

The Emotional Underpinnings of Radical Right Populist Mobilization:

Explaining the Protracted
Success of Radical Right-
Wing Populist Parties

CARR RESEARCH INSIGHT

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JUNE 2020

ABSTRACT

Radical right-wing populist parties have been a fixture of Western European party systems for several decades. Once considered “flash parties” they have become part of the political establishment. A number of factors account for their staying power. For one, radical right-wing populist parties offer an attractive mixture of anti-establishment rhetoric (populism) and an exclusionary policy program (nativism) which appeals to a diverse range of constituencies. At the same time, they evoke and play to a range of strong emotions engendered by large-scale structural changes, which threaten to disrupt the lives of a substantial number of citizens in advanced capitalist societies. When in a position of power, however, these parties largely fail to meet the needs of their core constituencies.

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To cite this document:

Betz, HG. (2020). “The Emotional Underpinnings of Radical Right Populist Mobilization: Explaining the Protracted Success of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties”. CARR Research Insight 2020.2. London, UK: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right.

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In recent years, the academic literature on radical right-wing populism in advanced liberal democracies has grown at an exponential rate. Major political science journals have dedicated special issues to the phenomenon; leading scholars throughout the social sciences – from sociology to economics, from communications to gender studies– have taken note of its importance and made significant contributions to the burgeoning literature. The media have also done their part to disseminate their findings among the general public. As a result, radical right-wing populism is currently one of the most closely examined and most profoundly explored and scrutinized phenomena in contemporary comparative politics.

Several reasons account for this development: Most importantly–and most often mentioned in recent studies–the election of Donald Trump and the outcome of the Brexit referendum; secondly, the upsurge of support for radical right-wing populist parties in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, particularly in France, Italy, Austria and the Scandinavian countries; thirdly, the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties in Western European countries previously thought to be immune to radical right-wing mobilization, i.e., Germany and Spain. Last but not least, the diffusion of a political climate of democratic distemper which has become a breeding ground for a “politics of backlash,” for “illiberal democracy” and a yearning for authoritarian leaders. And in the same context, and arguably most troubling, the advance of a political culture of “shamelessness” reflected in expressions of open racism, anti-Semitism, and the disparaging of sexual minorities (Wodak 2019).

One of the most important results of this intense academic preoccupation with the radical populist right has been growing awareness of, and sensitivity to, the complexity but also to the seemingly irreconcilable contradictions inherent in contemporary radical right-wing populism in Western Europe and other advanced liberal democracies. This is a far cry from the relatively cursory explanations advanced at the beginning of the first broad-based wave of Western European populist mobilization in the early 1990s. These studies interpreted the radical populist right's success at the polls largely as a response to processes of socioeconomic and/or sociocultural modernization and/or a response to the upsurge of migration starting in the late 1980s (for Austria see Wodak and Pelinka 2002; Halla, Wagner and Zweimüller 2017).

On this reading, the appeal of radical right-wing populist parties in the 1990s was largely owed to their ability to speak to the "losers of modernization" (Betz 1994). The explanation appeared plausible and seductive; it had only one flaw: it fundamentally clashed with empirical reality. Radical right-wing populist parties did best in some of the most dynamic and affluent countries and regions in Western Europe – Austria, Denmark, the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, northern Italy, and the Flemish part of Belgium (Betz 2001). Their electoral base reached across all social strata; but it was particularly pronounced among various segments of the middle class, such as skilled workers and entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized companies and their staff. Not surprisingly, most of these parties – from the Front national in France to the FPÖ in Austria to the Lega nord in Italy – promoted an economic program inspired by neoliberalism and the Thatcherite notion of the entrepreneurial self, designed to appeal to the better-off.

During the first wave of radical right-wing populist mobilization, parties such as the Danish Fremskridtspartiet and its Norwegian counterpart, the Fremskrittspartiet, were largely dismissed as "flash parties," i.e., parties "that come and go" (Lane and Ersson 2007, 95). Today we know that they did not go away. On the contrary, the second wave of radical right-wing populist mobilization following the financial crisis of 2008 confirmed that the radical populist right has become a permanent fixture in a large number of advanced

liberal democracies. It demonstrated once more that these parties were capable of defying all attempts on the part of the political establishment to relegate them to the "smut" margins of politics. In fact, in a growing number of advanced liberal democracies, radical right-wing populist parties have managed to break through the cordon sanitaire erected around them and been accepted as legitimate potential coalition partners by the established political parties. A case in point was the unprecedented invitation by the Belgian king, in the wake of the most recent regional election, to meet the leader of the separatist Vlaams Belang, which until then had been treated as a pariah by the Belgian political establishment. The meeting was arguably the most significant indication that the radical populist right has become *salonfähig*. At the same time, it was a tacit acknowledgment of the key role radical right-wing populist leaders such as the late Jörg Haider and his successor, the disgraced Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria, Marine Le Pen in France and Matteo Salvini in Italy have come to play in contemporary Western European politics.

Under the circumstances, it might not be too presumptuous to pause and take stock of the analytical/interpretative state of the art, as it were, with respect to radical right-wing populism in the advanced liberal democracies particularly, but not exclusively, in Western Europe. This is hardly an impossible task. As a result of the work of numerous scholars, academic analysts and journalists we have arrived at a basic understanding of the nature of the phenomenon, its appeal, and its significance in contemporary politics. To be sure, disagreements persist, particularly over questions of definition; but these disagreements are hardly essential. In the final analysis, for our understanding of radical right-wing populism and its importance in contemporary politics it matters little whether populism is characterized as an ideology, a discourse, a strategy or a political style. In heuristic terms, radical right-wing populism is like obscenity – we know it when we see it.

In the remainder of this paper, I set out to develop a comprehensive analytical/interpretative framework for the study of contemporary radical right-wing populism in advanced liberal democracies, based on the extant state-of-the-art literature on the subject. In Western Europe, radical right-wing populism is a relatively new phenomenon. Its genealogy, however, is much longer, going all the way back into the nineteenth century. Historically, instances of radical right-wing populist mobilization have always advanced two ideational narratives – a populist indictment of the elite, however defined, and a nativist claim to stand for the legitimate aspirations of the native-born. It is this ideational amalgam which accounts to a large extent for the success of radical right-wing populism in advanced liberal democracies today.

What sets radical right-wing populist parties and movements apart is their deliberate elicitation of a panoply of emotions, such as anxiety, anger, rage, and nostalgia. The history of radical right-wing populism is a history of hysteria, hyperbole and conspiracy narratives filling numerous tracts and pamphlets that could fill a whole section of a university library. Radical right-wing populist narratives tend to evoke a nostalgic vision of "the good old days" when men were still men, women knew their subordinate place in society, and foreigners stayed where they belonged, namely far away. These were the years of the postwar economic miracle (the famous German *Wirtschaftswunder* and French *trente glorieuses*), marked by rapid economic growth, full (male) employment, expanding welfare programs and growing mass prosperity. These were the years when the belief in progress was still intact and the future was still positively defined. These were the years when the social democratic left was at its most potent, both in terms of popular support at the polls and policy impact.

This is certainly no longer the case in contemporary Western Europe. Western European societies today are suffused with a combination of negative emotions, ranging from anxieties, fears and indignation to outright rage, in response to a multitude of crises, threats and uncertainties, for which the political establishment does not seem to have any realistic and sustainable solutions. For large parts of the population in advanced liberal democracies, the future is negatively defined—particularly when it comes to the future prospects of their children. The upsurge of Western European radical right-wing populism in recent years has to be seen in this larger context. It is for that reason that an explanation of the phenomenon needs to take into account the whole range of input from across the social sciences, from political science to economics, from sociology and social psychology to cultural studies, from political geography to gender studies and last but not least, legal studies.

This, however, is only half of the story. Contextual conditions favorable for populist mobilization remain latent as long as there are no credible and persuasive political entrepreneurs capable of translating vague popular unease and apprehension into a terse, trenchant narrative. This explains, for instance, why Germany and Spain for a long time appeared relatively immune to the sirens of radical right-wing populism – a fact that was erroneously attributed to the lasting impact of the lessons learnt from history. The dramatic gains of the AfD—particularly in the eastern part of Germany—in recent regional and national elections as well as the sudden upsurge of electoral support for Vox in national and regional elections in Spain have gainsaid this notion. They have demonstrated once again that the political appeal to resentment is a wide-open field ready to welcome any political newcomer savvy enough to take advantage of the opportunities offered by popular political disenchantment, disaffection and rage. The dramatic resurgence of the radical populist right in Flanders (Vlaams Belang) and the sudden upsurge of support for a relative newcomer in the Netherlands (Forum voor Democratie) in the most recent European election are prominent cases in point.

A comprehensive analysis of contemporary radical right-wing populism has to take account of all of these features. Given the vast amount of literature on the topic—and the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under investigation—any attempt to advance such an analysis obviously poses a particularly significant challenge. The choice of literature, as well as of supporting evidence, must necessarily be selective, informed by the idiosyncratic predispositions of the interpreter. In what follows, I will sketch the outlines of a broad-based interpretative framework for the analysis of contemporary radical right-wing populism in advanced liberal democracies largely based on the extant literature on the topic. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first part addresses questions of taxonomy. It deals with the main features of radical right-wing populism with a particular emphasis on genealogy. The second part addresses the question of what accounts for the protracted staying power of radical right-wing populist parties. The third part briefly addresses the question of what these parties have concretely done when in a position of genuine power to respond to the concerns and interests of the “ordinary people” they purport to represent.

What do we mean when we speak of radical right-wing populism?

The Basics

Most discussions of radical right-wing populism start with the assertion that populism is a “contested concept,” difficult if not outright impossible to clearly define. As the author of a widely cited work on populism has recently maintained, it is “far from obvious that we know what we are talking about. We simply do not have anything like a theory of populism, and we seem to lack coherent criteria for deciding when political actors turn populist in some meaningful sense” (Müller 2016:2). Anyone who has followed the rise of radical right-wing populism in Western Europe over several decades will find this statement rather puzzling. Like Justice Potter Stewart who once famously quipped that he knew pornography when he saw it, we instinctively know whether or not a new party belongs to the radical right-wing populist family when we come across it. This is not only because of the particular way these parties promote themselves in the political market place. It is also because of the tropes and idiosyncratic formulations they instinctively adopt – most significantly anti-multiculturalism, climate change denial, anti-genderism, historical revisionism, and last but not least, more or less subtle anti-Semitism and intense Islamophobia.

Stripped down to its most basic core, radical right-wing populism is a fusion of two ideational elements –populism and nativism. Populism is political doctrine that holds that society is divided into two antagonistic blocs – the vast majority of ordinary people and a relatively small elite that acts in its own interest. Populism is essentially about mobilizing ordinary citizens – the “low” – around a common set of grievances and resentments that provide them with a shared notion of identity and pit them against 'those above' held responsible for all their grievances. Populism claims for itself to restore voice to the people and thus assure that politics once again becomes the authentic reflection and expression of the popular will, derived from the “common sense” of ordinary people. At the same time, populism advances a discourse that “valorizes ordinary people” and claims to accord them the respect they deserve (Jansen 2011).

Nativism is informed by the notion that the material and cultural interests of the “native-born” should be accorded absolute priority over those new to the community – and that solely on the grounds that the former are natives. Nativism is closely linked to inhumanization, i.e., the “subtle denial of the humanity of out-groups which is then expressed in the differential treatment of outgroup members (relative to in-group members)” (Banton, West and Kinney 2019, 3). Politically, it involves a variety of measures on the part of the “indigenous” population designed to defend, maintain, and revive the cherished heritage of their culture. In the American contest, where the concept originated, it has centered upon the “demand that citizens come before noncitizens, Americans before foreigners, and that we take care of home first before abroad” (Greenberg and Zdunkewicz 2017, 6).

In short, nativism fundamentally rejects the progressive extension of “moral boundaries” –i.e., the “distinction between those entities that are deemed worthy of moral consideration and those that are not” –which has been one of the central characteristics of modern societies (Crimston et al. 2016, 1). Instead, it advocates a narrow conception of solidarity on the grounds that only a narrow conception will sustain solidarity in an age of progressive individualization (de Beer and Koster 2009). In practical policy terms, nativist doctrine holds that governments have as their primary duty the promotion and protection of the well-being and welfare of its own citizens, more often than not defined in

ethnic terms. At the same time nativist doctrine demands from governments the active demonstration of a "reasonable partiality towards compatriots" – particularly with regard to employment and social benefits (Miller 2004).

In today's radical right-wing populism, nativism is closely aligned with the notion of national sovereignty. It is this combination, which is at the heart of the radical right's "neo-nationalist" appeal, which Maureen Eger and Sarah Valdez have shown to constitute the defining characteristic of the contemporary radical right in advanced capitalist democracies (Eger and Valdez 2015; 2019). At the same time, neo-nationalism represents a certain degree of common ground between the radical populist right and the radical populist left. Both are vehemently anti-establishment (take, for instance, Podemos's attacks against *la casta*), both explicitly seek to regain national sovereignty – if for quite different reasons (Eger and Valdez 2015, 127). Where they diverge is on the question of nativism – even if even the radical populist left occasionally appears tempted by nativist appeals (a prominent example is Sahra Wagenknecht of Die Linke who adopted nativist lingo in an attempt to regain frustrated and disillusioned AfD voters).¹

Genealogy

Populism has a long and illustrious history, going all the way back to ancient times. However, in this paper, I am primarily interested in populism as a discourse of contestation within the context of representative political systems, geared to/aimed at mobilizing ordinary people against those in a position of socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and/or sociocultural power. Prominent examples are the Chartists (1830s-1850s Britain), the American agrarian populists (1880s-1890s), and the Boulangists (1880s-1890s France). Each one of them was a quintessentially populist movement; each one had a significant and lasting impact on its respective polity. By now, American populism is well known and understood. The same holds true, albeit to a lesser degree, for Boulangism – particularly given the prominence Ernesto Laclau accorded it. I therefore limit myself to a brief recapitulation of Craig Calhoun's characterization of Chartism (Calhoun 2012, 89-90). On his view, Chartism represented a "genuine and radical insurgency" that "spoke primarily on behalf of 'the people'" rather than "in favor of any specific segment of the population" such as the working class. The Chartist movement mobilized against the injustices engendered by the evolving industrial system "for reasons of the self-interest of elites rather than the demands of production or the benefit of the nation." In response, the Chartists evoked images of a "better past" – a nostalgic notion of a golden age embodying "an amalgam of actually remembered virtues of the past."

Nativism has its origins in antebellum United States when the new country was confronted with a large wave of Western European immigrants fleeing poverty and starvation – a majority of them from catholic Ireland. Their arrival provoked a vicious response on the part of large segments of the native-born population, intent on defending the new country's Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural heritage against the "popish" threat. American nativist organizations, such as the 'Know Nothings', held that Anglo-Saxon Protestantism undergirded the essential moral and intellectual qualities indispensable for democratic citizenship, which made American culture superior. At the same time, nativists charged that European countries were "dumping" their poor onto American shores leaving their charge to the new country (Klebaner 1961). Nativist passions continued to flare up throughout the nineteenth century, directed against a range of "aliens" – most infamously

¹ See <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2018-09/sammlungsbewegung-aufstehen-sarah-wagenknecht-ludger-volmer-gruendungsaufwurf/komplettansicht>

against the Chinese. Anti-Chinese vitriol resulted in legislation that banned them from entering the country.

In Europe, nativist sentiments can be traced back at least to the sixteenth century when towns sought ways to alleviate the burden beggars imposed on local communities. The result was what in the German realm came to be known as Bettlerschub—a practice consisting in returning beggars to their place of origin, thus allowing communities to take care of “their own people” first (Duplessis 1977). With the consolidation of territorial entities these local measures became state policy. The Habsburg territories, for instance, routinely organized removals to Bavaria and other neighboring territories; similarly, Prussia introduced a range of ordinances leading to the expulsion of foreign beggars (Gestrich 2013, 253). But it was during industrialization that nativist sentiments took on a political dimension. One of the most prominent examples was the mobilization against foreign workers in *fin-de-siècle* France, most notably by the Boulangist deputy Maurice Barrès. Barrès was the first to join socialist demands and nativist ideas into a “national-socialist” program, designed to appeal to working-class voters. Its central dictum, *les français d’abord*, would resonate on the radical right throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Excuse: Producerism

One of the central sentiments informing nineteenth-century American populism was “producerism.” Producerism held that “only those who created wealth in tangible, material ways (on and under the land, in workshops, on the sea) could be trusted to guard the nation’s piety and liberties” (Kazin 1995, 13). Producerism was grounded in a “popular version of the theory of value” which held “that free men rightfully received the ‘fruits of their labor’ and, conversely, that those who did not make a contribution to tangible production had no legitimate claims on its results” (Cohen 2002, 29). Producerism, in turn, informed populist republicanism which held that it was “the abuse of political power” rather than the inexorable laws of capitalism (as Marxists would argue) that caused economic inequality. “By manipulating and exploiting the power of the state, private interests acquired their wealth and their monopolistic position” (Goebel 2002, 12).

The producerist ethos had a profound impact on American populism – reflecting the ethos of its constituencies as well as its constituent components. The Knights of Labor, for instance, American’s first significant labor organization, were open to all “producing masses,” but excluded anyone suspected of living “off the sweat of other men’s brows” (Glickman 2007, 766). Later on, at the end of the nineteenth century, “the possibilities of producerism were argued by skilled workers and local business managers and their supporters. What distinguished them was the refashioning of American republican principles to problems of industrial modernization” (Amberg 1991, 59).

Producerism also fit into the populist imagination, characterized by dichotomous thinking. It “reaffirmed the ties between farmers and workers”—the producing classes – in their common struggle against “bankers, speculators, and loan-shark merchants—parasites who produced nothing but made money only by manipulating it, sucking the lifeblood from the honest labor of mechanics, and small proprietors” (Lears 156).

Ideationally, producerism, like populism, was largely informed by nostalgia for Jeffersonian republicanism and its vision of small communities of independent producers—an idealized vision, which corresponded but little with reality, even in the early years following the Revolution. In fact, the roots of producerism were already laid in the late 1790s, provoked by the perception “that the republicanism of the Revolution had been hijacked by a cabal of elites who, because of their ‘common interests,’ conspired to rob

the rightful rulers of the nation of their fair share of power” (Mercieca and Aune 2005, 119-120). These concerns were articulated most forcefully in a small pamphlet penned in 1798 by William Manning, an ordinary yeoman farmer and quintessential Jeffersonian Republican from Massachusetts (Morison and Manning 1956). In the face of the growing animosities between Alexander Hamilton’s Federalists and Jefferson’s Republicans, Manning “saw the political world that unfolded before him as portentous of the slippery slope to despotism,” In this situation, it was up to “common folks” like him to counter “the elite’s machinations of power” and “to save the republic from corruption” (Mercieca and Aune 2005, 123). Corruption, or so Manning and many ordinary farmers with him believed, was the direct result of wealthy elites’ determination to defend their privileged position and perpetuate inequality. This led them “to subvert commercial institutions in order to monopolize property and to reduce most settlers to tenancy, wage earning, and bondage” – in the process subverting the central ideals of Jeffersonian republicanism, built on free labor as the bearer of liberty and republican virtue (Rana 2014, 127-128).

The producerist vision resonated well with a range of occupational groups, not only farmers, but also artisans and, increasingly, skilled workers who considered themselves parts of “the honorable army of producers—people who produced economic value through their own efforts, unlike the ‘parasites’” who lived off other people’s hard work and money, such as lawyers, bankers, and brokers (Lears 2009, 74). Initially, producerism was largely directed against “those on top”—the fat cats that lived off the work of others and did so very well.

In the course of the nineteenth century, however, in response to antebellum mass immigration from Europe and the liberation of African American slaves following the end of the Civil War, the target of producerist resentment increasingly shifted toward those “below”—immigrants and African Americans. Antebellum immigrants, for instance, were denigrated as having been “vomited indiscriminately” upon American shores bringing with them “the ignorance, idleness, imprudence, viciousness, and pauperism which are the characteristic traits of the mass of foreign immigrants”—traits fundamentally anathema to the producerist spirit (Fisher 1949, 287). The result was a rhetoric that joined producerism and nativism—giving new meaning to the notion of “our people first” that referred not to the “native born” but to the productive “native born”. In this narrative, it is the “virtuous, striving, and browbeaten producer” and taxpaying citizen who struggles hard “to fend off the parasite, a dependent subject that consumes tax dollars and productive labor to subsidize a profligate and excessive lifestyle” (HoSang and Lowndes 2016, 931). As David Roediger has argued, this narrative derived its ideational impetus among the laboring classes from traditional republicanism. As he put it, republicanism “itself carried a strong suspicion of the powerless, not just of the powerful, and a fear that the top and bottom in society would unite against the ‘producing classes’ in the middle. As virtually all working whites were included in the ‘producing classes’, that suspicion could fall heavily on slaves and free Blacks” (Roediger 2007, 44).

With the establishment of radical right-wing populism in recent decades, the combination of populism, nativism and producerism has become firmly ensconced in European politics. Initially, it found expression in the radical populist right’s promotion of neoliberalism—from Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front national, Jörg Haider’s FPÖ, Carl Hagen’s Fremskrittspartiet to Umberto Bossi’s Lega Nord. Later on, with the upsurge in support for these parties among working-class voters, it led these parties to fully embrace what has come to be known as “welfare chauvinism.” In this way, the radical populist right responded to the broad support among its core working-class constituencies for

redistributive measures without, in the process, alienating potential middle-class constituencies (Krause and Giebler 2019).

Radical right-wing populist welfare chauvinism is primarily, but not only, directed against migrants and refugees; it is also directed against “benefit scroungers”—i.e., individuals accused of milking the social system by “chilling out in the comfortable hammock of the welfare state”; in some cases it is even directed against the inhabitants of regions within a given country, such as Wallonia in Belgium and the Mezzogiorno in Italy, charged with living off the productive, taxpaying inhabitants of the rest of the country (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019). The result has been a political discourse of “exclusive solidarity” (Lefkofridi and Michel 2017).

Framing the question of social benefits in this way has allowed the radical populist right on the one hand to promote themselves as champions of the welfare state defending the social rights of ordinary, hardworking citizens; on the other hand, framing welfare-state dependency in predominantly racialized terms has allowed the radical populist right to pursue their stigmatization of state-sponsored redistribution as a system in the hands of a political elite which showers ethnic minorities with generous benefits while leaving its own (needy) native-born people out in the cold (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019, 20). This is a prime example of how producerism functions in the service of populist dichotomized discourse that promotes polarization.

What Accounts for the Staying Power of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties

Much of the current hyped-up debate on radical right-wing populism in advanced liberal democracies—largely inspired by the election of Donald Trump and the outcome of the Brexit referendum—conveys the impression that this is a new phenomenon. Nothing could be further from the truth. Radical right-wing populist parties have been around for decades. A number of them, such as the FPÖ, the Rassemblement national (formerly Front national), the Fremskrittspartiet, and the Lega (formerly Lega Nord) are among the most well-established parties in Western Europe. In fact, the Lega, which was founded in 1991, is now the “oldest” still existing party of the Italian Second Republic, having survived all the ups and downs of almost three decades of Italian politics—and even Berlusconi.²

This differentiates the contemporary radical populist right from earlier populist movements and parties in liberal democracies (such as the French Poujadists in the 1950s) which more often than not had a relatively short shelf life. To be sure, most contemporary radical right-wing populist parties have experienced a series of ups and downs at the polls, in some cases these fluctuations have been quite dramatic. A case in point is the Vlaams Belang (VB, originally Vlaams Blok). After continuously rising in the polls in the first decade of the new century, the party’s support base had virtually collapsed by the parliamentary election of 2014, with many of its former voters defecting to the relatively moderate Flemish nationalist Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. Five years later, the VB was back with a vengeance, increasing the number of its seats in the Belgian parliament from 3 (2014) to 18. The resurgence of Pauline Hanson in the Australian parliamentary elections of 2016, after spending almost twenty years in the political wilderness, is an even more striking example.³

What might explain the resilience of contemporary radical right-wing populist parties over an extended period of time? In general, explanations for the rise and success

² See <https://www.ilfoglio.it/articoli/2011/04/21/news/maroni-e-i-cocomeri-padani-65602/>

³ See https://www.fairobserver.com/region/asia_pacific/pauline-hanson-one-nation-australia-populist-politics-news-78645/

of these parties have primarily focused on macro-structural factors such as “modernization,” globalization, economic and financial crises, and, more recently, rapid technological innovation. As will be shown below, these factors certainly are of prime relevance, particularly for understanding the recent upsurge of radical right-wing support across advanced liberal democracies. The crucial question is, however, how these macro-structural factors translate into support for the radical populist right. Empirical evidence shows, for instance, that financial crises tend to result in a significant increase in support for far-right political parties (Funke, Schularick and Trebesch 2016). This was certainly the case in the aftermath of the “Great Recession” of 2008 that, albeit not across the board and to the same extent, saw a significant upsurge in support for the radical populist right in a number of countries (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Correlation, however, has nothing to say about the mechanisms that link macro-structural factors to electoral outcomes. Financial crises don’t vote for the radical right. In the analysis that follows, I submit that what accounts for the contemporary radical right’s remarkable staying power is their ability to evoke, appeal to, and mobilize a range of primarily negative emotions.

Methodological Individualism and the Crucial Role of Emotions

Ernesto Laclau has argued that the analysis of populism has to start on the individual level (Laclau 2005). On this view, populism is the result of individuals’ demands that remain ignored, dismissed and, as a result, unmet and unsatisfied within the established democratic framework, primarily because of the political establishment’s unresponsiveness to these demands. Political space for populist mobilization opens up when individuals come to realize that they are not alone, that their demands and grievances are part of a larger chain of equivalent demands and grievances dismissed by the political establishment as unreasonable and/or politically incorrect. This leads to, or so Laclau argues, the constitution of an “antagonistic frontier vis-à-vis an antagonistic force”: the elite. As a result, what started as single, unconnected demands turns into a fundamental populist challenge to the socioeconomic and socio-political establishment, aka the elite (Thomassen 2005, 292). This was the case in the 1890s when the demands of farmers and their representatives for the regulation of railroads and banks, the free coinage of silver to be used as legal tender, the lowering of tariffs, and reforms of democratic representation (particularly the direct election of senators) went largely unmet by the political establishment.

For the analysis that follows, I take up Laclau’s individual-level approach. However, unlike what one might suppose, I don’t start with obvious demands, such as restrictions on the inflow of migrants and/or refugees. Instead I take up a point made by the sociologist Jansen, who in a well-known article defines populism as a political project that mobilizes ordinary people into contentious political action while “articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people” (Jansen 2011, 82, italics added). Jansen’s formulation makes an important point with regard to an essential facet of populism: the fact that populism accords recognition to ordinary people, their anxieties, and concerns. It does this by satisfying the need for psychological compensation via a rhetoric that primarily appeals to a range of primarily negative emotions, such as anger, indignation and resentment (on the difference see Miceli 2019).

Two acclaimed recent studies of the rise of populism in the United States make the point. In *Strangers in their own land* (subtitled *anger and mourning on the American right*) Arlie Russell Hochschild characterizes Trump supporters as having been “in mourning for a lost way of life.” Yearning “to feel pride” they instead “have felt shame. Their land no

longer feels their own” (Hochschild 2016, 225). Kathy J. Kramer, author of *The Politics of Resentment* makes a similar point with respect to the mood—which had been building up way before Trump’s campaign – that would lead disenchanting rural Wisconsinites to support Donald Trump. What they have in common is the sentiment that “they aren’t getting their fair share of power and resources and respect. Small town Wisconsinites feel deeply disrespected by urban dwellers”.⁴

A similar argument was advanced by Arthur C. Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute. In an article for *Foreign Affairs* Brooks noted that the U.S. had a “dignity deficit.” This was important because “to be treated with dignity means being considered worthy of respect.” Individuals gain a sense of dignity, in turn, when they have a feeling that their lives produce value for themselves and others. “Put simply, to feel dignified, one must be needed by others”.⁵ This, however, is no longer the case. Delocalization, offshoring, outsourcing and, as a result, deindustrialization in advanced capitalist countries have made a large number of workers not only redundant, but “structurally irrelevant” (Castells 2004). They are no longer needed and therefore dismissed and ignored, undeserving of dignity and respect. And in fact, more often than not Trump supporters were depicted as ignorant, racist and misogynist rubes, in need of enlightenment, their awareness raised (Lynch 2017).

What distinguished Donald Trump from his competitors was his willingness and ability to tap into these sentiments. As Hochschild puts it, Trump “is an ‘emotions candidate.’ More than any other presidential candidate in decades, Trump focuses on eliciting and praising emotional responses from his fans rather than detailed policy prescriptions. His speeches—evoking dominance, bravado, clarity, national pride, and personal uplift—inspire an emotional transformation.” His audience, as if “magically lifted,” no longer feel like strangers in their own land (Hochschild 2016, 225-226). At the same time, as Lamont et al. have shown, Trump in his campaign speeches, put significant emphasis on the concerns of the white working class, “raising their moral value” and thereby according them some measure of dignity (Lamont, Park and Ayala-Hurtado 2017, 153).

These examples illustrate how individual-level emotions translate into political support. Mabel Berezin has noted that emotions “are physical and expressive responses to some sort of destabilization” (Berezin 2002, 36). Destabilization is closely related to Robert Andrew’s notion of “strains” or “stressors” which figure prominently in his explanation of the causes of crime and delinquency. Andrew has made a strong case that strains evoke powerful negative emotions, such as anger and fear (Agnew 2001; Ganem 2010). Over the past decades, destabilization and strains have become an almost daily central experience, both on the national and international level. A key recent contribution by Mikko Salmela and Christian von Scheve seeks to explicate the link between individual experience, macro-level destabilization and electoral outcomes (Salmela and von Scheve 2017). They argue “that individual-level emotional dynamics mediate between macro-level social and cultural transformations (such as globalization, modernization), and micro-level support for right-wing parties” via “emotional mechanisms” that transpose feelings of personal insecurity in the face of macro-level dislocations into emotions (such as resentment, anger, rage) that trigger some sort of action – from penning insulting and denigrating comments on newspaper websites and the social media, reflecting what Ruth Wodak has characterized as a new

⁴ See <https://civic.mit.edu/2017/05/31/kathy-cramer-on-the-politics-of-resentment-what-i-learned-from-listening/>; see also <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2016/11/16/13645116/rural-resentment-elites-trump>

⁵ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-13/dignity-deficit>

“shamelessness” in the name of anti-PC, to taking part in demonstrations (for instance, Pegida) or voting for a radical right-wing populist party (see Wodak 2019; Heaney 2019, 226).

In recent years, authors from various social-science disciplines have identified and studied a range of emotions and their impact on individual choices and actions. So have the media. Prominent examples are references to the “angry white male” in Britain (as an explanation for the outcome of the Brexit vote) and the United States (with regard to the Trump vote) and, in Germany, the conjuring up of the *Wutbürger* (literally, the irate citizen) as an explanation for the growing success of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). Catherine de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann have convincingly shown that fear of globalization is closely associated with support for the radical populist right (de Vries and Hoffmann 2016).

Anger, rage resentment, and indignation together with anxiety and fear are the most prominent emotions cited in the literature on populism in general and radical right-wing populism in particular. A prominent recent example is Takis Pappas’s study of *Populism and Liberal Democracy*, which refers to emotions—and here particularly resentment—as a core mechanism fuelling populist rhetoric (Pappas 2019). What most of these emotions (anxiety is a notable exception) have in common is that they have negative connotations, as does embitterment, which recently joined the list (Poutvaarna and Steinhardt 2018). What most of them also have in common is the fact that all of them represent reactions to perceived moral injuries, injustices and insults. Embitterment, for instance, similar to resentment, is characterized as an emotive response to “persistent feelings of being let down, insulted or being a loser”, a “feeling and perception of injustice together with the urge to fight back” but unable to do so, a combination of revengefulness and helplessness (Linden 2003: 197).

George Marcus et al. have convincingly shown that among the negative emotions, anger is particularly conducive and responsive to populist mobilization (Marcus, Valentino, Vasilopoulos, and Foucault 2019.). For one, anger is closely associated with appraisals of unfairness experienced as an undeserved injustice and the perception of having been wronged (Mikula, Scherer and Athenstaedt 1998; Miceli 2019). This perception, in turn, is closely associated with “other-agency,” i.e., the notion that an external agent is responsible for a negative event or condition (Ellsworth and Smith 1988, 280). In other words, for anger to manifest itself, there has to be an “appraisal of accountability”—the notion that somebody is to be blamed for the negative event or condition (Smith and Lazarus 1990, 619). The perception of having been wronged, in turn, “renders anger ‘legitimate,’ that is, it makes anger coincide with resentment proper,” which makes anger an ideal motivating factor for populist mobilization (Miceli 2019, 15; see also Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza 2017). An exemplary case is the upsurge in support among working-class voters for the *Front national* during Nicolas Sarkozy’s tenure as president of the French Republic. As Nonna Mayer has shown, Sarkozy’s catering to the rich (particularly on taxes), his pension reform which hurt working-class people and particularly women, together with his apparent disdain for ordinary citizens (reflected in his infamous *casse-toi, pauvre*) provoked profound anger, fuelling support for the *Front national* (Mayer 2014, 284).

This also applies to a final major emotion associated with populism—nostalgia (Kenny 2017; Gest, Tyler and Mayer 2017; Steenvoorden and Hartevelt 2018). In psychology, nostalgia is considered not only as a longing for the past, but a longing for an idealized past, for a moment that never actually existed.” It is triggered “by an evocation of something we recognize from our past” more often than not “airbrushed or fictionalized

by our memory".⁶ As such, identity is closely linked to identity, both individual and collective. Nostalgia "reassures us of past happiness and accomplishment" and "simultaneously bestows upon us a certain worth, irrespective of how present circumstances may seem to question or obscure this" (Davis 1977, 420).

As Tuukka Ylä-Anttila has argued, nostalgia derives much of its emotional impetus from a sense of familiarity, which "is particularly compatible with the populist valorization of the experience of the common people" (Ylä-Anttila 2017, 342). In his study he documents how the populist radical right in Finland has appropriated a "culturally shared, familiar experience", the traditional singing of the Summer Hymn by school students at graduation ceremonies. This was an attempt "to infuse exclusionary nationalist demands with the feeling of familiarity, and exclude from 'the people' those who do not share the feeling"—i.e., migrants (Ylä-Anttila 2017, 352). The Finnish case provides an illustration of a point made by Svetlana Boym who noted that "nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory".⁷ Or, as Guobin Yang in his analysis of Chinese nostalgia in the 1990s observes, nostalgia "affirms identity through articulation" which "makes possible the public sharing of private experiences." It "brings private thoughts and feelings into the public sphere while also helping to transform that sphere by creating or reconstructing collective identities among particular social groups (Yang 2003, 278-279). This goes a long way to shed light on the mechanisms informing the contemporary radical populist right's identitarian politics (Betz and Johnson 2004).

In emotional terms, nostalgia is closely associated with grief over experienced loss, either as an individual confronted with the passing away of a loved one or as a community with the inexorable transformation of a familiar space (such as, for instance, a neighborhood as a result of gentrification). Here nostalgia reflects a yearning for the lost sense of community (in German *Heimweh*, from where the word is derived) brought about by the dislocations associated with globalization, financialization, technological innovation and societal modernation. Examples of this kind of nostalgia abound, from the nostalgia of the Cultural Revolution generation in 1990s China to nostalgia for the Soviet Union in current-day Russia to the nostalgia for the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the eastern part of Germany—aka *Ostalgie*—which explains, at least in part, why the s been so successful there (Yang 2003; Pourtova 2013; Betz and Habersack 2019). Its most recent political manifestation occurred in Spain with the upsurge of Vox, a radical right-wing populist party which successfully tapped "in to voter anxieties which are fuelled by culture wars and an acute sense of loss: the loss of a former way of life, of national sovereignty, of their privilege as well as the loss of jobs".⁸

At the same time, however, as Marcos Piason Natali has noted, nostalgia represents a "symptom of the real unease caused by an unjust society, a condition that would disappear as soon as the underlying cause of the dissatisfaction was done away with" (Natali 2004, 18). This was the case with nineteenth-century American populists' embracing of a bucolic vision of the Jeffersonian republic, directed against bankers and commodity speculators, railroad magnates, grain elevator operators and local money lenders. This is the case today when Sweden's radical populist right evokes the world of Astrid Lindgren together with the notion of the *folkhemmet* (literally, the people's Home), which defined the golden era of Swedish Social Democracy in the postwar decades—when life was significantly harder but also more "innocent" and "simpler" than today (Elgenius

⁶ See <http://www.contemporarypsychotherapy.org/volume-5-no-1-spring-2013/the-nature-of-nostalgia/>

⁷ See <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html>

⁸ See <https://unherd.com/2019/04/will-vox-call-the-shots-in-spain/>

and Rydgren 2019; Coman 2015). And it is the case when the leader of the Spanish radical populist right (VOX) characterizes his party as a “barrage” against the specter of a new “Popular Front” (the name of the left-wing republican coalition of 1936 which ended in the ruins of the Spanish Civil War), evoking nostalgia for the Franco regime, a time where Basque and Catalan nationalist aspirations were brutally repressed.⁹

Unlike anger, rage, resentment and embitterment, however, nostalgia is not necessarily negatively defined. In fact, in an age characterized by grand-scale social, economic, and cultural destabilization, the politics of nostalgia can also represent an emotional counterweight providing a positive sense of reassurance and comfort for those profoundly troubled by these developments. Or, as Catarina Kinnvall has put it, “narratives of the past are often used to supply ontological security in the present”—i.e., a “sense of biographical continuity in the light of emerging changes” (Kinnvall 2014, 322).

All of this, in turn, explains the central position the question of identity holds in the contemporary radical populist right’s discourse. In a recent analysis of the rationale behind the recent upsurge of populism cum nativism in India under the banner of Hindu nationalism (promoted by Modi’s BJP and affiliated groups), Kinnvall (2014) lays out the logic of the links between nostalgia, identity, and support for radical right-wing populism. Citing a passage from Anthony Giddens’ *The Constitution of Society*, she notes that “ontological security is about having a ‘sense of place’ as the world is changing, a ‘place’ that provides ‘a psychological tie between the biography of the individual and the locales that are the settings of the time-space paths through which that individual moves’ (Kinnvall 2019, 285). With the impact of globalization, rapid technological change, and mass migration, this experienced sense of space—what the Germans call *Heimat*—which provides the individual with meaning with respect to both the past and the present, becomes increasingly disrupted and instable. Individuals feel increasingly “trapped by a series of structural changes that they cannot control, but which affect them directly” leaving them with the sense of having become strangers in their own land (Busquet 2011, 70).

Structural Factors Prone to Engender Strong Emotions in Advanced Capitalist Democracies

In recent years, students of radical right-wing populism have reached a tentative consensus to separate its causes along economic and cultural lines (Gidron and Hall 2017). At the same time, there is a strong sense that economic factors might have a significantly smaller effect on the support for the radical populist right than do cultural ones (Bornschiefer 2010; Bornschiefer and Kriesi 2013; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Davis et al. 2019). Against that, the most recent direction in research on the structural causes of radical right-wing populist support suggests that economics does matter, but in significantly more complex ways than earlier theoretical approaches suggested (see, for instance, Vlandas and Halikiopoulou 2019). These approaches presumed that support for radical right-wing populist parties, such as the Front national or the German Republikaner, was to a large extent the direct result of the inability of certain groups in society to adapt to the risks associated with modernization processes such as individualization or with economic processes such as globalization (the well-known “modernization loser thesis”).

The argument had considerable intuitive appeal, but failed when empirically tested. In fact, empirical studies have shown that support for radical right-wing populist parties extends across the whole of the social spectrum, with modernization loser groups (such

⁹ See <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20190722/463651094203/vox-debate-investidura-abascal-sanchez.html>

as the unemployed) accounting for only a relatively small share of the vote. The explanation is as straightforward as it is mundane: The real losers of modernization (the unemployed, the poor) tend not to vote.¹⁰ Left-wing parties, in return, have little incentive to appeal to these potential voters. And radical right-wing populist parties don't seem to be able to mobilize them either. A case in point is the AfD, a new party, which took only a few years to pose a serious challenge to Germany's established parties, particularly in the eastern part of the country. As Holger Lengfeld has shown, "typical modernization losers" were not significantly more likely to vote for the AfD than was everybody else. Support for the AfD came largely from individuals with average and/or higher incomes (Lengfeld 2017; see also Schwander and Manow 2017).

This is not to deny the importance of the "proletarianization" of the radical populist right over the past few decades. This denotes a gradual shift in the core constituency of successful parties such as the Front national, the FPÖ, the Scandinavian Progress parties, and the Swiss People's Party (SVP) from the old middle class to the popular classes, what in French is known as the *couches populaires*. They are responsible for the "changing face of class politics" – set in motion by the defection of a significant part of the manual working class from the traditional left to the radical populist right (Arzheimer 2013; Bornschier and Kriesi 2013). At the same time, however, the radical populist right has managed to mobilize a remarkably heterogeneous, yet volatile, social coalition with a substantial presence of working-class voters.

In the process, these parties have turned into what one might characterize as catchall parties of protest, seeking to appeal to a broad range of potential constituencies without, however, substantially toning down their rhetoric on core issues. The catchall strategy has been reflected in a broadening of their programmatic offerings as well as intensified efforts on the part of these parties to brush up their image and insert themselves into the mainstream following Marine le Pen's strategy of *dédiabolisation*. Mainstreaming refers in this context to both "a process of accommodation between the democratic political system and the populist far right" and "the adaptation of mainstream political discourse" to their issues and logic (Feischmidt and Hervik 2015, 10-11). This has increasingly happened, most recently in Denmark with the social democrats largely adopting the anti-immigrant agenda of the Dansk Folkeparti – resulting in a drastic drop in electoral support for the latter (Özkırımlı 2019) – and in Austria, where the center-right ÖVP followed a similar path (Heinisch, Werner and Habersack 2019).

What accounts for these developments? In their analysis of the "changing face of class politics" in advanced liberal democracies, Simon Bornschier and Hanspeter Kriesi maintain that "economic marginalization and job insecurity play no role in determining the vote" for radical right-wing populist parties (Bornschier and Kriesi 2013, 26). The most recent literature on the combined impact of globalization and technological innovation challenges this view. It suggests that globalization and technological innovation have revived traditional political cleavages – particularly center-periphery ones.

Originally, the center-periphery cleavages opened up between the central state seeking to impose a dominant culture across the territory and the periphery seeking to preserve its cultural idiosyncracies. More recently, they involved conflicts between relatively affluent regions, such as Flanders, Scotland, Catalonia, and northern Italy and the rest of the country charged with living off the hard work of the former. Today, these regional conflicts are overshadowed by a new conflict, engendered by the growing polarization between areas that benefit from the combination of globalization and automation and those that are increasingly falling behind or have been left behind

¹⁰ See <https://observatoriosociallacaixa.org/-/urnas-vacias-suburbios-ciudades>

altogether (Wuthnow 2018; Rodríguez-Pole 2018). It is these “places that don’t matter,” as Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2018) has put it, that voters are “surfing the wave of populism and, through the ballot box or revolt, attacking the very factors on which recent economic growth has been based: open markets, migration, economic integration and globalization” (Rodríguez-Pose 2018, 205).

The growing number of studies addressing this polarization clearly show one thing—geography matters, even in advanced capitalist democracies. Take, for instance, a recent study on home ownership in the UK. The authors show that disparities in home ownership and real estate values strongly correlate with the results of the Brexit vote (Ansell and Adler 2019). In Sweden, support for the radical populist right (Sverigedemokraterna) has been concentrated the south of the country to a degree that defies common social-science explanations (Blomqvist, Sumpter and Mann 2019, 14). With respect to the United States, Trump did particularly well in communities “with more economic distress, worse health, higher drug, alcohol and suicide mortality rates, lower educations attainment, and higher marital separation/divorce rates.” These are “places that are generally worse off today than they were a generation or two ago,” particularly rural areas and small towns in the formerly industrial Midwest (Monnat and Brown 2017, 229) These are the places where the only thing you can get are “shit jobs with shit wages and no benefits and no health insurance,” where “the basic components of middle-class life are growing further and further out of reach”.¹¹ As a Gallup report summarizes, these are areas where measures of social well-being, such as longevity and particularly intergenerational mobility, are relatively low. In these communities, parents are likely to see their children fail to reach the education and skill levels necessary for a successful career and blame politics for it. At the same time Trump did particularly well in culturally and racially isolated areas – white, segregated enclaves, with little exposure to blacks and ethnic minorities (Rothwell and Diego Rossell 2016, 19).

These studies mark a significant advance in the analysis of the contemporary radical populist right, providing a spatial dimension to explanations for what accounts for the variance in electoral support of these parties. They shed light on local dynamics, such as the experience of relatively rapid economic decline and/or rapid ethnic diversity, which provoke strong emotions and incline “natives” to vote radical populist right (see Patana 2018 for Finland). Closely associated with this spatial dimension is a second important development—the growing cleavage between cosmopolitanism and parochialism (or, alternatively, communitarianism) characteristic of virtually all advanced liberal capitalist democracies. Both developments are important for the study of the radical populist right because they tend to elicit a range of emotions.

Among the most significant such emotions are the ones provoked by, and associated with, individual feelings of relative deprivation, both economic (winners vs. losers of globalization and automation) and cultural (cosmopolitan vs parochial dispositions). Relative deprivation is broadly defined “as a judgment that one or one’s ingroup is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent; this judgment invokes feelings of angry resentment” (Pettigrew 2016, 9). It is an individual experience that “may arise when people compare their socio-economic status with that of others at the same point in time (social comparison) or with their own past or future status” (Chen 2015, 3). This might explain the finding that an increase in aggregate education in non-urban areas is associated with greater support for the radical populist right (Stockemer 2017). It is at the local level that diverging social trajectories are particularly apparent and observable and the sense of falling behind particularly painfully experienced, potentially leading to

¹¹ See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/06/republicans-and-democrats-fail-blue-collar-america>

resentment. As a number of studies have shown, relative deprivation is associated with a strong sense of injustice with respect to the individual's predicament, giving rise to negative sentiments, such as anger and resentment (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin and Bialosiewicz 2012, 203). Today, the experience of relative deprivation is primarily a result of genuine and/or perceived status loss. Experimental studies suggest that relative deprivation potentially "impacts aggressive behavior" via "increased feelings of disadvantage and aggressive affect" (Greitemeyer and Sagioglou 2019, 515).

The most extensive empirical analysis of the impact of relative deprivation on support for radical populism has been advanced by Brian Burgoon and his collaborators. They demonstrate that "positional deprivation relative to the wealthiest deciles (upper-register positional deprivation) tends to spur support for the radical left" while "positional deprivation relative to the poorest deciles (lower-register positional deprivation) spurs support for the radical right" (Burgoon, van Noort, Rooduijn and Underhill 2019, 84). A recent contribution by Sarah Engler and David Weisstanner go in the same direction. Starting with the observation that relative deprivation "reflects the extent to which citizens fall behind or stagnate even if they retain their job" they argue that relative deprivation makes radical right parties "appealing for voters" because they "use alternative non-economic criteria in their claim to restore status" (Engler and Weisstanner 2020, 383). These and similar findings pair well with studies on the "squeezing" of the middle class in advanced capitalist democracies. This has to a large extent been the result of technological change which has engendered broad-based increases in employment in both high and low skill occupations to the detriment of middle-skill occupations, resulting in job polarization (Acemoglu and Autor 2011).

A number of empirical studies have shown that across Europe there has been a trend toward job polarization, with significant increases in the number of highest- and lowest-skilled jobs concomitant with an equally significant contraction of those in the middle (Goos, Manning and Salomons 2009; Peugny 2019). Thomas Kurer's exploration of the "declining middle" goes in the same direction. He argues that it is particularly among those workers who manage to "survive" in the brave new world of massive economic restructuring that the radical populist right finds fertile ground for its resentment-laden discourse (Kurer 2019).

This, by the way, is nothing particularly new. In fact, as early as 1930, the German sociologist Theodor Geiger, in his well-known essay "Panik im Mittelstand" (middle-class panic) noted that what drove parts of Germany's middle class to vote for the Nazis was what he called *Angst vor Mindereinschätzung* (fear of not being appreciated; see Bude, 2014). Today, similar fears appear to provide a breeding ground for contemporary parties on the radical populist right. A comparative study of the sentiments of AfD and Front national supporters in the strongholds of these two parties from 2018, for instance, found a widespread sense of unfairness and disadvantage stemming from personal "experiences of devaluation" coupled with a strong belief "that politics has withdrawn from certain social and geographical areas" resulting in an equally "strong sense of abandonment" (Hillje 2018, 2).

Two secular processes account for these fears—globalization and automation. Globalization entails primarily an expansion and intensification of international trade (i.e., commodity market integration), subject to the logic of comparative advantage (see Baldwin 2016). Classical trade theory posits that international commodity market integration should lead countries to specialize in goods in which they hold the greatest relative advantage in terms of factor abundance and the factor intensity of goods. In general, countries will produce relatively more of the goods that use their relatively

abundant factors (i.e., land and labor) relatively intensively. This explains, for instance, why for much of the nineteenth century, “Britain exported manufactures and imported foodstuffs, while the reverse was true for the United States” (O’Rourke and Williamson 1999, 67). In today’s world, factor abundance refers primarily to the distribution of skilled and unskilled labor. Developing countries are relatively abundant in unskilled labor; the opposite holds true for advanced industrial countries. From this it follows that the latter should specialize in goods produced using skilled labor, the opposite holding true for developing countries. It further follows that the gains from trade largely accrue to the abundant factor (skilled labor and capital in advanced industrial countries) while the relatively scarce factor (i.e., unskilled labor) will suffer declining income if not outright redundancy. Empirical evidence supports this proposition. Hale Utar, for instance, has shown that even in Denmark, increased import competition, particularly from trade with China, has had a “substantial negative effect on Danish workers’ earnings and employment trajectories” – and this despite Denmark’s relatively generous social net coupled with a range of active labor market measures designed to reintegrate workers into the active labor force (Utar 2018, 646). Significantly enough, the negative effect was largely borne by women (Keller and Utar 2018).

For the purpose of this paper, automation is defined as the replacement of routine, repetitive tasks in the factory and office by AI-equipped machines, i.e., robots. While the advance of robotization is highly uneven across sectors, it has resulted – and will continue to do so at an accelerated pace – in the elimination of a growing number of jobs, primarily in lower-skilled manual, clerical and administrative occupations (Baldwin 2019, 245-250). At the same time, evidence suggests that automation leads to the creation of new, higher-skilled jobs (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2018). These new jobs, however, are primarily in occupations that require a high level of cognitive ability and skills (such as problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, learning from experience), creativity, emotional intelligence and social interaction–skills that either are not readily available or take time to acquire (Beck and Libert 2017). Available evidence also suggests that there is a link between globalization and automation. A recent McKinsey report on the “declining share of labor income” in the United States notes that the decline has been particularly pronounced in sectors that “tend to be more globalized, more digitized, and more capital-intensive than the overall economy” (Manyika, Mischke, Bughin, Woetzel, Krishnan and Cudre 2019, 2).

One significant result of automation has been a further acceleration of inequality. As Wolfgang Dauth et al. have shown for Germany, those workers who have retained their jobs – albeit not necessarily performing the same tasks as before the onset of automation – have seen a significant wage decline. Robots “raise labor productivity but not wages” thus contributing to inequality (Dauth, Findeisen, Südekum and Wößner 2017). At the same time, as Paul Mason has noted in the Guardian, work for low-skilled workers “has become far more coercive” than in the postwar period, before the onset of neoliberalism. “The threat of the sack is not implicit; it is in your face, daily”.¹² This is bound to provoke anger and resentment, in addition to fears, worries and anxieties generally associated with the advance of automation. A recent Pew Research study provides ample evidence of these emotions: In 2018, large majorities of respondents in ten countries (developed and developing) thought automation would not only make it more difficult for people to gain employment but also further increase inequality. Only a small minority said they believed automation would create new, better-paying jobs (Wike and Stokes 2018).

Evidence also suggests that “the probability of a job being automated decreases the higher the level of education required” (Deloitte 2015, 4). This means that with the

¹² See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/26/liberals-politics-emotion-right-wing-populists>

advance of automation, “cultural capital” is becoming more important than ever. In the United States, for instance, workers with a high school degree or less are “four times as likely as those with a bachelor’s degree to be displaced by automation” (McKinsey 2019). Individuals who, for whatever reason, do not dispose of the cultural capital necessary to qualify for these new jobs are bound to see their life chances severely limited if not diminished. As routine jobs that require moderate skills and offer good benefits have disappeared, “the laid-off workers have had to either upgrade their skills or take lower-paying service jobs” (Rajan 2012).

Hardly surprising, the inexorable advance of automation engenders anxiety among those potentially directly affected by it. Stanley Rachman defines anxiety as “a tense anticipation of a threatening but formless event; a feeling of uneasy suspense” (Rachman 2013, 2). Since anxiety lingers on, it represents a permanent psychological substratum for political mobilization. Thomas Kurer and Bruno Palier, for instance, have recently argued that the anxieties and disaffection on the part of those individuals faced with increasingly bleak employment prospects in the wake of automation represent a significant reservoir for radical right-wing populist mobilization (Kurer and Palier 2019). In fact, a recent study of the impact of “automation anxiety” on the 2016 Presidential election concludes that U.S. districts exposed to the “robot revolution” were significantly more disposed to vote for Donald Trump than those less exposed. This suggests, the authors of the study aver, that the victims of automation have a considerable propensity to vote for radical political change (Frey, Berger and Chen 2018, 26). In a similar vein, a British report from early 2018 noted that UK cities most at risk of losing jobs as a result of automation were among those where support for Brexit in 2016 was highest.¹³

Contemporary technological innovation is hardly gender-neutral. On the contrary. Guido Matias Cortes et al. have shown that the rapid transformation of the labor market informed by automation puts women at a distinct advantage – to a large extent driven by the growing importance of social skills. This, they argue, is broadly in line with “findings in the psychology and neuroscience literatures that indicate that women have a comparative advantage in performing tasks that require social skills” (Cortes, Jaimovich and Siu 2018, 41). A recent study on the impact of information technologies on employment patterns reaches similar conclusions: Given the growing importance of social and communication skills in the labor market, women have an advantage over men in high-wage occupations (Jerbashian 2019).

In fact, a recent study shows, companies that score high on “empathy” (defined as “a cognitive and emotional understanding of others’ experiences”) have done significantly better than companies that rank low on the empathy scale. Perhaps not surprisingly, a substantial number of the companies on top of the ranking are located in Silicon Valley (e.g., Apple, Google, and Tesla) (Parmar 2015). These realities might, at least in part, explain the upsurge in male anger alluded to above as well as the gender gap that continues, albeit to a lesser degree than in the past, to be one of the most important feature of the radical populist right’s support base–i.e., “angry white men voting for angry white men” To be sure, objectively, white males continue to be privileged.¹⁴ However, as Dan Cassino has pointed out in the pages of the Harvard Business Review, what counts are perceptions rather than a reasoned assessment of existing realities: “Even if men are actually privileged in society, the belief that they aren’t is enough to push them to respond to perceived discrimination in the same way that actually disadvantaged members of

¹³ See <https://www.businessinsider.com/brexit-voting-cities-will-lose-the-most-jobs-to-robots-2018-1?r=US&IR=T>

¹⁴ See <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/29/from-le-pen-to-alice-weidel-how-the-european-far-right-set-its-sights-on-women>

society are. They increase their gender group identification, experience lower self-esteem, get angry, and even lash out at the group they see as doing the oppressing (Cassino 2016).

Resentment appears to be particularly pronounced when governments introduce measures that seem to punish the victims of technological innovation even more. Philip and Hanna Schwander, for instance, have argued that the launching of the “Agenda 2010” by SPD chancellor Schröder in 2003 (designed to reform and liberalize the German labor market) was a major reason for growing perceptions among a significant number of German voters of being left behind (Manow and Schwander 2019). Similar arguments have been advanced to explain the upsurge of the Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) following the implementation of the center-right’s 2007 measures to “make work pay” (Bengtsson and Jacobsson 2018). These reforms implied, to a certain extent at least, cutbacks on certain social benefits. One result of these measures was “to raise the disposable-income gap between people with and without work”—resulting, one might presume, in resentment among those objectively falling behind (Dal Bó, Finan, Folke, Persson and Rickne 2019, 9). And this particularly when they compared themselves to recently arrived refugees who appeared to receive preferential treatment. Given these circumstances, the Sverigedemokraterna’s adoption of the notion of the *folkhemmet* alluded to above was more than a smart electoral gimmick.

Economic factors are important to account for a sense of status loss and relative deprivation associated with technological innovation (Alba and Foner 2017). They are, however, hardly sufficient to explain the depth of resentment prevalent among significant segments of the population of advanced liberal democracies. Take marriage. As a recent article in The Guardian provocatively put it,¹⁵ in today’s advanced industrial countries, marriage “has become a mark of status, increasingly the preserve of the wealthy and educated. Recent studies have linked this development to deindustrialization. They suggest that when “factory jobs vanish, men become less desirable partners” (Semuels 2017). Or, as David Autor and his colleagues at MIT recently put it, when jobs disappear, the “marriage-market value” of men precipitously drops (Autor, Dorn and Hanson 2017). As a result, as the authors of a recent article caustically put it, marriage is increasingly becoming a “privilege” of the economically secure; i.e., rich white men (see Carbone and Cahn 2013).

Richard Baldwin, one of the leading experts on globalization, has argued that the advance of automation has to be analyzed in the context of globalization. In fact, it is the nexus between globalization and automation which has led to what Baldwin characterizes the current “globotics upheaval” (Baldwin 2019). Globotics follows its own logic. One of the most significant and most consequential aspects of this logic is the accelerated pace of urbanization, a function of the fact that “spatial concentration of economic activity creates forces that encourage further spatial concentration” (Baldwin 2016, 187). The result is what a McKinsey report has characterized as “superstar cities”—urban conglomerates such as London, New York, Mumbai and Shenzhen. What they have in common is that they are hubs of global finance, business, technology and innovation. What they also share is a cosmopolitan outlook, an openness to the world (McKinsey 2018).

A prime example is the San Francisco Bay Area technology cluster, which includes Palo Alto and Silicon Valley. Empirical evidence shows that metropolitan areas have become the prime locus of “high high-techstartup entrepreneurship” and technological innovation, largely because of the cross-fertilization that comes from myriad interactive processes within technology clusters (Adler, Florida, King and Mellander 2019; Fallows 2014). Clustering is particularly prevalent in STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and

¹⁵ See <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/oct/07/marriage-america-privilege-rich>

mathematics) occupations, which are at the core of the new economy, centred around “knowledge locations” (McKinsey 2019, 51). At the same time, urbanization accounts to a significant extent for the dramatic increase in inequality within metropolitan areas and between them and the rest of the country (Behrens 2014). In the United States, according to McKinsey, by 2030, twenty-five cities will account for a whopping 60 percent of job growth. At the same time, rural areas are expected to see as little as a one percent job growth, (McKinsey 2019, 49-50). 2020 Democratic presidential hopeful Andrew Yang has gone even further, arguing that top graduates in the United States choose to pursue a career in a handful of cities – New York, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC. The result has been an acceleration of inequality: “People in the right sectors and regions experience a climate of abundance, while those in the wrong sectors and regions experience a climate of scarcity.” Tellingly, Yang’s book is entitled *The War on Normal People*.¹⁶

A recent American report notes that urbanization “has sorted and segregated national populations and concentrated economic production in megacities, driving us further apart—culturally, economically, and politically—along the lines of ethnicity, education, and population density.” Urbanization “has intensified the self-selection of temperamentally liberal individuals into higher education and big cities while leaving behind a lower-density population that is relatively uniform in white ethnicity, conservative disposition, and lower economic productivity” (Wilkinson 2018, 4-5). Richard Florida’s widely cited empirical analysis of “the geography of bohemia” makes a similar point. Florida finds that “bohemians” (characterized as formerly marginalized eccentric and alternative types of individuals with a high level of “human capital” whose virtues make them particularly valuable in the new “knowledge economy” where creativity and innovation are highly appreciated) are “highly concentrated” in spaces which also have a high concentration of high-technology industry” (Florida 2002, 67). What distinguishes “creative-class workers”, or so Florida maintains, is that they “choose cities for their tolerant environments and diverse populations as well as good jobs”—such as San Francisco and Seattle.¹⁷

These arguments, while originally made with respect to the United States, are equally pertinent for current-day Western Europe. A recent Guardian report on Milan makes the point. The author quotes Roberto Camagni, a professor of urban economics from Milan, who notes that the city “provides financiers, lawyers, designers, artists, culture, everything required to be a modern international hub.” According to Camagni, Milan has “a monopoly on the high-end services that command the highest prices, and the rest of Italy has to pay those prices.” The problem is, however, that “this miracle in Milan only really involves the million or so people at its very heart. The city has shaken off the industrial hinterland that made it great in the 20th century. In the end this creates a problem of dignity for other places.” As elsewhere in Western Europe, it is the radical populist right, i.e. Salvini’s Lega, which has benefited most from this “problem of dignity.” In the European election, the Lega did very well throughout Lombardy and particularly in the deindustrialized towns in the vicinity of Milan—the only area held by the traditional left.¹⁸

Roberto Rho’s account of the Lega’s strongholds in northern Italy goes a long way to illuminate some of the dynamics which revived the party’s electoral fortunes. Concentrated in small communities (15 thousand or less), middle-aged, with a steady job in the private sector, the typical “leghisti” are “very much tied to their territorially-based

¹⁶ See <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36204293-the-war-on-normal-people>

¹⁷ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/01/arts/the-cities-and-their-new-elite.html>

¹⁸ See <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/nov/10/how-europes-cities-stole-continents-wealth>

traditions and identity.” With a highly negative view of the national public administration and rather pessimistic with respect to the economic development of the country, they “fear to lose their status and the privileges associated with them.” For them, the Lega is the only party in Italy that defends their dignity and “roots” (Rho2019).

Rho’s account resonates to a large extent with similar accounts found in other Western European countries and in the United States in the wake of radical right-wing populist electoral success. In fact, on both sides of the Atlantic, these dynamics account for what has emerged as the major new political cleavage for the coming decades—cosmopolitanism versus parochialism (see Piketty 2018). Michael Zürn and Pieter de Wilde have maintained that what is at the core of this divide are concerns “that directly address the core questions of justice in the face of globalization—concerns for redistribution, recognition and representation”—in other words, questions of dignity and social justice (Zürn and de Wilde (2016, 293).

The diametrically opposed emotions generated by these dynamics—excitement among what Richard Florida has famously referred to as the “creative class;” anxiety, frustration, anger and despair among those who have seen their life chances increasingly diminished—are at the root of growing socioeconomic, sociocultural and socio-political polarization. As Richard Florida recently put it,¹⁹ “people of different views and economic means live too far apart to understand one another”. In the United States, socio-political polarization is particularly glaring, driven by the new cleavage: “Democrats have become the party of the multicultural city, Republicans the party of the monocultural exurbs and country—the party of relatively urbanization resistant white people” (Wilkinson 2018, 7). Similar observations have been made by Kiss et al. with respect to Toronto and De Maesschalck in the case of Antwerp, both of them affluent metropolitan cities. Both studies reveal growing center-periphery tensions—reflecting a growing city-peri-urban divide and polarization (Kiss, Perrella and Spicer 2019; De Maesschalck 2011). The case of the Netherlands suggests, however, that the dynamics of this new cleavage are more complex and go beyond a simple urban/rural division. Both Amsterdam and Rotterdam are metropolitan areas. Yet the latter has been a fertile terrain for populists, most famously Pim Fortuyn, whereas in the former, populism has remained marginal. One explanation for these opposing trends lies in the socioeconomic and sociocultural differences between the two cities. Whereas Amsterdam has become an important service sector heavily weighted towards finance, research, and information and communication with a strong international focus. Against that, Rotterdam is dominated by its port, and by a traditional economic structure “that constantly threatens to become obsolete” (Enzinger 2019).

Similar dynamics have been observed in Western Europe, most notably in France, the UK, Sweden and the eastern part of Germany As Christophe Guilluy has shown, over the past several decades, France has increasingly been divided between “*la France périphérique* and *métropoles mondialisées*” (Guilluy 2014, 71). Tellingly, Guilluy promotes his analysis as a study on “how the popular classes have been sacrificed” on the altar of what he calls “*la mondialisation heureuse*” (happy globalization). At the same time, he shows how the neglect of, if not outright contempt for, the *France populaire* has breathed new life into the Front national under Marine Le Pen, who has successfully promoted herself as the advocate of *la France oubliée*, the forgotten France reflected, for instance, by the decline of public services in these areas, which leave its inhabitants with the impression of being second-class citizens (Fourquet 2012, 51-52). Similar observations were made by Hervé Le Bras and Emmanuel Todd. They noted as early as 2013 that the FN had become, economically and territorially, the party of the “dominés (i.e., those lacking

¹⁹ See <https://urbanland.uli.org/fall-meeting/richard-florida-notes-unexpected-effects-creative-class-rise/>

agency), “the weak which, as a result of their education and occupation, have been held at a distance from the urban centers of power and privileges, relegated to the peri-urban and rural areas” of the country (Le Bras and Todd 2013, 290).

Similarly in the UK, support for Brexit was particularly pronounced in lagging areas, which, ironically, have tended to benefit from the EU’s support for regional and local economic development (Los, McCann, Springford and Thissen 2017). These are areas with very low levels of mobility, where residents feel, to a certain extent at least, trapped, unable to move to places promising greater opportunities. However, as Lee et al. have recently noted, lack of mobility “only matters for respondents living in places experiencing relative economic decline or those where there have been substantial recent increases in non-white British migrants.” Had more of them been in a position to move, had these “left-behind” places done better economically, had they “remained more stable in terms of demographic composition,” the Brexit vote might have gone in the other way (Lee, Morris and Kemeny 2018).

Echoing observations advanced after the election of Donald Trump, Matthew Goodwin and colleagues have submitted that the most substantial vote for Brexit came from “the least diverse local jurisdictions, or in those with large concentrations of working-class voters and voters with few educational qualifications.” On the whole, the Brexit vote “was delivered by the ‘left behind’—social groups that are united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalisation, who do not feel as though elites, whether in Brussels or Westminster, share their values, represent their interests and genuinely empathise with their intense angst about rapid social, economic and cultural change” (Ford and Goodwin 2017, 25-26; Godwin and Heath 2016, 331). In a similar vein Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever have argued that the support of Brexit among working-class voters was informed by “a deep sense of loss of prestige” and an attempt to “retreat from the damaging impact of a globalized world that is no longer recognizable, no longer ‘British’” (Virdee and McGeever 2018, 1811). A recent statistical analysis of support for the Swedish radical populist right provides further evidence for the importance of these dynamics. One of the central findings of the analysis is that radical right populist “ideas gave spread faster in rural regions with low population densities” than elsewhere in the country (Blomqvist, Sumpter and Mann 2019, 14).

Similar dynamics explain the dramatic upsurge of radical right-wing populism in the eastern part of Germany—the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). There, over the past several years, the AfD has gradually replaced Die Linke (the result of a merger of disgruntled left-wing social democrats and the eastern German PDS, the post-unification successor to the SED) as the dominant Ostpartei (party of the east) giving voice to the anger and resentment of parts of the east German electorate (Betz and Habersack 2019). Katja Salomo’s analysis of Thuringia, the east German region “boasting” particularly high support for the AfD, is paradigmatic. She shows the impact of regionally idiosyncratic precarious structural conditions on sentiments and, via the resulting grievances, on voting behavior. These conditions are marked by the exodus of a large number of younger and better educated individuals and particularly young women (Kröhnert and Klingholz 2006). The exodus was particularly pronounced in rural areas (Bauer, Rulff and Tamminga 2019, 9). The result has been a high level of demographic homogeneity—a disproportionate number of seniors 65+ and a disproportionate number of young men experiencing great difficulties to find a spouse or partner (Salomo 2019)—a condition even worse than that postulated by Autor et al. (2017). Similar conditions can be found throughout the territory of the former GDR, accounting in part for the dramatic gains of the AfD in recent years (Betz and Habersack 2019).

The case of the eastern part of Germany shows that relative deprivation extends far beyond economics involving as well social and cultural deprivations and grievances. What they have in common is a strong sense on the part of a significant number of individuals of “falling behind” and/or “being left behind” profound socio-economic and socio-structural disruptions that, nevertheless, exert a very direct impact on their life chances. The experience of deprivation is bound to provoke a panoply of negative emotions, such as anxiety, frustration, anger and resentment. A recent analysis of American responses to automation provide substantial empirical support for this proposition. It found profound worries among respondents with regard to robotization. At the same time, it found considerable differences between educational groups: The highly educated thought that automation made their work more interesting and provided them with opportunities for advancement; those lacking the necessary cultural capital expressed opposite sentiments (Smith and Anderson 2017).

Recent contributions from economics and political science have started to analyze these dynamics. Autor et al.’s study of the regional effect of Chinese import penetration on the vote for Donald Trump is arguably the most prominent case in point (Autor, Dorn, Hanson and Majlesi 2017). So is Colantone and Stanig’s work on the impact of trade competition on electoral choice in Europe; Dippel and al.’s study of the impact of trade shocks on electoral choice in Germany and Caselli et al.’s study on Italy (Colantone and Stanig 2018; Dippel, Gold and Heblich 2016; Caselli, Fracasso and Traverso 2019). In each of these cases, there is relatively strong evidence that globalization (in the form of Chinese imports) has given a non-negligible boost to right-wing populist candidates and parties. The emerging literature on the impact of automation on voting behaviour paints a similar picture. A recent paper by Anelli et al. demonstrates that “higher exposure to automation increases support for nationalist and radical-right parties, both at the regional and at the individual level” (Anelli, Colantone and Stanig 2019, 35). Along similar lines, Zhen Im et al. find that as the risk of automation increases, the probability a person affected by automation will vote for the radical populist right substantially increases as well (Im, Mayer, Palier and Rovny 2019). Jane Gringrich’s study of the impact of automation goes in the same direction. She finds that voters negative expose to automation are prone to vote for the radical populist right, even in cases where they are being compensated by the welfare state—as they should according to traditional trade theory (Gingrich 2019). This suggests that anger and resentment provoked by redundancy associated with automation are not necessarily a question of economics (mitigated by welfare state compensation) but go deeper, involving individual pride, an individual’s sense of self-worth and social status, which are significantly more difficult to resolve politically.

The arguments advanced so far provide a plausible answer to two phenomena associated with the contemporary radical populist right: their staying power over several decades, despite often intense hostility and animosity on the part of the political establishment and the media; and their upsurge in the polls in recent years. Extant empirical evidence suggests that the success of these parties is to a large extent the result of their ability to exploit a range of negative emotions provoked by secular socio-economic, socio-structural, and socio-cultural processes and developments that open up ever new fields for populist and nativist mobilization. More often than not, what mobilizes individuals to vote for the radical populist right are perceptions of being treated unfairly, of being ignored and dismissed, and, in the worst case, of being disdained and treated with contempt by the “political class.”

A typical example is the eruption of resentment in recent years following the refugee crisis, increasingly addressed by the media. In the eastern part of Germany, for instance, one grievance often heard and related by journalists is that refugees, once they arrived in Germany, “got everything” (in terms of social benefits) whereas “natives” are made to jump numerous bureaucratic hurdles when they apply for benefits.²⁰ This reflects the perception that non-Germans received preferential treatment while “hardworking, tax-paying Germans” faced discrimination. Similar perceptions can be found across Western Europe, such as the charge, widely distributed in the UK that “illegal immigrants” are “eligible for over four times more in state aid than pensioners”.²¹ Or charges, increasingly peddled by the yellow press ahead of the Brexit vote, that there were “thousands” of migrants in the UK “raking in” undeserved benefits (Gavin 2018, 837).

In the media and in academia these charges have been dismissed as “welfare chauvinism.” In reality they represent diametrically opposed sentiments—perfect reflections of the cosmopolitan/parochial divide. As Houtman et al. have noted, egalitarianism is fundamentally differently understood among the working class than among the middle class. The middle class might be less egalitarian-minded; yet egalitarianism is “nevertheless part and parcel of a progressive political outlook that includes an acceptance of cultural differences and post-traditional identities” and, hence, “a willingness to share the nation’s wealth with immigrants from poor third-world countries.” Against that, for the working class, albeit being more egalitarian-minded, egalitarianism is “more closely tied to authoritarian rejections of cultural diversity, desires to exclude immigrants from the national welfare system, and rightist political identifications there” (Houtman, Achterberg and Derks 2008, 116).

One of them is the desire for a strong leader. Stefanie Sprong et al. have recently shown that growing inequality enhances the yearning for a strong leader who “fixes” things without being subject to constraints. The authors argue that inequality increases fears of social disintegration, i.e., the erosion of the social fabric. With regard to social protection, social disintegration implies, among other things, the gradual breakdown of solidarity—reflected in the notion that others cannot be trusted and that everyone is out for themselves and no longer willing to help others in need—which is one of the mainstays of the social welfare state (Sprong et al. 2019, 4). This might partly explain the attraction of radical right-wing populist parties featuring strong, charismatic leaders.

Emotions, Politics and the Policy Impact of the Radical Populist Right

Radical right-wing populist parties have been quick to exploit voters’ perception of having been wronged and yearnings for a strong leader, using them to promote themselves as the ultimate defenders of cultural identity, national sovereignty, and particularly the welfare state. Prominent examples are Marine Le Pen’s “social turn” after she took over the reins of the Front national and, more recently, the Sverigedemokraterna’s adoption of the *folkhemmet*. At the same time, the radical populist right has used them to launch a frontal attack at the established political parties—and particularly the “cosmopolitan left”—charging them with having nothing but contempt with their “own” people, i.e., the native-born. In its most extreme version, the argument goes as far as to charge that the “cosmopolitan elite” promotes and furthers the “great replacement” (of the “indigenous”

²⁰ See <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article169032071/Die-Sorgen-der-Maenner-im-Osten-Integriert-doch-erst-mal-uns.html>

²¹ See <https://fullfact.org/news/are-illegal-immigrants-eligible-over-four-times-more-state-aid-pensioners/>

population by migrants, particularly from Muslim countries) to fulfil its utopian cosmopolitan dreams.

These discursive tropes play to the diffuse fears and anxieties informing recent outbursts of nativism, which, in turn, reflect widespread uneasiness with ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. A number of surveys have shown that a significant number of the population in liberal democracies believe that ethnic diversity undermines national culture.²² This is particularly the case when it comes to Islam. In 2019, half of the German population perceived Islam as intolerant, dogmatic, and threatening.²³ Politically, the result has been more polarization and a new cleavage, pitting the advocates of multiculturalism against the defenders of idiosyncratic national identity. Hardly surprising, the radical populist right has promoted itself as the most fervent promoter of the latter, adopting the Vlaams Blok's (now Vlaams Belang) demand of "either assimilate or bugger off".²⁴ What informs these demands is an illiberal conception of democracy, based on ethno-religious discrimination and the perpetuation of "indigenous" privilege—what has come to be known as "ethnocracy" (Anderson 2016). Ethnocracy fits in well not only with the notion of "our people first" but also with notions prevalent on the radical right that migrants (particularly from predominantly Muslim countries) represent the vanguard of a migratory tsunami which will end in the "Great Replacement."

These charges might appear ludicrous, a figment of conspiratorial thinking. Yet they fall on fertile ground because of the established parties' genuine problems with responding to the very real and justified grievances of a substantial segment of voters. Again, the eastern German case is paradigmatic. Here even top representatives of the established parties have acknowledged that mistakes were made after unification, that the anger and resentment expressed via support for the AfD might be reasonable—a reflection of the loss of dignity a substantial number of eastern Germans have experienced over the past several decades.²⁵

This leaves us with a final question: Given the myriad grievances contemporary politics leaves unanswered, what have radical right-wing populist parties concretely done for the growing number of voters who have voted for them? The socio-structural disruptions described above open up a wide field for policy proposals designed to mitigate their (negative) impact on individuals directed affected by them. If automation invariably entails the disappearance of employment opportunities for those with lower- and middle-level skills, one logical response is an emphasis on social investment in training and retraining. If globalization entails job losses as a result of what populists like Donald Trump have (not without justification) characterized as "unfair competition," the solution is a certain measure of protectionism. If "globoitics" entails the elimination of jobs held by senior workers unlikely to be able to take advantage of retraining schemes, the answer is early retirement. This invariably entails additional pressure on the welfare benefits, which entails, in turn, a renewed focus on redistribution, i.e., raising taxes on the rich. It is reasonable to suggest that any of these policies would particularly benefit those voters who form a core constituency of the radical populist right. To what degree have these parties adopted such an agenda?

A preliminary answer is 'not that much', at least given the wide range of opportunities that structural change and the established political parties' problems in responding to them have offered the radical populist right. To a large degree, the policies

²² See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/17/four-in-10-people-think-multiculturalism-undermines-british-culture-immigration>

²³ See <https://www.dw.com/en/germans-support-democracy-but-are-concerned-about-islam/a-49549541>

²⁴ See <https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/vlaams-blok-blijft-bij-aanpassen-of-opkrassen-standpunt~be4d390a/>.

²⁵ See <https://www.zeit.de/2017/17/petra-koeppling-integration-sachsen-pegida>.

advanced by these parties have been of symbolic nature, largely failing to address the real problems faced by their constituencies: increasingly precarious working conditions, worries about how to make ends meet, anxieties with respect to the prospects of their children, and social marginalization. These are to a large extent “bread-and-butter” issues. Instead of proposing realistic policies that respond to these issues, the radical populist right has to a large extent focused on exploiting widespread cultural and identitarian anxieties (Betz and Johnson 2004).

Take, for instance, the Norwegian case. Here, the leader of the Progress Party (junior partner in a minority center-right coalition), Siv Jensen has been Minister of Finance for the past five years. As Minister of Finance, she has been in charge of Norway's 'Oil Fund' which invests surplus revenues from the country's petroleum sector (which in late 2017 topped \$ 1 trillion). Ironically enough, the Progress Party has a long history of opposing the official cap on spending from the Oil Fund (set at 4 percent) demanding that a substantial portion of it should be invested in public policy projects, such as education and infrastructure (Jupskås 2015: 33). Once in charge of finances, however, Jensen not only insisted on dropping the party's opposition to the cap, but lowered it by 1 percent (amounting to a roughly 10 billion reduction). In other words, fiscal prudence won out over populist principles.

The Norwegian case is hardly unique with respect to radical right populist parties, once in government, falling short of their own demands. The Lega Nord, for instance, since its inception in the early 1990s, had one central political objective—the transformation of Italy into a federal state, leaving the individual regions with extensive autonomy, particularly with respect to fiscal matters. The party's original leader, Umberto Bossi, would perennially threaten that if his demands were not met, the north (aka 'Padania' in Lega speak) would secede from the rest of the country. Yet after years of being a reliable junior partner in various Berlusconi governments, the Lega Nord had achieved little on the question of federalism. The reason was simple. The Lega Nord's promotion of federalism was directed against the south, which has crucially depended on funds from the north. Yet neither Silvio Berlusconi nor Gianfranco Fini's Alleanza nazionale (the other major coalition partner) had any interest in alienating the south, given the region's overwhelming electoral support for the center right. As a result, fiscal federalism never saw the light of day.

Anecdotal evidence of radical right-wing populist parties in a position of power confirms the impression that these parties do little beyond “simulative politics” to promote the concerns of their core voters (see Blühdorn and Butzlaff 2019). Salvini's Lega and Strache's FPÖ, for instance, promoted policies that did little to alleviate the very real plight of their core constituencies—ordinary people disposing of relatively low levels of cultural capital, finding it difficult to compete in an increasingly competitive labor market. In fact, the FPÖ during its most recent stint in government, appears to have been primarily concerned with defending the interests of the “upper ten thousand” leaving ordinary people—who voted for them—to fend for themselves.²⁶ At the same time in Italy, Salvini's Lega made calls for a flat tax central to their economic program—an policy that clearly advantages the rich. This perhaps should not come as a surprise. After all, Jörg Haider, the self-proclaimed champion of ordinary Austrians, had embraced the flat tax idea as early as 2003 (Rathgeb 2019, 21). Empirical evidence from US states suggests that states that boast a flat income tax, such as Illinois, are among the most regressive. “In fact, Illinois ranks as the 8th-most upside-down state tax code in the country, worse than some states that have no income tax at all”.²⁷

²⁶ See <https://kontrast.at/fpoe-kickl-hofer-wahlprogramm-nationalratswahl-2019/>

²⁷ See <https://itep.org/taxing-the-rich-works/>

Finally in Switzerland, the SVP has marketed itself as the party representing ordinary people for more than two decades. Yet its policies have consistently been in favour of capital, particularly financial capital.²⁸ Ironically enough, with its populist turn, the SVP attracted a growing number of voters who were least likely to profit from the party's neoliberal tax and social policies (Rennwald and Zimmermann 2016).

Instead of promoting policies focused on investing in the upgrading of human capital and protecting their core constituencies against the vicissitudes of socioeconomic and technological change, radical right-wing populist parties, more often than not, stoke the fire of resentment against migrants and the "political class." This is undoubtedly simpler and more cost effective than developing concrete policies that might actually respond to the very real grievances of their constituency. These policies would undoubtedly cost money, which would have to be raised by, for instance, tax increases on the rich. A fairer tax policy, in turn, would certainly go a long way to counteract inequality trends, but immediately infringe on the interests of "the upper ten thousand." And this, the radical populist right, despite all their populist rhetoric, is hardly prepared to do.

Instead, radical right-wing populist parties have contrived a range of symbolic politics designed to divert their core constituencies' attention from the actual problems. In recent years, this has been primarily a nativist agenda of "our people first" reflected, in its most concrete and tangible form, in various measures marketed as effective means to protect the welfare state. In the social science literature, this is known as "welfare chauvinism." With the beginning of mass migration following the end of the Cold War, welfare chauvinist positions have increasingly become central to radical right-wing populist parties' political agenda (Enns-Jedanastik 2016; 2018). Welfare chauvinist policies "defend distribution only for those who deserve it, that is, the nationals who contribute to the society's wealth and have the right to fully enjoy social benefits" (Chueri 2019, 188). In concrete terms this applies primarily to labor-market "insiders," i.e., full-time workers enjoying permanent employment. For this group, radical right-wing populist parties such as the FPÖ have gone a long way to secure continued protection against income losses in case of unemployment and retirement (Rathgeb 2019). These policies are clearly inspired by a strong sense of producerism, reflected in the notion of "deservedness" and designed to exclude particularly recent migrants routinely stigmatized as "benefit scroungers" and "social welfare tourists."

Empirical as well as anecdotal evidence suggests that radical right-wing populist parties have not only been quite successful in translating welfare-chauvinist propositions into concrete policies; they have also been successful in directly impacting the policy position of the mainstream parties. As Tarik Abou-Chadi and Werner Krause have recently shown, "established parties react to the success of radical right challengers by emphasizing more anti-immigrant and culturally protectionist positions" (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018, 15). This has been particularly the case when a radical right-wing populist party participates only "informally" in a governing coalition (Chueri 2019, 199).

The paradigmatic case is Denmark, where, until recently, the Dansk Folkeparti (DF) was instrumental in advancing policies promoting "group-based" welfare rights (Enns-Jedanastik 2016) which for all practical purposes racialized access to social rights (Arndt and Frølund Thomsen 2019). In the process the DF managed to effect one of the most restrictive immigration policies in Western Europe, which have served as a model for the radical right in other Scandinavian countries (Nordensvard and Ketola 2015). In the case of Denmark, DF-inspired anti-immigrant measures include the notorious policy to force migrants and refugees to hand over assets exceeding a certain amount in cash to offset

²⁸ See <https://www.woz.ch/-7255>

the costs of resettlement. Ironically enough, the policy turned out to be largely symbolic,²⁹ yet gained the radical populist right significant international notoriety while attracting imitators.³⁰ Thus the short-lived ÖVP/FPÖ coalition agreed in 2016 to force anyone seeking asylum in Austria to hand over all of their cash to cover the costs associated with the asylum request.³¹

Forcing migrants and asylum seekers to hand over their last remaining possessions is hardly an effective way to stabilize the Western European welfare state. It might assuage the resentment of “native-born citizens” asking why refugees dispose of smartphones while they themselves can’t afford one.³² It does little, however, to compensate for the neoliberal assault on the social rights most Western European have taken for granted. In general, radical right-wing populist parties have done little to counter this assault—and this despite the fact that they represent a (native-born) constituency that is most likely to have to take advantage of the social welfare state at one point in the future. In general, radical right-wing populist parties have been exceptionally apt in exploiting the panoply of negative emotions provoked by the profound socio-structural and socio-cultural disruptions that have become the new normal in today’s world. This has required considerable programmatic versatility in response to changing circumstances.

The shift from the promotion of neo-liberalism to the defence of social protectionism is perhaps the most significant case of policy reversal. It is a direct response to the fact that the electoral base of the radical populist right today largely consists of individuals who, as Paul Mason has observed for the UK,³³ are “scared, depressed and angry because the world created by precarious employment, poor housing and rising inequality is scary, depressing, and annoying”—individuals for whom the future is negatively defined. At the same time, however, the radical populist right, when in a position of genuine power, has done little to translate rhetoric into genuine policies that promote the material wellbeing of their core constituencies. Radical right-wing populist parties, for better or for worse, have become central to the politics of advanced liberal democracies. In a growing number of countries, they appeal to a significant part of the electorate. As such, they should be taken seriously and held responsible with respect to the promises they make to their voters, particularly when it comes to policies that might alleviate the anxieties, resentment and anger provoked by the dramatic structural changes that are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

²⁹ See <https://www.thelocal.dk/20190124/three-years-after-denmarks-infamous-jewellery-law-hit-world-headlines-not-a-single-piece-has-been-confiscated>

³⁰ See https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/02/opinion/denmarks-cruelty-toward-refugees.html?_r=0

³¹ See <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article171661397/Asylbewerber-muessen-Geld-und-Handys-abgeben.html>

³² See <https://www.zeit.de/2019/01/staatliche-leistungen-fluechtlinge-smartphones-stimmt>

³³ See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/26/liberals-politics-emotion-right-wing-populists>

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