

Interview with Paul Taggart, Professor of Politics, Department of Politics & Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex

# The Latest Developments in Anti-Globalization in Europe & the US

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

In pursuing a rules-based global economic system, domestic politics in developed nations will play an important role, as multilateral cooperation in achieving international rules will depend upon each nation's policies and attitude regarding globalization. Will the rise in anti-globalization sentiment that has been seen these past few years be the next stage?

We interviewed Prof. Paul Taggart in the United Kingdom, an expert on political science.

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## Assessment of Current European Politics

**JS:** What do you think about the outcomes of the French presidential election in May 2022 and the subsequent National Assembly election in June? It was noticed that a right-wing party made progress in the former while in the latter the left wing won many votes.

**Taggart:** I think France is very different from many other European states and there are some particular aspects that make it different. It is interesting because it is the state that has seen the most success for the populist right – the National Rally has now become an established party and so it is an interesting test case. In the presidential election you saw a victory for Emmanuel Macron but what we were actually seeing there was a victory for the political center, and a European Union supporting center. So you had a great victory and a reassertion that the center is not gone, or the liberal part of it has not gone. It is very rare for French presidents to be reelected so, in a sense, this is a double achievement for Macron.

If you combine that with what happened in the parliamentary election, the center won and got the presidency – but you have qualified support for the center in the sense that in the presidential election the right wing was very strong and came second, while in the parliamentary election the left and its coalition with the greens came together and also did very well. So you had a kind of anti-establishment left and an anti-establishment right doing well and depriving Macron of the ability to govern in an easy way, depriving him of a majority. If you take those two aspects you've got qualified support for the political center, for an EU-supporting center as well, but you've also got support that is half-hearted as the French population did not give Macron a free hand for the next five years to govern in the way that he wants; the parliamentary elections tied his



Paul Taggart

hands behind his back.

What is also noticeable in France is the complete collapse of the traditional center right – what became the Republicans – and the complete demise of the *Parti Socialiste*, the traditional center left party. In politics you have to look for what has happened, but you also have to notice what doesn't happen and the French system was always built around the idea of having a dualistic competition between center left and center right, and that has essentially been wiped away. The center left and center right conflict has been replaced by a centrist versus anti-establishment conflict. I think that is very significant.

We should also bear in mind that Macron created his party almost from scratch in a very short time period before his first election. The paradox here is that you have a reassertion of the political center, but you also have the establishment of anti-establishment politics. Some form of anti-establishment politics, whether it be on the left or the right, looks like it is part of the current terrain of French politics. Both elections show that the political establishment has re-established itself while the anti-establishment forces look like they are here for the medium and possibly the long term.

The old party system from two presidential elections ago is completely gone. Finally, we have to be careful as the focus is always on Marine Le Pen and the right and this amazing success that she had, but if you look you will see that the French extreme right has gradually built itself up, even under her father Jean-Marie Le Pen – it's not something that came from nowhere.

**JS:** How about other countries in Europe – is there a similar trend of political nationalism?

**Taggart:** Clearly in recent years there has been a rise in nationalist forces, on the right primarily. The situation in France with Le Pen represents a trend of growing support for the populist right across

Europe. However, when we look across Europe we tend to look for the commonalities, but there are a lot of significant divergences.

The first obvious point is you see different levels of success for the nationalist forces. Some are getting into government and some not. Nationalist forces have thus done better in some places than others and in some places have become part of the government – places like Hungary and Poland. So there is variation in the levels of nationalism.

Also, while there are similarities, there are differences of emphases among these parties and these forces, which reflect the different national contexts of politics. While there are similar issues such as immigration or Euroscepticism, or law and order, they load in different countries in different ways. We can't say they've all got the same agenda. Immigration, for example, matters much less in countries like Hungary than it does in countries like Italy. The radical right might be similar in other ways, but they tend to load on different issues.

The third variation, more generally speaking, is that there is a difference between the radical right forces in Central and Eastern Europe compared to those in Western Europe, in that you are seeing a stronger emphasis upon values in Central and Eastern Europe, upon a more anti-liberal motivation. Interestingly, in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in parties like Law and Justice in Poland, you are seeing an interesting combination of left-wing redistribution economics with a kind of social conservatism.

I am not an expert on the area, but I think you see a different sort of agenda in Eastern Europe and that might well be something that starts to spread across to Western Europe if it proves to be a successful formula, although you don't see it now. If we go back to France though, Le Pen has become more socially liberal, ironically to try and get rid of the stigma of her father. So there are these different levels of support for the government, different issue focuses, and different political contexts.

There is some regional variation with a slight difference in Central and Eastern Europe compared to the Western European radical right forces. There are also some countries where there are some elements of left-wing forces – like SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain – and they have had some success, whereas in some countries you see very little left-wing populist nationalism.

### **JS: Overall, do you believe this trend of rising nationalism will continue in the near future in Europe?**

**Taggart:** Yes – what you are seeing is the embeddedness of nationalist forces within most European party systems. I am just cautious, though, because I think you see real change in the form of those nationalist forces. If you take Italy, and if you were to argue who have been the nationalist actors in that country, it has varied over time: from the Northern League to Berlusconi, then the Five Star Movement and now we have the Brothers of Italy. In the French case, you see the loss of these old parties that are established center-left and center-right. In some incarnation, in the coming years we will have to get used to nationalist anti-establishment politics as a current feature of European politics.

## **Factors Possibly Influencing Nationalism**

### **JS: These nationalistic political leaders seem to have some preference for authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin. Do you think the Ukrainian crisis will provoke sentiment against such authoritarian leaders or influence nationalism in Europe?**

**Taggart:** The model of authoritarianism of Putin is a powerful one, potentially for nationalists in Europe. The Ukrainian conflict creates some different sorts of dynamics. Firstly, one of the things that has united all these nationalist forces pretty much has been some skepticism over the European integration project. In a sense the war deprives these parties of one of the key aspects of their appeal; European integration as a project starts to look more legitimate for the new candidate states such as Ukraine.

The fact that other states want to join the European project and that Russia sees the EU as its enemy – that revives support for European integration or has the potential to. That's not necessarily a key aspect of all nationalism. A number of these radical right parties had expressly supported Russia and had been very admiring of Putin's leadership. The Russian conflict also creates difficulties – the obvious cases are Matteo Salvini in Italy and Marine Le Pen who had to actually go to Russian banks to support her previous election efforts. So the overt support for Russia on the part of some of those actors would seem to create difficulties.

Interestingly, it didn't really resonate as a problem for Le Pen in the presidential election, so maybe it won't matter that much. We should also remember that some of these nationalist and radical right forces are anti-Russian: Law and Justice in Poland is very hostile to Russia and will always be. So we must be careful not to say that all these radical right forces have pro-Russian sympathies. It is not always the case.

The other thing that is difficult in the short to medium term for these parties from the Ukraine conflict is the rally effect. The fact that under times of war people will support their government and the establishment and that deprives the nationalist radical right of one of their key appeals of being anti-establishment. The long-term effects of what might be a long-drawn-out war are yet to play out. So I am very cautious about this – while initially it looks like the Ukrainian conflict might be significant for the nationalist radical right, I'm not sure whether it will play out the same way in the long term.

You phrased the question around authoritarianism, and I think we have to be careful when we are talking about authoritarianism. Putin is doing something very different from what these nationalist radical right forces would want to enact. Some people would say that figures like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban have moved in a direction that is authoritarian but not as far as Putin. So I'm always cautious. I think Putin is an extreme example and I am cautious about saying that the nationalist radical right is inherently authoritarian in the way it operates. It can tend to be, but isn't necessarily.

### **JS: Income inequality or anti-immigration sentiment could be key to nationalism's survival in the long term. Will such causes of nationalism remain in Europe for a while?**

**Taggart:** If you focus on income inequality as a driver of support for the nationalist radical right, of course there is an element there that is very significant. However, there is nothing necessarily in the nationalist radical right that links to inequality, because income inequality can drive support for the far socialist left, as well as for the nationalist right. If you have great inequality it tends to go along with support for the nationalist radical right but it's not the only driver. Greater inequality doesn't necessarily mean more support for the radical right. There is a prevailing thesis here that there is a particular part of the population that has been "left behind" and that those once part of the manufacturing base are no longer affiliated to the center left and social democratic traditions and are picked up by the populist right. That is significant but, in a way, it's not the poorest that tend to support the radical right, it tends to be a section above the poorest. I'm generalizing very broadly here.

I'm not an economist, so speaking as a political scientist I think that income inequality is one of the factors that will help the radical right but is not the single driver of it. People might, for example, become politicized about an issue such as immigration if they are feeling very economically left behind or unequal. I am always a bit cautious about saying that income inequality is the single magic bullet that creates the success of the hard right.

## Nationalism & Global Cooperation

**JS: Do you think that European nationalism could be an impediment to restoring global cooperation after the Ukraine crisis?**

**Taggart:** The post-Ukrainian situation will be very unpredictable. We can't expect to go back to the way it was before. What role the nationalist forces will play in that situation is so difficult to interpret. We don't know how successful they will be or what the new economic order will be. It depends how the war ends but if there is validation of Ukraine, if they win the war and become part of the EU and so on, the nationalist radical right will have difficulty in opposing that. Having said that, the nationalist right is not so concerned with international politics compared to issues close at home. But I don't think we can read the future from the past and assume that we are going back to what we had before.

**JS: You were referring to anti-EU sentiment in political leaders but how is this European nationalism viewed in international institutions such as the United Nations?**

**Taggart:** Of course the opposition that nationalist forces in Europe have towards the EU is easily translatable theoretically to other international institutions such as the WTO and so on. However, I don't see that as a significant part of their appeal to their voters. I don't think it's a salient issue that their voters would focus on. I think that the appeal of these parties is very much about the withdrawal from the international context, it's about domestic, nationalist concerns. As long as the UN or WTO is not seen to kind of intervene in any country directly, it's not an issue. The EU is a convenient scapegoat that is far enough away that they can bash from a national perspective but it's

close enough to also be visible. Whereas I think that the UN and other international organizations are almost invisible to these nationalist forces and it is not part of the appeal that they make to the kind of voters they want to get.

## Some Mitigating Factors on Nationalism

**JS: You mentioned that European nationalism would continue for a while at least, but what would mitigate such nationalism? In the case of the United States, the millennial generation likes globalization and not nationalism. As they grow up, we may see globalization rising again.**

**Taggart:** Many of the voters that these parties are targeting tend to be older, and the parties don't have such strong appeal to the younger generations. In the sense there is a demographic time bomb where their voters will die off, that would limit the long-term appeal of these nationalist forces.

On the other hand, sometimes it's not about cohort effects – the millennial generation moving through with a common position; it may be that there are generational effects when the millennial generation becomes older and perhaps doesn't have the same benefits that the current generation enjoys such as pensions and security, and they will become less happy with globalization. So we have to be careful in assuming that generations maintain their values as they go through the life cycle. Some do, but there are generational effects as they move through the life cycle, but we are yet to see that. Those factors certainly work against the nationalist radical forces at the moment but what will undermine the long-term stability of these anti-establishment nationalist forces?

The two factors I would point to are, firstly we have to look at the success of the edges of the party systems, of the anti-establishment forces, partly as a reflection of what is happening at the center. I think it depends on how the political establishment, the major political parties, deliver to their voters in the long term. At the moment you are seeing a kind of long-term decline of center-left and center-right, but in different ways in different countries. Therefore the success of anti-establishment forces depends on what the establishment does. If the establishment centrist mainstream political forces recapture a strong sense of appeal and perform well and can deliver a more robust economic situation and more stability, then that will rob the nationalist anti-establishment forces of part of their appeal.

The other thing I think is significant is that we have to get used to the fact in Europe that very often we refer to the postwar period in the 20th century as the norm. We had very quiet stable patterns of political conflict, and it may well be that, in terms of European history, that period from 1945 to maybe the end of the century was an unusual period. The more normal situation is great flux, great variation, and great change. It may be that having anti-establishment forces as a normal part of politics is perhaps more normal. We might have to learn to live with the fact that systems of political competition are more changeable than we imagine they are if we assume the norm is the postwar period. That might in fact be an exception rather than the norm.

**JS: Some economists would say that reducing income inequality would help mitigate political nationalism. I agree with your view that income inequality is not the only cause of nationalism. Would fostering local communities help to reduce the appeal of anti-establishment forces?**

**Taggart:** Economic factors matter but they are not the only ones. I've talked about political factors and political alienation and frustration, and you are raising wider social trends about whether we see increased alienation, whether we see more atomized, lonely people.

In terms of local communities, it may well be that for younger generations their sense of community is not based upon space or locality, it is online, it is sharing values or communities online. In the long term, the millennial generation may become more rooted in locality as they choose spaces to live in and that will work against that sense of alienation. That is purely speculative on my part. The future will look different – it won't look like now with the same generations doing the same thing. In 20 or 30 years they will have different centers of community. I hope that is better than now, but we just don't know.

## What Will Happen in US Politics?

**JS: Turning to the US, how do you see the prospects for the American anti-globalization political movement?**

**Taggart:** American politics has had a very long tradition of populism. There is something in American politics that particularly drives this form of politics. You could say that Donald Trump is the first populist president, so it has reached its high point, but it's not new. The American political system has functions that traditionally are based on coalition politics – it has checks and balances and constraints and powers but essentially this creates a very difficult system that only works if there are political coalitions that can drive it forward. By which I mean the parties in America have traditionally been coalitions. And traditionally they had to be coalitions across the parties, and across the presidential wing of politics to the congressional wing. So that system has always worked on the basis that you have coalition politics, much unlike the UK. What has happened in recent years is the growth of polarization. The two parties and the coalitions within them have become more homogenous but less able to reach across to each other and become mutually exclusive.

This polarization is both a cause and an effect of populism. Trump came to the presidency partly as a consequence of polarization, but then once in the presidency he exacerbated that polarization. Growing polarization means the system is unable to function and unable to deliver policy. Trump comes along touting fundamental change and that looks an appealing prospect and people get into office based on exploiting polarization. Once in office, Trump achieved very little and therefore one can say he gets thrown out of government and then in comes Joe Biden re-asserting the traditional form of politics. Biden then has great difficulty governing, as we still have a polarized polity.

Like Trump, it's not unimaginable that after four years it won't look like Biden's achieved very much. Afghanistan, for example. He is

unable to get Congress onside to respond to the economic crisis and so on. So you will get people like Trump or some populist force coming back and telling people to try again. You might get a cycle of anti-establishment/pro-establishment presidencies. I don't think it is inconceivable that Trump or someone like him could regain the presidency, but the political system underneath it has almost become ungovernable, it would seem.

The paradox is that it increases the support for these populist radical forces but it also means once in office they have difficulty in delivering substantive change. Trump did not fundamentally reshape American political institutions – we understand that he reshaped the nature of the Supreme Court in terms of its composition, but he didn't actually change the institution. The American political system has the potential to become a system that lurches between an establishment that fails to deliver and anti-establishment forces that fail to deliver, and voters are likely to act against both those forces if acting rationally. It will be much more unstable and more difficult to deliver any kind of political stability in the future.

On the other hand there could be things (like the overturning of Roe vs Wade) that might regenerate support for Biden, certainly in the mid-term elections, and maybe in the long term the Democrats might benefit from that. It might be another period of what I would call an establishment Democratic presidency. It is very uncertain – change is more likely than stability, sometimes in a populist direction and sometimes not.

**JS: Do you think the US-China “cold war” will affect such political trends?**

**Taggart:** That is a very difficult question. I am cautious about characterizing US-China relations as a new kind of cold war. What is probably more likely is a multipolar world with institutions like the EU as well as China and America. I don't think we are going back to a security-based Cold War like we had with the Soviet Union. But the rising power of China fundamentally changes the game; will that exacerbate the moves towards global conflict or instability within the US? Yes it could do, but on the other hand China could become a powerful enemy for forces like Trump to exploit. Previously he focused on things like steel tariffs and used China as the enemy for the pandemic. So the demonization of China by those forces is possible and has already happened to some extent.

The Cold War was, paradoxically, a period of stable conflict between two forces; I am not a great international relations scholar but I assume there will be more of a multipolar conflict in the world with more instability. That might help nationalist forces, but I don't think it's a foregone conclusion; it depends how the establishment forces of the left and the right respond. If they created more stability out of that, then in a sense it robs the nationalist forces of the ability to use it as a base for their appeal.

**JS**

Written with the cooperation of Joel Challender who is a translator, interpreter, researcher and writer specializing in Japanese disaster preparedness.