

THE NEW NATIONALISM

The nation-state is so dominant today that it seems natural. But no political arrangements are natural, and any concept with a hyphen has a fault line running through it by definition. States are sovereign political structures. Nations are unified social groups. What does each owe the other?

The claims of the state are obvious: it has a host of practical responsibilities and legions of technocrats working to satisfy them. But the claims of the nation are less clear, and they come with ugly echoes. The advocacy of those claims—nationalism—drove some of the greatest crimes in history. And so the concept became taboo in polite society, in hopes that it might become taboo in practice, as well. Yet now it has come back with a vengeance. Here, a dazzling collection of writers explain what's happening and why.

Jill Lepore opens with a bravura survey of two and a half centuries of American national consciousness. Today's challenge, she argues, is not to resist nationalism but to reappropriate it.

Kwame Anthony Appiah tackles the supposed incompatibility of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, which he claims is based on a misunderstanding, since cosmopolitans believe in the possibility of multiple nested identities.

Andreas Wimmer notes that distinguishing good, civic nationalism from bad, ethnic nationalism is largely unhelpful, since the two share so many assumptions. For him as well, the contemporary battle is not to fight nationalism but to promote inclusive versions of it.

Jan-Werner Müller argues that the true challenge comes not from nationalism per se but from a particular populist variant. The best response is to avoid getting distracted and focus on delivering practical results.

Robert Sapolsky offers a depressing take on nationalism's cognitive enablers. When it comes to group belonging, humans don't seem too far from chimpanzees: people are comfortable with the familiar and bristle at the unfamiliar. Taming our aggressive tendencies requires swimming upstream.

Yael Tamir suggests that the main problem today is a clash between nationalism and neoliberal globalism. Nationalists want states to intervene in the market to defend their citizens; their opponents favor freer trade and freer movement of people. Jack Snyder concurs, suggesting that the proper response is to allow governments greater freedom to manage capitalism. And Lars-Erik Cederman shows that rising ethnic nationalism has usually been followed by violent upheavals, so keeping things peaceful down the road will be difficult.

Nationalism's largely unpredicted resurgence is sobering. But these essays left me hopeful, because they show a way out. Underneath all the theory and history and science, everything boils down to politics. Leaders and governments need to produce real solutions to real problems. If they don't, their disaffected publics will look for answers elsewhere. It's as simple as that.

—Gideon Rose, *Editor*

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