

Index of authoritarian populism: main findings

What is authoritarian populism?

Demand for authoritarian populism is at an all-time high in Europe. It constitutes the biggest change in the European political landscape since the fall of communism and the breakthrough of democracy.

Authoritarian populism is used in this report as a collective term for the parties that challenge the *European consensus* that has dominated European politics since the end of the Second World War. While populism and authoritarianism are different things, there is considerable overlap between the two categories: almost all successful populist parties are authoritarian and almost all successful authoritarian parties are populist.

The authoritarian populism category contains parties that vary greatly from each other. It includes parties with roots in both Nazism and liberalism, in Marxism-Leninism as well as in peace movements, nationalistic or socialist ideologies. Some of these parties are better described as totalitarian and the index therefore distinguishes between totalitarian and authoritarian parties.

However, the parties in the authoritarian populism category have significant overlap in their voter base and many similarities:

- (1) the self-image that they represent the *people* in an irreconcilable conflict with a corrupt *elite*;
- (2) a lack of patience with the rule of law;
- (3) a demand for direct democracy, eager proponents of referendums and of removing any impediments to political decision-making by democratic majorities;
- (4) the pursuit of a more powerful state through police and military on the right and nationalisation of banks and big corporations on the left;
- (5) highly critical of the EU, immigration, globalisation, free trade and NATO;
- (6) the use of revolutionary language and promises of dramatic change.

What is the Index of Authoritarian Populism?

The Authoritarian Populist Index (TAP) includes both right- and left-wing populist parties and covers all national elections in 33 European countries, from 1980 to 2016. The Index shows an alarming development, with authoritarian and illiberal parties and ideas steadily gaining influence across the continent.

What is its aim?

The TAP Index aims to shed light on whether populism poses a long-term threat to European liberal democracies. The report seeks to avoid three common shortcomings of research on European populist trends:

- (1) examining populism in a national, not European, context;
- (2) overwhelmingly focusing on right-wing populism and fail to deliver an accurate analysis of the phenomenon that considers both sides of the spectrum and the threat of left-wing populism;
- (3) conflating anti-democratic and anti-liberal parties while it is actually the illiberal, authoritarian strain in many populist parties that threatens the values and principles of European democracy, not the populism in itself.

How can authoritarian populism be combatted?

There are significantly more studies on the rise and causes of populism than on its demise, so counter-strategies to populism are lacking. One strategy is isolation, by which populist parties receive different treatment than other parties: they are delegitimised. A second strategy is for established parties to respond to the questions raised and answered by populist parties. Supporters of this strategy believe that the rise of populism is due to a lack of competition and as long as they are the only ones responding to public concerns surrounding the EU, immigration and globalisation, these parties will continue to grow.

Shift the focus to the ideas, not the parties. It is evident that populist parties are not going away, so it is more important and effective to fight authoritarian ideas.

Fight the authoritarian view of democracy and protect the liberal one. Populist parties are not anti-democratic and their rise does not signify discontent with democracy as an ideal. It is rather symptomatic of a lack of patience with the constitutional state. Liberals should respond by pushing for more, not fewer, checks on majority rule. Division of powers and protection of minorities must be held as equally essential to liberal democracy as the majority principle. Developments such as those in Hungary and Poland cannot be met with passivity.

Admit that politics cannot solve all problems in society. Populists gain support on promising jobs, homes, welfare, security and growth. When they fail to meet these promises, they blame immigrants, globalisation and the EU.

Methodology

The Index used electoral data from 1980 until today. Many of today's populist parties emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. All European countries with consolidated democratic systems – countries considered “free” by Freedom House – are included: EU member states, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Serbia and Montenegro.

The study includes results for all parties in all general national elections. European parliamentary elections, regional or local elections are not included.

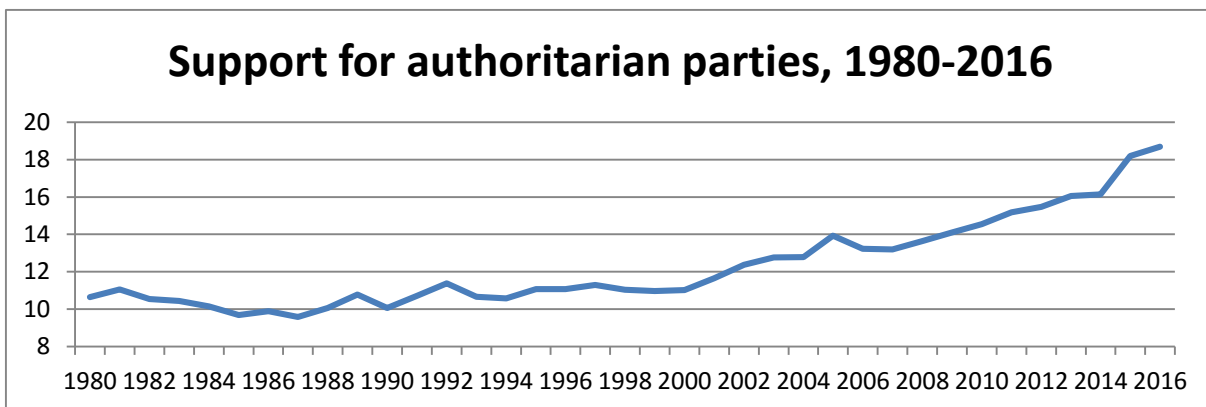
The aim was for the categorisation to mirror the ideology of the parties in question. The right-wing or left-wing classification is primarily dependent on the parties' own classification. The division of authoritarian and totalitarian depends on the parties' view on democracy. Only explicitly anti-democratic parties have been classified as anti-democratic. If a party contains Nazism, fascism, communism, Trotskyism, Maoism etc. it is a totalitarian party.

There are of course authoritarian strains in established parties, so the prominence of authoritarian populism, not its existence, was the defining factor for this study.

To measure demand for authoritarian populism, election results have been used. All parties that have won a minimum of 0.1 per cent in an election in any of the 33 countries since 1980 have been included. To measure influence, the total amount of mandates and participation in a government have been used.

Results

At the beginning of the 1980s less than ten per cent of Europeans voted for left-wing authoritarian parties. Support for these parties dropped to its lowest point – 3.7 per cent – in 2006. During the last five years, however, support has almost doubled. This increase is mainly driven by the successes of left-wing populist parties in Greece, Italy and Spain, but left-wing radicals have also been successful in countries like Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Romania and Croatia. Anti-immigration views and euroscepticism are the two main issues driving the rise of right-wing authoritarian parties.

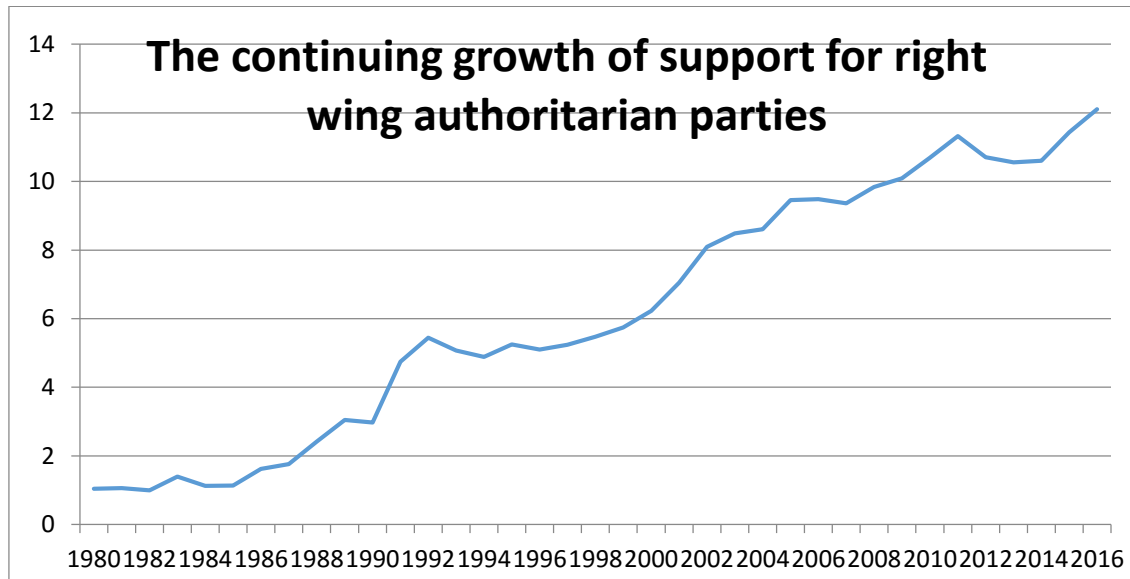


Comment: Mean support for all authoritarian and totalitarian parties 1980-2016.

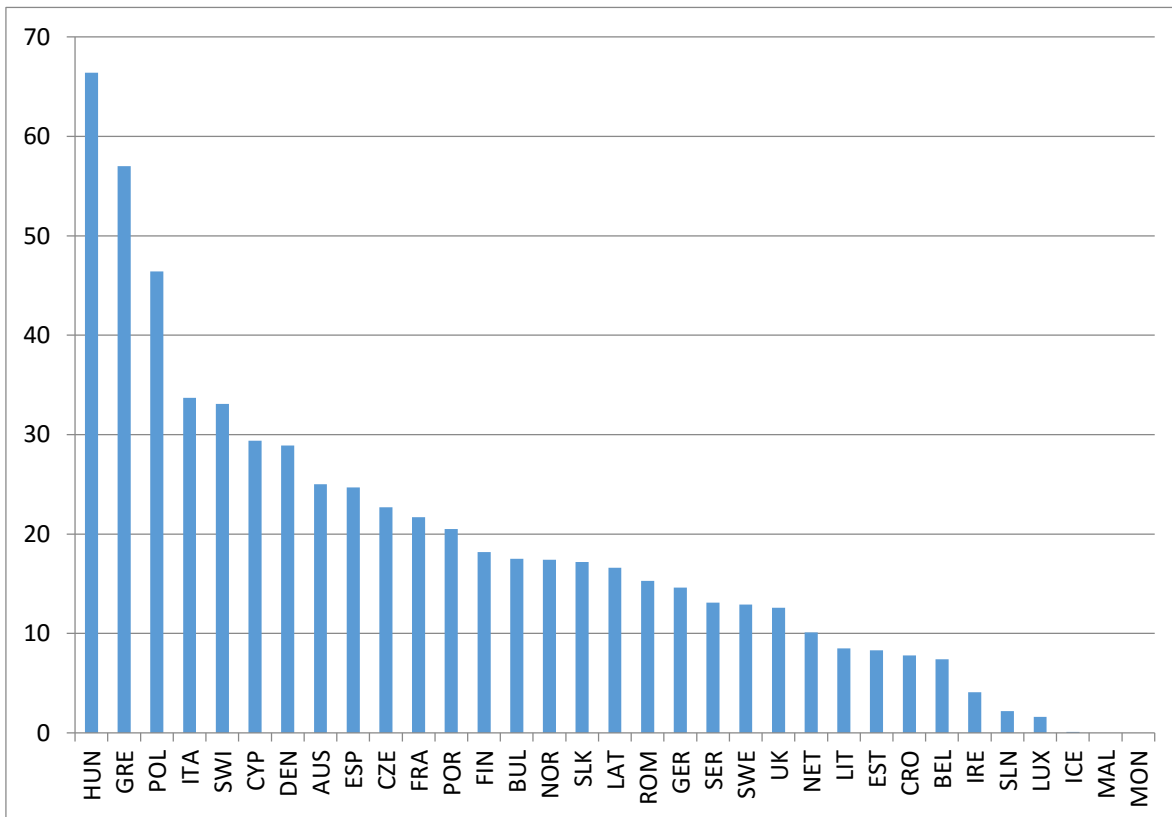
Since the World Wars, European voters have never been as eager to support authoritarian parties as they are now. In the 1980s, 10 per cent of voters voted for authoritarian parties. In 2008, when the financial crisis hit Europe, voter support climbed to 12 per cent. Since then, the increase has only accelerated. If you consider Europe as a whole, authoritarian parties won 17.3 per cent of votes in the elections which took place in 2014 and 2015. This was the single biggest yearly increase in 70 years.

Having been discredited after the experiences of the Second World War, only one European voter in a hundred voted for a fascist or right-wing populist party in the beginning of the 1980s. But since then their support has increased consistently. Today, the average support for right-wing authoritarian parties is roughly 12 per cent. Countries long thought to be

particularly hostile to right-wing authoritarian parties – Sweden, Germany, Great Britain – have witnessed their rise to prominence in the 2010s.



The wave of authoritarianism is a pan-European phenomenon. Only three countries – Malta, Montenegro and Iceland – lack voter support for authoritarian parties. On the other end of the spectrum, Poland, Hungary and Greece’s political landscape is dominated by authoritarian populism.

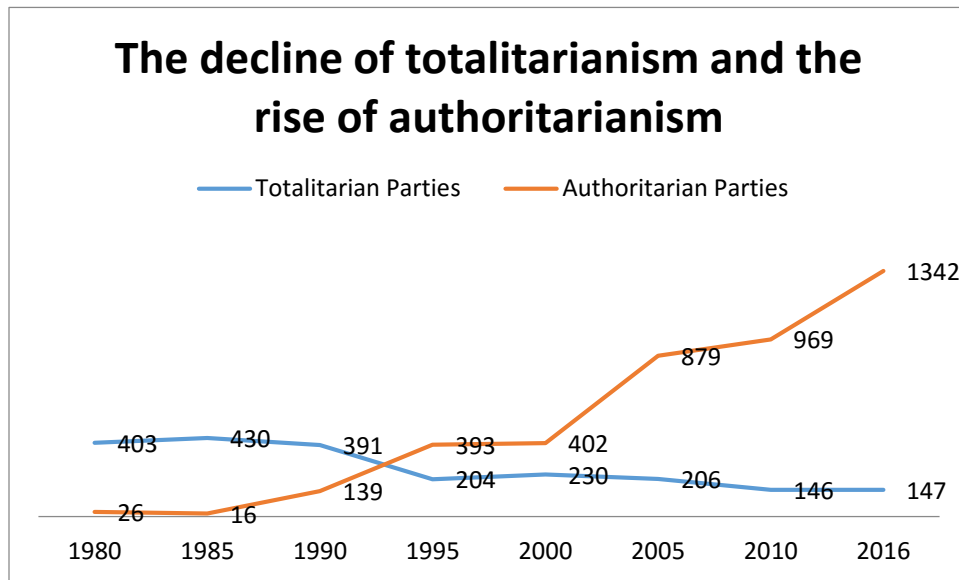


Comment: Mean share of for authoritarian and totalitarian parties in the last election.

Switzerland and Austria are among the countries in which right-wing authoritarian parties established themselves the earliest. The Austrian FPÖ formed a coalition government with the conservative Österreiche Volkspartei after the 1999 election and SVP has been a part of the federal Swiss government for decades. Germany was long considered immune to populism but in the 1990s both the right-wing extreme Republicans and the former communists, who later became Die Linke, managed to attract voters through their scepticism of reunification. In the 2010s the Eurosceptic AfD has reaped success in all of the elections in which they have been represented.

In the 2010s Scandinavia has come to represent the showcase of right-wing populism in Europe: the Progress party and the True Finns party have been in government since 2013 and 2015, respectively; in Denmark, the Danish People's Party act as parliamentary support for a conservative government since 2015 and, after the election in 2014, the Sweden Democrats have played a prominent role in Swedish politics.

In the 33 countries included in this study, there is a total of 7843 mandates in national parliaments. Parties that have been classified as authoritarian hold 1342 of these, while totalitarian parties hold 147. That's the equivalent of 17.1 per cent and 1.9 per cent, respectively. This means that representatives of illiberal and/or antidemocratic today hold almost a fifth of all mandates in European parliaments.



Comment: the total number of MPs in elected parliaments for authoritarian and totalitarian parties.

Populist parties are also beginning to successfully translate voter demand into political influence. At the time of writing, authoritarian parties are in government in nine European countries: Hungary, Poland, Greece, Norway, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Switzerland. In Denmark and Bulgaria they act as support to the ruling parties. In the 1980s, authoritarian parties were rarely part of governments, but in 2016 authoritarian populists are represented in governments of one third of the countries under study.

On average, one fifth of the European electorate now vote for a left- or right-wing populist party. Support for these parties has increased steadily since 2000 in all European countries and 2015 was the most successful year for populist parties, which used the refugee crisis to draw in voters.

This report therefore shows that populism is not a temporary challenge but a permanent threat. There are no signs that support will decrease in the short run. It's not even particularly likely that the rate of increase will go down. The populist parties are here to stay. Whether or not authoritarian ideas will spread too remains an open question.

This is a summary of Andreas Johansson Heinö's "Authoritarian Populist Index" (Timbro, 2016).