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'The populist radical right is still going strong'

While their policies have become 'common sense', far-right parties have never been more popular, argues Cas Mudde

Read this interview in German.

Populist politicians like US President Trump and Britain's Prime Minister Johnson have been facing huge problems recently. Is populism in decline?

With Boris Johnson and Donald Trump fighting for political survival and parties like the Austrian Freedom Party and Italian League recently out of power, pundits have started to declare the end of populism...again. But this is far too early or, perhaps better, far too imprecise. While left-wing populism is indeed in sharp decline, from Southern Europe to South America, right-wing populism is alive and kicking hard.

What are examples for the persistence of right-wing populism?

It might be better to speak of the age of the far right rather than populism. Far-right parties have never been more popular than today and far-right policies have become adopted as "common sense" by many mainstream parties. And while some far-right parties and politicians are struggling, others are thriving. Just a few months ago the world's largest democracy returned a massive victory for Narendra Modi's BJP, incidentally the biggest political party in the world, while in Poland Law and Justice were cruising towards an even larger election victory. Even the dethroned League of Matteo Salvini remains, by far, the most popular party in Italy.

Parties like the Austrian Christian Democrats are trying to move voters from right-wing populist parties to the centre again. Is this a good way of battling populism?

It is true, many mainstream right-wing parties in (Western) Europe are signaling a "return to the middle", such as the Austrian and Dutch Christian Democrats. But that "political centre" reflects the populist radical right much more than it did even one decade ago. Moreover, within the European Parliament, far-right parties are still represented in all right-wing political groups, while far-right positions on immigration and Islam are propagated by parties in almost all groups, including the Socialists & Democrats. In short, what we are witnessing is at best an end of left-wing populism. The populist radical right is still going strong.

This interview was conducted by Claudia Detsch.



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