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Coming Together or Growing Apart? Western Europe and the United States

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Observers on both sides of the Atlantic believe that the United States and the major countries of Western Europe are growing apart in important ways. The view adopted here is quite the opposite. Instead, the assertion here is that the New World is coming to resemble the Old World, both in regard to the behavior of their fragmented political elites and the resentment-laden attitudes of their mass publics. What was once labeled "American exceptionalism" by prominent analysts was largely a product of the peculiar conditions of the postwar era (1945–1965), conditions that no longer depict current realities.

Keywords: American Exceptionalism, Polarization, Political Trust, Right-Wing Populism

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the American-led war in Iraq, conflicting attitudes toward the state of Israel, competing views over the limits of the welfare state, and a substantial list of other considerations, many analysts have reached the conclusion that the United States and the countries of Western Europe are growing further and further apart.[1] No doubt this "growing apart" perspective has been reinforced lately by the disclosures about US electronic surveillance of the Continent's prominent leaders. It would be hard to imagine anything would be more likely to increase European suspicion than Washington's evidently longstanding policy of monitoring the private communications of European leaders and publics. In short, America is from Mars, Europe is from Venus.

Despite what appears to be a *prima facie* case, we maintain that the United States and the countries of Western Europe are, if anything, drifting toward one another, but at different paces. In this article, we intend to explore this

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change and speculate about its likely consequences. We begin with a statement summarizing the case and then elaborate on it in some detail.

During the 1950s, scholars investigating important distinctions between American and European political life sought to explain why democracy seemed to work so well in the United States while it appeared so fragile on the Continent, especially in such countries as France, Italy, and the German Federal Republic. The case appeared almost self-evident. All three countries had gone through horrendous episodes of brutal despotism, Petainist, Fascist, and Nazi (in ascending order of brutality), in the years leading up to and during World War II (1939–1945). Following the war, the three countries underwent transitions to democratic rule. In 1946, French voters approved—barely—a constitution for a Fourth Republic. Two years later, Italians voted to eliminate the country's monarchy and put in its place a liberal democratic constitution, again by a small margin. In 1949, with the encouragement of the Anglo-American allies, West German decision-makers promulgated a new Basic Law establishing a federal and democratic regime in the part of the country not under Soviet occupation.

These new, or more accurately, newly restored democracies confronted exceptionally serious problems, both economic and political. In France and Italy, largely centrist governments faced large communist parties whose commitments to the constitutional order were ambiguous at best. And in both cases the governments met strong labor union movements, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL), linked to the communist parties whose leaders looked to the Soviet Union for inspiration and who regarded capitalism as doomed to collapse. On the right, there were also antidemocratic forces with which they had to contend. In France, there was a populist anti-tax movement led by Pierre Poujade that could be counted on to vote against the government of the day. And we should not forget that for much of the 1950s the Gaullist movement was openly contemptuous of the bickering politicians of the Fourth Republic. It was the Algerian crisis of 1958 that led to the end of the latter and the advent of a Fifth Republic under the "heroic" leadership of General de Gaulle himself.

Italian political leaders had to contend with a neo-Fascist party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI) led by individuals, so-called nostalgics, left over from the Mussolini dictatorship. These Fascist veterans pursued a policy of "insertion," making themselves auxiliaries of Christian Democratic–led center-right governments. Younger neo-Fascists were dissatisfied with this accommodation and broke away from the MSI in 1956 to form the New Order (ON) and the National Vanguard (AN) to pursue a Fascist restoration via extraparliamentary means. (Both ON and AN later developed links to Italy's military intelligence agency.)

During the 1950s, West German governments issued decrees outlawing both the new country's communist party as well as a small neo-Nazi

aggregation—one that enjoyed support among ethnic German immigrants from the East forced out by the victorious Soviets. So organized political opposition to the new Bonn democracy was very limited. Moreover, the German "economic miracle" of the 1950s radically reduced the prospects of labor union militancy. The Christian Democrats, under the leadership of Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard, created a "social-market" economy, which combined private enterprise with a substantial welfare state.[2]

Influential analysts of these postwar decades observed a number of considerations that made the persistence of democracy difficult. Either implicitly or explicitly, these analysts compared the newly restored West European democracies to their more successful American counterpart. For example, Giovanni Sartori saw a major difference in the way continental Europeans and Americans learned and then applied what they had learned (e.g., Roman law vs. common law). It was a matter of deductive versus inductive reasoning. The European tradition (see Descartes) was one that stressed the learning of abstract principles and then applying them deductively to practical cases. This propensity toward deduction made Europeans more susceptible to abstract ideologies in their assessments of politics. Americans, Sartori claimed, were more likely to reason by induction, reaching the general from specific cases and examples. America was the home of pragmatism (e.g., William James, John Dewey) after all. As a result Americans were less likely to view politics through a set of ideological predispositions.[3]

Observers reached similar conclusions about what was then the emerging field of inquiry into political culture. French and Italian political cultures were characterized by popular alienation from the political order. In general, Italians and French people tended to be deeply mistrustful of their governments and profoundly alienated from the institutions of the democratic order.[4] Furthermore, these observers noted France and Italy were subdivided into mutually suspicious subcultures erected around social class, religion, and region. (The same might be said about Austria and Belgium.) By contrast, Germans or West Germans were not alienated so much as they were passive. Scarred by the Nazi experience, Germans took little pride in the new Bonn democracy. Furthermore, they tended to see themselves as "subjects"—the passive recipients of government policy—but not as "citizens" able to shape the policy decisions.[5]

Party politics in France, Italy, and the German Federal Republic during the 1950s were typically polarized. It is true that Bonn banned the communist party, but the country's Social Democrats under the leadership of Kurt Schumacher and Eric Ollenhauer persisted in their commitments to Marxism until the party's 1959 Bad Godesberg conference accepted capitalism in its social market framework. Both the French Fourth Republic and Italy's post-Fascist democracy had party systems in which electorally powerful Communist parties expressed very limited commitments to the democratic rules of the

game. (Internally, the parties were organized on the basis of democratic centralism principles.) And given the Cold War atmosphere of the era, the communists were excluded or excluded themselves from governing coalitions. The far right in France, Italy, and West Germany was thoroughly discredited as the result of the World War II catastrophe. The far-right parties that were too explicit in their expression of sympathy for the fascist past (see above) risked being placed outside the law. Nonetheless, parties committed to *Algerie Francais* or to the use of violence to prevent a communist presence in government and a revival of nationalism began to put down roots that would later begin to grow during the 1960s.

With a few exceptions here and there—for example, C. Wright Mills or William Appleton Williams—scholars tended overwhelmingly to paint American political life in the most positive terms. At the level of ideas, such intellectual historians as Louis Hartz stressed the abiding consensus around the principles of Lockean liberalism.[6] Whether they were conscious of it or not, Americans overwhelmingly supported the natural rights of life, liberty, and property as reflected in the country's founding documents. What passed for left and right in the United States were really two sides of the same coin. For historical reasons, America lacked a hereditary aristocracy, a monarchy, a landless peasantry, and an established church—institutions that in Europe had given rise to both a militant socialist movement and a conservative one in reaction to it.

For other historians writing in the 1950s, the American environment itself promoted political consensus. By contrast with Europe, America was a land of abundance where socialism "foundered on shoals of roast beef and apple pie."[7] As a consequence, instead of class conflict and an alienated urban working class characteristic of European politics, America was a place of upward social mobility where individuals from blue-collar backgrounds could rise to the heights of economic and social success. The mass media of the era offered examples to depict the possibilities.

Americans' attitudes toward their political system tended to reflect these positive views. Instead of the alienation, mistrust, and passivity that typified political cultures in Western Europe, America had a robust civic culture. Below we report some of the findings of Almond and Verba's seminal volume *The Civic Culture*, a book originally published in 1963 but based on cross-national opinion surveys dating from the late 1950s.[8]

First, by comparison with individuals from the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and Mexico, Americans were far more likely to express pride in their country's governmental and political institutions. Americans were close to being twice as "proud" of their institutions as respondents from the United Kingdom and nearly three times as "proud" as respondents from Mexico. The gap between Americans' pride and that of Germans and Italians was far more dramatic. Americans were also relatively trusting of their institutions and

believed they had the ability to do something if they considered a law or government decision to be unjust. In addition, Americans were more trusting of "most" of their neighbors than their counterparts were. Again the gap was largest between Americans' attitudes and those of Germans and Italians. In terms of political participation, American attitudes, taken together, exhibited a judicious mix of active participants and passive subjects.[9] Almond and Verba reasoned that a culture composed largely of active citizens would become overheated and too conflict-ridden to permit the political system to function effectively. Taken together, these clusters of attitudes permitted the writers to characterize the United States as having a civic culture, one that fit with the attributes of a healthy, viable democracy.

These and other findings led Almond and Verba to describe the American political culture as follows:

> The pattern of political culture found in the United States approximates what we have called the civic culture. There are several significant components in this cultural pattern. . .. respondents in the United States, compared with those in the other four nations, are very frequently exposed to politics. They report political discussion and involvement in political affairs, a sense of obligation to take an active part in the community, and a sense of competence to influence the government.. . . Furthermore, . . . they have a high degree of pride in the political system. And their attachment to the political system includes both generalized system affect as well as satisfaction with specific governmental performance.[10]

American party politics during this era were also depicted favorably in comparison with their continental counterparts. These positive judgments were rendered at both the individual and systemic levels. Whatever else their failings, the Republicans and Democrats were typically depicted as loosely organized and decentralized aggregations seeking the support of voters across the political spectrum.[11] Unlike Western Europe's mass parties, the Republicans and Democrats sought the electoral support from all sectors of society. As a result, they were driven toward the center where they competed for the support of moderate voters. As a consequence and after elections, at least, both parties' leaders stressed the benefits of compromise.

While the United States had a two-party system in which the major contestants competed for the center, the French, German, and Italian systems were characterized by multi-partyism. And certainly in the French and Italian cases, the parties did not compete for the same segment of the electoral center. Parties of the left and right competed with those parties closest to them on the ideological spectrum.[12] Communists, for example, competed with socialists for the support for the same working-class segment of the electorate. Party competition tended to reinforce political divisions rather than serve to moderate them. This circumstance led the political scientist Arend Lijphart to distinguish political party systems on the basis of their centripetal versus centrifugal

drives.[13] The American system was "centripetal" in the sense that its dynamic was toward the center, toward consensus and moderation, while the continental European system was "centrifugal" in that it tended to pull apart and give rise to extremism.

Some observers explained these differences based largely on the ways the vote was counted.[14] With the "political formula" employed in the United States, winning and losing was based on a simple plurality of votes cast. The proportional representation (PR) system used in much of Western European parliamentary elections assigned seats to parties on the basis of the percentage of the vote they received in multi-member constituencies. The American system, because it tended to manufacture simple majorities, supported two-partyism, while the European PR alternative promoted or did little to retard multi-partyism.

The trouble with this explanation is that it did not fit the French and German cases. Italy continued to use PR throughout the 1950s, but neither France nor Germany did. In the latter case, decision-makers took into consideration the Weimar experience, one where PR was used to elect members of the Reichstag—with calamitous results. To avoid a repeat of the Weimar outcome, policy-makers in Bonn imposed a five percent minimum requirement before a party could achieve representation in the Bundestag. They also assigned voters two ways of making their preferences known, one of which required voters in single-member districts to select deputies based on the plurality formula. Half the members of the Bonn parliament were chosen on this basis, the other half through the use of a PR formula.

For most of the French Fourth Republic (1946–1958), parliamentary deputies were selected on the basis of a single-member district, the *arrondissement*, with a runoff in the case no candidate received a majority at the first balloting. Despite this formula, parliaments during the Fourth Republic continued to exhibit extreme multi-partyism.

These observations suggest that the way the votes were counted in these three countries was not decisive in explaining their political party systems. The Scandinavian countries used PR throughout the 1950s and had multiparty systems, but without the serious social and political problems France, Germany, and Italy confronted.

The largely American social scientists and historians who painted this picture of American democracy side-by-side with its West European counterparts managed to overlook serious strains in US life during the 1950s. Not only did the country go through an episode of anti-communist hysteria linked to the term "McCarthyism," but it also, and more importantly, suffered from racial segregation and the stirrings of the racial integration movement that would come alive in the succeeding decade. Nor did these same social scientists and consensus historians anticipate the turmoil of the 1960s and the Watergate scandal in the 1970s. Nor did they imagine the end of the Cold War.

WHAT'S NEW?

First, we should point out that none of the three major continental West European democracies has suffered an interruption in its democratic system since the late 1950s. And following Franco's death, Spain went through a surprisingly smooth transition to democratic rule. France, though, might be treated as an exception because of its brief interlude from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic in the period 1958–1959 when General de Gaulle, acting with parliamentary approval, ruled by decree for six months in an effort to resolve the Algerian crisis. In fact, following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992, the countries of Eastern Europe tended to model their new states along West European democratic lines. And under the auspices of the European Union, the West European democracies invested millions of euros in promoting democratic developments in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and other parts of the world where the blessings of liberty were largely unknown.

Like its continental counterparts, the American democracy persisted uninterrupted during the trouble-plagued decades following the end of the Eisenhower administration. Assassinations, foreign wars, domestic turmoil, and political scandals occurred without a serious challenge to its democratic order. From time to time, political figures, largely from Texas and the other states of the Old Confederacy, made references to the benefits of secession, but their remarks were typically greeted by chuckles elsewhere in the country.

Despite its durability, the ensuing decades hardly left American democracy unscathed. Given the various crises, how could it be otherwise?

"Political trust" is one of the key elements of a country's political culture (see above). In its absence, or in its substantial absence, democratic governments face an array of problems in making and implementing policy decisions. For example, this is how Joseph La Palombara depicted the mistrustful Italian citizen during the 1950s:

> He is isolated into mutually antagonistic sub-groups of the society, basically disinclined to engage in the pragmatic bargaining—the give and take—of a pluralistic democratic polity and at times completely alienated from the political system. His attitudes and behavior therefore do not generally contribute to the maintenance and growth of a stable democracy.[15]

In this context, what should we make of the American situation? At roughly the same time La Palombara was making his observation about Italian political life, surveys suggested that not only did Americans take pride in their country's political institutions, they also expressed a high level of trust in Washington's intent to "do the right thing" in making public policy decisions. According to survey evidence from 1958, 73 percent of a national sample of Americans expressed such trust. By October 2013, the same question produced

a result of 19 percent.[16] Nor was this low figure a statistical anomaly. Rather, it reflected a long-term trend, one traceable over decades. To be sure, there were upward spikes from time to time, but the overall trajectory was one of decline.[17] Although the decline was steeper in some years than in others, there was a general loss of trust nonetheless. And in comparative terms, the growing American pattern of mistrust has come to resemble those exhibited by French and German publics. This popular mistrust hardly occurred overnight. As the contributors to Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam's volume *Disaffected Democracies* note, these trends were clearly noticeable by the 1990s and earlier.[18]

In addition to the decline in trust, America seems to be losing what Robert Putnam and others refer to as "social capital."[19] The latter constitutes the basis of a civil society, a social environment in which large numbers of the people have sufficient trust in one another to participate in an extensive network of socially concerned groups and organizations. Putnam captures this outlook: "People who trust others are all-around good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy. Conversely, the civically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants and feel less constrained to be honest themselves."[20] A classic case, one that Putnam and his collaborators mention in another volume, is that of southern Italy. The Italian South (or the *Mezzogiorno*) is a place where interpersonal and political mistrust is so rife that it stifles the kind of civil society many believe is a prerequisite for democratic government.

The United States may not have become the *Mezzogiorno*, but Putnam does report that between 1973–1974 and 1993–1994 Americans showed a dramatic decline in their levels of community and political participation. Putnam notes decreases ranging from just over one third fewer people reporting that they attend political events or public meetings, including meetings on local issues such as education, to around 40 percent fewer people reporting being an officer or committee member of a local organization or club.[21] They were increasingly, to use Putnam's term, "bowling alone."

Furthermore, to the extent Americans pay attention to political events, many believe they are becoming polarized. During the 1950s, observers of the American political "scene" stressed the role of compromise in making the system work. Writing in the 1950s, Congressman T. V. Smith equated the ability to compromise with the "democratic way of life."[22] Though some dispute it (e.g., Morris Fiorina), many observers have come to the conclusion that Americans are much less likely to view compromise in a favorable light, much less equate it with the democratic way of life. This generalization applies at both the elite level of Washington policy-makers and among members of the public.

Within the Washington Beltway, congressmen, particularly those on the Republican right, have now come to perceive themselves as engaged in a virtual war with their colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Advocates of

an ideology approximating 19th-century social Darwinism, they have come to understand politics as a conflict of principle where one side is right and the other is not only wrong, but tainted with evil.[23] "There appears to be a consensus among scholars and political observers that US political elites have grown more polarized in recent decades. Democrats and Republicans in Congress more consistently oppose each other on legislation, the party platforms are more ideologically extreme, and issue activists are more committed to one party or the other."[24] The fact that the current American President, Barack Obama, is the first African American elected to that office has likely exacerbated this ideology-driven outlook.

Washington, however, is not a "house without windows," a set of institutions cut off from the public at large. Rather, Beltway attitudes appear to reflect those expressed by the American electorate in general. As Abramowitz and Saunders conclude:

> Evidence from the American National Election Studies indicates that partisan polarization has increased considerably over the past several decades. . .. contrary to the claim that partisan polarization has increased only slightly, there has actually been a dramatic increase in the correlation between party identification and ideological identification since 1972 and especially since 1992 . . .. The result of the growing relationship between ideological identification and party identification has been marked increase in ideological polarization between Democratic and Republican identifiers.[25]

Abramowitz and Saunders identify the period of this "substantial increase in polarization" between 1972 and 2004. Even though these findings were evident across categories of those polled, for the period between 1982 and 2004, the polarization was highest among respondents described as interested, knowledgeable, educated, and part of the voting public. Between 2002 and 2004, the percentages of respondents with consistently liberal or conservative stances approached 50 percent among those who were highly knowledgeable and college graduates.[26]

This political polarization is now reflected in the appearance of distinct political subcultures. At an earlier time, social scientists stressed the importance of cross-pressures and overlapping group affiliations in moderating the political outlook of American citizens.[27] Social pluralism was healthy and supportive of democratic values in the United States because individuals tended to join intermediary groups (between primary groups and state institutions), whose other members were from a diversity of economic, social, and political backgrounds. As a result, citizens came to realize that compromise and moderation were necessary for the group to achieve any of its goals.

This picture of American pluralism at work no longer seems to coincide with reality. Instead, we have the increasing division of the country into separate subcultures. This separation manifests itself in a number of ways. For

instance, a Pew Center public opinion survey reports a significant and growing difference between Democrats and Republicans over the matter of human evolution. Even when controlled for religious affiliation, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to deny natural selection and biological evolution.[28] The media offer other compelling examples. In earlier decades, most citizens derived their political news from roughly the same outlets. This fact was emphasized and compared to the situation in Western Europe. In France and Italy, newspapers and other forms of mass communication conveyed different political messages or applied a different spin to the same events. In France and Italy, for instance, the communist, socialist, and Christian democratic parties published their own newspapers and weekly news magazines. Their messages were intended to convey the parties' views to relatively separate audiences of members and followers.

Today, this mutually isolative means of communication is far less prevalent on the Continent than it once was. On the other hand, the situation in the United States has changed radically from the 1950s. First, and obviously, there is the Internet, which among other things, permits likeminded people to communicate with one another without the requirement of a common mediator. Websites and blogs with particular political outlooks preach to essentially the same choirs of committed partisans. About the same may be said in regard to the role of the mass media. There are now separate cable television channels attracting distinct audiences of conservatives and liberals. Likewise, talk-radio commentators, predominantly right-wing, attract substantial audiences of likeminded conservative listeners.

The country's electoral map is now divided into "Red" and "Blue" states or, respectively, strongly Republican and strongly Democratic ones. These geographic colorations have the effect of reducing interparty competition, particularly at the level of congressional district balloting.

American party politics have changed in other ways as well, ways that make them bear a closer resemblance to their West European counterparts—past and present. In the past, such scholars as Seymour Lipset sought to explain the absence of a powerful socialist movement in the United States.[29] This continues to be true today. But the situation in West Europe has changed in a significant way in recent times. It now seems unclear whether, or the extent to which, France, Germany, Spain, and the smaller democracies have major socialist movements. Italy, whose communist and socialist parties once were major forces in the country's political life, has undergone a succession of transformations so that their current manifestations bear little resemblance to their predecessors.[30] The French Communist Party (PCF) retains its name but has recently abandoned its hammer-and-sickle symbol and has lost most of its electorate. Likewise, the French Socialists have retained their historical identity and, in fact, currently hold the country's presidency. On the other

hand, the party's leadership shows little interest in further nationalization of businesses and the other elements of a coherent anticapitalist policy. The German Social Democrats long ago abandoned their commitments to Marxist ideas. The German Left, a party whose electoral appeal is strongest in the former East Germany, expresses a continuing commitment to some of these ideas but is at present a minor force in the Bundestag. In short, America no longer seems all that exceptional in regard to the weakness of socialism.

Party politics on the right, in contrast, appears to be thriving on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the Tea Party is the most recent manifestation of the country's long history of right-wing populism.[31] Claiming to represent the "real people" as opposed to economic and political elites, populist movements have attracted substantial support periodically over the course of American history. They have frequently been tinged with xenophobia; oftentimes their supporters have appeared challenged and fearful of recent immigrants and newly risen ethnic groups whose presence the populists have found threatening to their status and claims to primacy. Characteristically populist movements have been deeply suspicious of America's international involvements and commitments out of fear these would compromise the country's sovereignty—frequently permitting its takeover by foreign elements.

The Tea Party is the most recent manifestation in this long trail of right-wing populist movements. Seeking to model itself after the insurrectionary episode provided by the Boston Tea Party, the movement appeared following the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Its ostensible purpose was to oppose the growing tyranny represented by the federal government with its growing budget deficits. Within a short time, however, the movement turned its attention to the alleged threat to individual liberty posed by the Obama administration's health care reform proposals. Online and at various public rallies, Tea Party figures conveyed, often in apocalyptic terms, that if enacted into law, the country would propel itself into an irreversible downward spiral. Tea Party activists could also be found among the ranks of the "birthers," believing that President Obama had been born in Kenya or Indonesia and was therefore ineligible to serve as the country's chief executive.[32]

Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and other scholars working in the field of "contentious politics" and social movement activity often refer to movement "entrepreneurs" as indispensable in galvanizing social and political discontents. These entrepreneurs then play crucial roles in sustaining the movement's momentum in its challenge to the status quo.[33]

In the case of the Tea Party, we are dealing with individuals whose sponsors are often literally entrepreneurs. Although it presents itself as a grass-roots movement, the reality is that the party has been sponsored by a variety of conservative political action committees (e.g., Freedom Works, Americans for Prosperity, Heritage Action), headed by prominent former congressmen along

with longtime Washington political consultants. In turn, they receive financial support from wealthy businessmen. At present, a struggle is underway within the Republican Party between Tea Party activists and the GOP's establishment, leaders committed to a more middle-of-the-road course in which the compromise of ideological principles is not regarded as a sin or a compromise with the Devil.

Right-wing party politics in Western Europe is also undergoing a substantial transformation. The Continent now abounds with "populist" or "people's" parties, who present themselves to voters as opponents of multiculturalism and further immigration to Western Europe from the Third World—the Muslim parts of it especially. Rather like the Tea Party in the United States, these "people's" parties tend toward what one analyst describes as "welfare state chauvinism."[34] That is, their voters tend to support welfare state benefits for people like themselves but not for the "undeserving," i.e., newcomers and people at the margins of society. Then there is the matter of globalization.

Far-right parties on both sides of the Atlantic are strong opponents of developments and policies that appear to support the globalization of the economy and, more broadly, society itself. Whether or not they are personally globalization "losers" whose jobs have been lost or negatively affected by recent economic trends or simply resentful by what seem to be too many compromises with national sovereignty, far-right leaders and followers oppose those institutions thought to be responsible for the momentum toward globalization. The European Union, United Nations, and multinational corporations appear to arouse the most ire.

New York Times correspondent Andrew Higgins summarizes the situation:

> In some ways, this is Europe's Tea Party moment—a grass-roots insurgency fired by resentment against a political class that many Europeans see as out of touch. The main difference, however, is that Europe's populists want to strengthen, not shrink, government and see the welfare state as an integral part of their national identities.[35]

We should emphasize that leaders of the new right parties have typically gone out of their way to distance themselves from historical fascism. (This is less true in Eastern Europe and with Greece's New Dawn party, in particular.) In the case of France, the National Front's (FN) leader, Marine LePen, has distanced herself from the anti-Semitism and racism that characterized the FN under her father's longtime leadership. And in Italy, neither the Northern League nor the National Alliance (now the Future and Freedom Party) regard with nostalgia the Mussolini era. Under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini, virtually all traces of his party's Fascist past have been eliminated from its presentation of self. In other words, we have entered the era of post-fascism.[36]

Germany, given its postwar division into East and West, seems to be unusual. None of the visible far-right parties has gained enough electoral support to make its way into the Bundestag. During the 1980s, the Republikaner Party showed some promise, but after a major leadership split its prospects faded. The National Democratic Party (NPD) has enjoyed some electoral success at state-level elections but has not had enough support to win seats in the Bundestag. Furthermore, the NPD's post-fascism appears to be a thin veneer covering some neo-Nazi sympathies.

The Austrian Freedom Party, though, offers another tale. Under the leadership of its late and charismatic leader, Jorg Haider, the party abandoned its nostalgia for the Nazi era and became an electorally successful right-wing populist party: nationalist, wary of immigrants from the East, and skeptical about the benefits of further European integration.[37]

Right-wing populism on both sides of the Atlantic has become a propulsive force whose spokespersons have managed to aggregate widespread resentments against a number of targets. Opposition to immigration from countries in the Southern Hemisphere seems one of the most important sources of pique. Muslims represent disproportionate targets for abuse. Another basis for resentment is posed by those institutions representing transnational and international forces. Historically, the right in Europe has been associated with statism. Fascists aspired to achieve a "strong state" capable of achieving great deeds. Right-wing populism in the United States, with its links to the rebellious South, has long been associated with hostility to the power of Washington policy-makers. This difference is undeniable, but we should also remember that Western Europe's far-right populists currently represent a heterogeneous collection of views on the role of the state.[38]

In some respects, though, these conflicting outlooks seem to be changing. Right-wing populists active in both Europe and America express deep suspicions of the United Nations, the European Union, and multinational corporations—globalization, in other words. And for the Europeans, subnational regionalism (e.g., the Northern League, Vlaams Belang) has become a significant political force. In addition, for right-wing populist movements active on both continents, the open expression of explicitly racist and anti-Semitic ideas has been largely reduced to the margins of acceptable discourse.

In short, far-right activity in the United States and Western Europe seem to be heading in a similar direction. This similarity of direction is not completely the consequence of exposure to similar stimuli, e.g., Third World immigration. Wealthy supporters of free-market economics have created a network of think tanks in both the US and Europe (Latin America as well) to promote their ideas. Given their Internet admirers, Frederick Hayek et al. are now able to share their views on a virtually instantaneous basis.[39] In fact, networking among right-wing groups appears to be a growing phenomenon throughout the West more generally.[40]

WHY?

At this point, it makes sense to restate our general hypothesis. The United States and the countries of Western Europe seem to be converging in an important number of political and economic ways. For the most part, this seems to be the result of the United States having lagged behind the European states because of a set of unusual circumstances that no longer prevail. What were they?

The outcome of World War II produced a set of extraordinary conditions. The United States was one of the two victors (along with the Soviet Union). Its democratic institutions had remained unscathed; in fact, their resiliency had won the admiration of populations and lawmakers throughout Western Europe. In the postwar years, its economy had performed spectacular feats while the war-devastated countries of Europe were the recipients of Marshall Plan aid. In the realm of foreign affairs, the United States was the unquestioned leader of the Western alliance in the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union and its East Bloc allies. It was likely this abnormal circumstance that produced the civic culture of the Eisenhower years. The major countries on the Continent struggled to re-establish democracy and to promote economic recovery. These unusual circumstances, with the United States as an outlier, did not last.

After their economic recoveries and subsequent expansions, the countries of Western Europe came closer to resembling American performance standards. For instance, in an earlier era the United States was renowned for its intergenerational social mobility, the frequency with which the sons and daughters of working-class parents could ascend to middle-class status. The evidence now suggests this is no longer the case. In fact, OECD data suggest the United States now trails its Western European counterparts in the rate of intergenerational mobility.[41] To quote the *Economist*, "Back in its Horatio Alger days, America was more fluid than Europe. Now it is not. Using one-generation measures of social mobility—how much a father's relative income influences that of his adult son—America does half as well as Nordic countries, and about the same as Britain and Italy, Europe's least-mobile places."[42]

About the same may be said about income inequality. Economist Joseph Stiglitz, among others, calls attention to growing inequality of income in the United States, stressing the degree to which income, and wealth more generally, has been accumulated at the top, while those in the middle and at the bottom have seen wealth and income shrink in both relative and absolute terms. Relying on UN data and using the Gini coefficient to measure the extent of income inequality, Stiglitz reports that the level of such inequality in the United States now exceeds that of any country within the European Union.[43] He goes on to suggest a number of ways this highly skewed distribution of wealth portends the long-term weakening of democratic beliefs and institutions. Or, to put it more explicitly,

> The fading ideals of American citizenship, civic virtue, social commitment, and civic nationalism are being actively sought once again in the old continent. These are values that are supposedly better preserved and rooted in national West European political cultures than in an American society wracked by socio-economic divisions, federal break-up, and extraordinary ethnic and racial fragmentation and conflict.[44]

Another force pushing the United States and Western Europe in the same direction is what Sidney Tarrow describes as the new "transnational activism." To the extent that countries on both sides of the Atlantic confront similar problems (e.g., environmental concerns, peace protests, strains on the welfare state), they have given rise to what Tarrow describes as "rooted cosmopolitans" and what the writer/journalist Tom Wolfe describes as the "Mid-Atlantic Man."[45] By these labels the writers have in mind networks of activists who interact with one another either face-to-face or via social media to develop a common response to issues facing the Western world. There is also the problem of Islamic militancy in its Salafist/Jihadist manifestation that draws American and European counterterrorism officers and academics into closer forms of cooperation.

What, then, of the claim that the United States and the countries of Western Europe are growing apart? The claim is the most persuasive in the realm of foreign and defense policy. The American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 offers a strong example of divergence with Western European populations and some governments (Britain excepted) expressing strong opposition to the adventure. About the same might be said in regard to the conduct of the war on terrorism more generally (e.g., Guantanamo Bay, the use of waterboarding by CIA agents at "black sites"). There is another side to this story, however. Specifically, a large swatch of the American public also objected to the Iraq invasion and subsequently to the use of torture and other violations of international treaty obligations. There was a substantial number of mass protests before and during the Iraq War. And various American-based "rooted cosmopolitans" played major roles in condemning the conflict.

The evidence is more compelling when we focus on domestic political and economic patterns over the last half-century. What was once a strong case of American exceptionalism from the woes of the Old World has become progressively weaker as the years have passed: the New World has come to resemble the old one in important ways.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Kopstein and Sven Steinmo (Eds.), *Growing Apart: Europe and America in the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–23; for an interpretation similar to the one we suggest, see Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, "Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 529–542.

2. For summaries of these developments, see Tony Judt, *Postwar* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 41–164; Walter Laqueur, *Europe in Our Time* (New York: Viking, 1992), 3–115.

3. See, especially, Giovanni Sartori, "European Political Parties: The Case of Polarized Pluralism," in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, eds., *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 137–176; see also Philip Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 206–261.

4. See especially Hadley Cantril, *The Politics of Despair* (New York: Collier Books, 1958), 45–92; and Joseph La Palombara, "Italy: Fragmentation, Isolation, Alienation," in Sydney Verba and Lucien Pye, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 282–329.

5. Sidney Verba, "Germany: The Remaking of Political Culture," in Pye and Weiner, eds., 130–170.

6. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1955).

7. David Potter, *People of Plenty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), quoting Werner Sombart.

8. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963).

9. Ibid., 64, 142, 213.

10. Almond and Verba, 313–314.

11. See, for example, V. O. Key, *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1958), 218–249 especially.

12. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

13. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

14. Douglas Rae, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of majoritarian and consensus government in twenty-one countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 150–168.

15. La Palombara, 282.

16. Pew Research, Center for the People and the Press, "Public Trust in Government: 1958–2013" (October 18, 2013), www.people-press.org/2013/10/18/trust-in-government-interactive/. Another Pew Center poll reported at the beginning of 2014 showed even lower levels of Americans' trust in the federal government; see Charles Babington and Jennifer Agiesta, "Poll: Americans Have Little Faith in Government," *Associated Press* (January 2, 2014), http://bigstory.ap.org/article/poll-americans-have-little-faith-government.

17. For a comparative perspective, see Todd Donovan, David Denemark, and Shawn Bowler, "Trust in Government: The United States in Comparative Perspective," n.d., http://faculty.wwu.edu/donovat/trust.pdf. For an account of social and political trust in the 1990s, see Pippa Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

18. Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); see especially 31–51, 52–73.

19. See especially Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 15–28.

20. Putnam, 137.

21. Ibid, 45.

22. T. V. Smith, *The Democratic Way of Life* (New York: Mentor Books, first printing 1951).

23. See, for example, Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than You Think: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); and Sarah Binder, *Stalemate* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 57–83.

24. Shawn Treier and D. Sunshine Hillygus, "The Nature of Political Ideology in the Contemporary Electorate," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2009): 679.

25. Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, "Is Polarization a Myth," *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 547.

26. Ibid., see also Table 1, "Ideological Polarization in the American Electorate by Decade," 544.

27. William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 21–38.

28. Pew Research Center, "Public's Views on Human Evolution" (December 2013), http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/30/publics-views-on-human-evolution/.

29. Seymour Lipset, *American Exceptionalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 77–109.

30. See, for example, Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 249–324.

31. See especially Chip Berlet and Mathew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 1–18.

32. See, for example, Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

33. See especially Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 34–41; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9–47.

34. Herbert Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 10–11.

35. Andrew Higgins, "Right-Wing Surge in Europe Has the Establishment Rattled," *The New York Times* (November 9, 2013), p. A10.

36. For a discussion, see Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), 1–35.

37. Piero Ignazi, *L'Estrema Destra in Europa* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 127–142.

38. "Europe's Populist Insurgents," *The Economist* (January 4–10, 2014), 16–18.

39. Steven Teles and Daniel Kenney, "Spreading the Word," in Kopstein and Steinmo, eds., 136–169.

40. Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

41. "A Family Affair: Intergenerational Social Mobility across OECD Countries," *Economic Policy Reforms: Going for Growth* (OECD, 2010), 181–198.

42. "Social Mobility in America: Repairing the Rungs on the Ladder," *The Economist* (February 9, 2013), www.economist.com/leaders/21571417/print.

43. Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 23–24; for a discussion of the relationship between political polarization and income inequality, see Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

44. Adrian Favell, "A Politics That Is Shared, Bounded, and Rooted? Rediscovering Civic Political Culture in Western Europe," *Theory and Society* 27 (1998): 221.

45. See Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35–56.