



Populism's Surge in the U.S. and Europe: Political Scientist Sheri Berman Explains

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): We are delighted to be able to have a true scholar and an expert who has been studying through her research and scholarship, not only the current nature of EU politics, but also all kinds of European history as well. She is Professor Sheri Berman, who is a political scientist on the faculty of Barnard College of Columbia University. Her scholarship has focussed on European history and EU politics, the development of democracy, populism and fascism, and the history of the left. From 2009 to 2012, Professor Berman served as chair of the Barnard Political Science Department, and then again in the fall of 2021, as well as chair of the Council on European Studies. Her most recent book is entitled *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancient Regime to the Present Day*, published in 2019. And she is also the author of a op ed that was published just yesterday entitled, quote, *How Serious is Europe's Anti-Democratic Threat?* published in Project Syndicate. So it's very obvious that she is in a very excellent position to help us understand these elections and their dynamics that led to them. Professor Berman, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. I know there's a lot of confusion and a lot of uncertainty about this election, and we are thrilled to have you here. Thanks for taking the time.

Sheri Berman (SB): My pleasure.

GG: So let me just, start by asking this. There's obviously a lot of discourse surrounding this election, a lot of attempts to try and understand it, but at the same time, EU parliamentary elections are notoriously sparsely voted for just like a lot of primaries and off year elections are. How much meaning do you think can be derived from these results?

SB: So that's a great question because you're right, up until fairly recently, these elections got many fewer voters to the polls than national elections did. That's begun to change and in fact, anyone who was following the news in Europe would have seen much more attention paid to

these elections than previous ones. Much more attention on the news, much more attention online, much more debate among the parties themselves about the election and its consequences. So that has begun to change. And so these elections are somewhat different than previous ones. And the election participation level was up somewhat. I do not think it is any longer correct to see these elections as distinct from national elections. As you said, it's no longer the case that folks will often vote one way in the European elections and then another way in the national elections. The kind of standard line was that you more often saw protest votes at the European elections because the stakes were lower and, you know, more moderate votes at the national level. That has begun to change. And so I think these election results are not a bad reflection of public opinion in the countries overall.

GG: One of the points you made in the article that you published that I just referenced, and I should say, you know, as I said, it's important not to overstate the tumultuous nature of these results because the kind of status quo party did eventually get a majority, although clearly there are a lot of changes going on, one of the things you emphasised was that at least in Germany and France and the Netherlands, these election results didn't come out of nowhere. They were kind of a part of events leading up to it that you could almost predict. And I just want to read this one paragraph that you wrote, quote, "Right-wing populist forces have indeed enjoyed remarkable success in recent years. In 2022, the Brothers of Italy became the largest party in Italy, elevating its leader, Giorgia Meloni, to the premiership. The Sweden Democrats have become the country's second-largest party, and now have a dominant position in the right-wing government. In France, National Rally's Marine Le Pen achieved her best result yet in the 2022 election". And then you refer to Geert Wilder's victory in the Netherlands and the Finns Party placed second in the Finnish election. Now I want to get to, in a minute, whether there are differences in the dynamics driving this in each country. But before I get to that, can you say whether it is concerns about immigration or concerns about economic difficulties or kind of a general animosity toward EU leadership that is driving the rise of this right wing populism, what do you see as its causes?

SB: So I'll take that last question first. So I think the answer to that question is all of the above. So if you look at the issues that European voters are most concerned about, the ones that you mention very much come out on top in almost all European countries, that is to say, immigration and economic concerns, jobs, economic insecurity, social welfare state, those kinds of things. So people are concerned about both economic and about immigration related issues. But also, you know, sort of on top of that is the other factor that you mentioned, which is a kind of resentment of or a disillusionment with the ability of what you might call mainstream or establishment politicians and parties to deal with these issues. So it's one thing to say, look, voters have a series of concerns and demands, and then it's another thing to say, well, those concerns and demands lead them to vote for, let's say, right wing populist as opposed to traditional social Democrats or Christian Democrats. Clearly they are voting for populists because they believe that the parties that have that establishment history were not doing their job. That is to say, they were not dealing with the economic and immigration related challenges that they see their countries facing.

GG: Just focusing on that point a little bit, in terms of the role immigration is playing, because I do think it's often assumed by American analysts looking at it through a kind of American lens, that the reason right wing populism is increasing is because of concern about, and even hatred for this increase in immigration that we've seen in Europe and that that concern of or anger toward immigration is in turn fuelled by racism, white nationalism and the like. It is interesting because as recently as, you know, 15 years ago, the standard left wing position in the US and then throughout Europe was to be a little bit opposed or even a lot opposed to immigration on the grounds that it would drive down wages for American workers and the like. And it's sort of recent that this fear of immigration has been put through a kind of racism prism. But one of the things you also wrote in this article, I just want to ask you about, you say: "There is not much cross-national correlation between levels of racism or xenophobia and populism's success in a given country. Some countries with low levels of racism and xenophobia, like Sweden, have large populist parties, whereas some countries with higher racism and xenophobia, like Ireland and Portugal do not. And as a general matter, racism and xenophobia have declined in almost all Western societies over the past decades, while support for right wing populism has grown". So is in your view, and it seems like it is, but maybe you can elaborate on this, the view in the United States that anti-immigration sentiment is primarily driven by racism, do you think that's overstated?

SB: It is not to say that racism and xenophobia don't exist, and that it's not driving some voters in Europe, and certainly in the United States. But stopping there really misses, as you mentioned, both the cross-national differences and support. There are countries that, you know, no matter how many polls you take, come out quite low on these sentiments and yet still have very large levels of support for right wing populist parties. And also the over time dynamic, which a lot of people also don't seem fully aware of, that is to say that, you know, almost everywhere in the West, these kinds of sentiments have declined. Not as much as they should, of course, but they have declined at the same time as support for these parties is going on. So to stop your explanation there, it's too easy and it's also empirically inaccurate. So what we have to do is we have to layer on a more sophisticated understanding of what voters' concerns really are. And if you dig deeper into concerns about immigration in particular, they tend to focus on two types of things that you've already mentioned. One is straightforward economic concerns, which is why, as you said, the left was really quite hesitant about immigration up until a generation ago. Jobs are scarce. Economic insecurity has increased, access to government resources has become more difficult. And in those kinds of situations, it's very easy to make people look at newcomers to the country and see them as taking up resources and the job community, you know, using community institutions that they feel very concerned about. So there is tons of research that shows that in these kinds of difficult economic situations where people feel that they're in some kind of zero sum competition, it's much harder to gain acceptance for immigration. There are also some other concerns that while I would not consider to be racism or xenophobia, straightforward, do relate to sort of levels of social change. These are concerns that I would put more correctly, I would say, under the rubric of assimilation or integration. There it is much easier for people to accept newcomers when they feel like those newcomers are willing to respect national traditions, play by the rules of the game. You know, accept the rule of law, these kinds of things. So

these should not be, I think, conflated with racism and xenophobia, both because they are not and also because understanding these differences points to different ways of dealing with them.

GG: Absolutely. One of the the points you've made, both in that article and I've seen you make it elsewhere in other writings and things you've done that actually surprised me a little bit, just based on press coverage in the US, is that other than the AfD in Germany, which is just its own, you know, sort of very extremist manifestation that by and large, these what was once called fringe, far right, even proto fascist parties in Europe have to a large extent moderated and even kind of integrated themselves into mainstream. I remember when Giorgia Meloni was elected and it was the headlines everywhere in the United States: She is the new Mussolini, she's a fascist, Italian democracy is over, and then in a very short amount of time she announced support for the war in Ukraine, kind of embraced a lot of EU policies, made clear she doesn't intend to be revolutionary, at least internationally, and you don't hear that anymore. And in what respects have these right wing parties generally, other than the one in Germany, moderated?

SB: So many of them, but not all, and the AfD is the key most important example, many of them have moderated. Meloni is a good example. I mean, as you mentioned, when she was elected, there were headlines on both sides of the Atlantic about a new fascism in Italy. That term is still used, fascism with regard to Marine Le Pen and the National Rally. I think this is inaccurate and also dangerous. Dangerous because when you call someone a fascist, there is no real way to sort of cooperate with them and their supporters become beyond the pale. That is to say, people, that it's not worth reaching out to the fact that these parties, some of them, I would say Meloni is a great example, Marine Le Pen's party, anybody who's old enough to remember Marine Le Pen's father knows that there has been a very significant shift between her and her father. Now, that doesn't mean that one shouldn't be concerned. It does mean that one should recognise that shift. And if one is a "small d Democrat", one should welcome that and want to encourage it. You may still very much disagree with the policies that she stands for, but that's [inaudible]. The question is, is she still pushing for racist, unconstitutional policies? If she's not, then you know, she is part of a legitimate Democratic field of competition. There's a big difference between, as I said, Marine Le Pen and her father's party, the National Front. There's a big difference between Meloni and some of the neo fascist movements her party grew out of. There's a big difference between the Sweden Democrats today and the neo fascist movements that they came out of. Again, I'm not saying one should not be wary, but one should also recognise the difference. Throwing them all under the label of fascist or even far right for that matter I think at this point obscures more than it clarifies.

GG: Yeah, it's so interesting how Marine Le Pen has very aggressively, very explicitly distanced herself not just from her father, but from his ideology. They've expelled some of those old members and really worked hard to create this new identity. The passage from your article that I referenced talked about these events that led up to this EU election, that kind of were a harbinger of the results that we saw and probably more future events. When I think, though, about animosity toward Brussels and to EU institutions and just kind of a general

anger towards them, I of course, first think about the 2016 vote in the United Kingdom, where they approved Brexit, where they just left the EU, they didn't even like limit the control of Brussels over it, they just left. I know in some sense British politics in the UK itself are a little bit different from European politics because of geography and history and the like. But did you see, do you see Brexit as a similar dynamic to what is driving this rise of populism that we're now discussing as well?

SB: Well, I think first, as you said, it's important to note that the British have always been a little bit different. They joined the EU very late and somewhat reluctantly, and so that they were the last in of the big countries and the first out is perhaps not that surprising. Personally, I think that was a mistake on the part of the Brits. But I'm not British, so my view is completely and utterly irrelevant. It was not an anti-democratic decision. It may be one that some people think is unwise, but it is not anti-democratic. I would note that parties like the National Rally in France, more in Le Pen's party and the far right parties in Italy, including Meloni initially, were quite EU sceptical. They have moderated on that as well because it serves their interests. They recognise that their citizens, as much as they complain, often legitimately, about EU [inaudible] or about the continued democratic deficit, as some people refer to it in Europe, not only people benefit more than they do not and still, while criticism may be quite sharp, demands to actually leave are really quite low. So they are reflecting their populations, ambivalent, I would say attitude sometimes towards the EU, but they're no longer calling for leaving the EU. And that is in line, I think, with what their populations by polling all over many years seems to indicate.

GG: Let me ask you a little bit about the differences, if there are even any non-trivial ones between right wing populist parties throughout Europe other than, again, the AfD. As you might know, I live in Brazil. I've lived in Brazil for a long time. My husband was a member of the Brazilian Congress. I became very involved in Brazilian politics, and I remember when Jair Bolsonaro was first running for president, then it began looking like he would win, the American press labelled him the Trump of the tropics. And although I understood why, they kind of needed shorthand to convey to Americans who this person was, and there were some obvious similarities stylistically, Bolsonaro clearly was copying Trump strategically and rhetorically in odd ways, it was driving me crazy because in reality, their ideology is so radically different in so many ways. Bolsonaro is kind of this throwback to the Cold War, right? Obsessed with communism, very, very focussed on social conservatism in a way that Trump isn't. And, you know, those differences get lost because it's hard to convey the nuances. What about in the EU again, other than Germany, is there some kind of very common connective ideological tissue that connects these parties in a way that makes the local parts of them almost trivial?

SB: So the parties do vary quite a bit by country, as you would imagine, as you said, you know, sort of it was wrong to conflate Bolsonaro with Trump, it's wrong to conflate Geert Wilders with Marine Le Pen. But sure, there are some similarities. I would say one thing that really does differentiate most, not all, but most of these right wing populist parties from their counterparts in the US if you want to throw Trump and the Republicans in there, is that these

parties, most of them moved to the left on economic issues a generation or two ago. So Marine Le Pen's party is not a far right party on economic issues. Her father was. He was a Thatcherite or a Reaganite, but she is a centre or centre left figure, as is her party on economic issues. She sells the party very much as the champion of the left behinds. Whether you agree that that's true or not is irrelevant. That's how she presents herself. And that's where her policies are on economics. Denmark and Sweden criticise the Social Democrats for having abandoned their defence of the welfare state. These parties are really quite different from their American counterparts on economic issues. You know, they do have some connective tissue. I would say their issue, the issue that they are most associated with is immigration and their opposition to it. And having changed the way that opposition is phrased over the years, having moved away from sort of direct racial or xenophobic opposition to immigration, to claiming in any case that their opposition to immigration is based on a purported unwillingness by immigrants to assimilate conflicts over economic resources. Whether that's true or not, that is what they say. And that is clearly a connective tissue among almost all these parties. Again, with the caveat that there are some, like the AfD and certainly the East European counterparts, which I would put in a separate category that are [inaudible] on these issues than the mainstream, if you can call it that now, far right populist parties in Western Europe are.

GG: One of the, I think, really fascinating aspects of these election results, especially in the two biggest and most important countries, France and Germany, is just how kind of segregated and separate the various political groups are, not unlike, I think, the United States, where the vast middle of the country in the South are hard core red states and then the, you know, coastal states, are blue states. If you look at the German map of the voting, I think we have this on the screen, what you see is that the AfD's popularity was overwhelmingly from what was once called East Germany. In fact, I think they were pretty by a good distance, the most popular party, if you just looked at East Germany and they had a lot less support in Western Germany, especially in Western cities. What explains the AfD's extraordinary popularity compared to the other parties in East Germany?

SB: So that's right. I mean, the AfD is exceptional in a number of [inaudible], and in the German context it's exceptional because it still retains a very, very heavy eastern base. Its support has expanded somewhat to the western parts of Germany, but it remains a party that is disproportionately successful in the East. In fact, it is the most popular party in many of those Eastern states. And that is because folks in those states a) have a very different history than folks in the West. They did not live through West Germany's post-war history, the reckoning with the Nazi past, the democratic norms that developed during that time. And they also feel very much still like they have been sort of, to use a common term, left behind over the past decades or two. That, you know, these are regions that have suffered a lot of emigration. They are regions that still remain to some degree poorer than the West. And so this is a place where anti-establishment, kinds of voices gain much more resonance than they do, in the West. But that map is really quite telling. But note that in West Germany, the most popular party, the plurality, not the majority party, is the very traditional, you know, centre right CDU, CSU.

GG: That was Angela Merkel's party, for example. Just to tie this a little bit to the United States. And it's a oversimplification, I realise, but I think there's a lot of validity to it, which is that in these places that are kind of far from the nation's capital and far from the concentrated centres of power like Wall Street and Silicon Valley and the like, there is a very strong perception the anti-establishment sentiment comes from this notion that the people in power basically harbour contempt for the beliefs and values, but also the material interests of all these people in the middle of the country who have this anti-establishment sentiment. Is that true as well in the EU writ large, and in East Germany specifically?

SB: Oh, absolutely. That kind of resentment at highly educated, cosmopolitan elites is a central part of the appeal of these parties. So in the German case, for instance, again, I'll pick that one, even though it has, you know, some exceptional qualities. The AfD's main target is always the Greens, not so much the Social Democrats, the sort of traditional, albeit now really diminished party of the sort of working class, but the Greens right. Why? Because the Greens are the party of the highly educated, cosmopolitan urban elites. So they make a very strong effort to kind of constantly attack the Greens and their party and their policies. They say that they are out of touch. They don't care about the quote unquote, you know, sort of average people. And so if you could imagine the United States with a proportional representation as opposed to a majoritarian electoral system like we have, the Greens would be the party of the sort of educated elites living in [inaudible], in university towns, that kind of thing. So you see this very much play itself out in Europe. It's just that these people have now segregated themselves into different parties, as opposed to being clumped together into big ones as they are in the United States.

GG: Let me ask you a similar question about France, where it seems to me at least, you know, having not studied this, nearly as in-depth as you, to put that mildly, that there is a similar dynamic, especially when it comes to the United States. So if you, you know, I think the conventional wisdom in the United States is that the Democratic Party is becoming much more the party of affluent suburbanites and wealthy centres of power, lots of exceptions, obviously, whereas the Republicans are really trying to become, let's call it, the party of a multiracial working class, not just the white working class, but the multiracial working class. But you can't really say that poor people in general have abandoned the Democratic Party, because there's a lot of very poor people for all kinds of different non-economic reasons, including race, who traditionally vote Democrat. There was this interesting passage from an article in The Guardian, and this is September 2023, obviously before yesterday's election by Julia Cagé and Thomas Piketty, trying to explain French politics from that perspective of who it is that is anti-establishment in favour of Marine Le Pen and who still supports Macron. And they said the following, quote: "The French political landscape can be described as follows: low income urban voters, who tend to be mainly service industry employees and tenants, vote predominantly for the left, while working class voters outside the main cities, who are mainly blue collar workers and homeowners, are more likely to vote for parties of the far right". If that's true, if you agree with that, how is it that kind of working class people who, at least in the United State's, the Democratic Party always claims to represent, obviously, the British party is called the Labour Party, how is it that so many of these working class voters are now

turning to the far right, because they believe they represent their interests?

SB: Well, we see, as you noted, a very similar dynamic in the US, right? So the white working class, if we stick to just the white working class vote in the US, is also [inaudible]. And so the Republicans get disproportionate working class votes from folks who are living in non-urban areas and evangelical voters. If you are to look at sort of white working class voters who are secular, who live in whatever New York or Los Angeles, those folks still have a fairly strong tendency to vote for the Democratic Party. But so then the question becomes, well, why? Why do we see the tendency of, you know, whatever, low income, low educated voters and others to vote for these right wing populist parties? I mean, we could go back to the issues that you brought up at the beginning. I mean, I think they are applicable generally people who have economic and social and cultural grievances. I would say when you're looking at working class voters, though, the other thing to throw in is the changing profile of the left, right? Which is these people, you know, a generation ago would have disproportionately voted for in Europe, as Piketty and his colleagues say, they would have voted for whatever, socialist parties, Labour party, social democratic parties. Those parties now no longer have those voters at all. They really lost them gradually over time. And then suddenly through the 1990s, when they really kind of abandoned their traditional economic profile and ran headlong to embrace a kind of softer, gentler version of neoliberalism, right, what was called Third Way politics in Europe, or progressive neoliberalism in the United States and what you see after that is that working class voters no longer see these left wing parties as standing for them, as their champions, as their natural, so to speak, political homes. And so, you know, these parties no longer have the ability to capture or attract, particularly these working class voters the way they would have during the post-war decades. And so those voters were particularly up for grabs. And now in Western Europe, even more so than in the United States, I would add, many of these right wing populist parties are the largest working class parties in their countries. That is to say, the parties that receive a plurality, sometimes more of working class votes.

GG: Yeah. It's fascinating. And the same in Brazil, where you have all these left wing parties and politicians who speak incessantly about representing the poor people and the working class, and yet all their votes and donations come from highly educated, primarily white sectors of the city and the country. There's this big breach between the left on the one hand, and the people they claim to represent on the other throughout the democratic world. I want to ask you about that, because we've been spending time and we usually do in other contexts as well, when we talk about how hatred toward or dissatisfaction with establishment centres of power lead to right wing populism. And of course, the question is why can't it lead to left wing populism? Or at least why isn't it? And there are some figures in Europe who I find really interesting, one of whom is the longtime German leftist Sahra Wagenknecht, we've had her on our show several times and interviewed her, who basically went to war with the left of what she was always apart. In fact, you could call her the leader of the left in Germany if you wanted, and she basically split from the left over things like attacking them over an obsession with very kind of academic and obscure cultural issues that alienate ordinary people, and not because they're hostile to it, because they don't find it relevant to their lives. She's become

more anti-immigrant, for sure. She's against the war in Ukraine and NATO and institutionalist policies. And she started a new party, it just got almost 6%, and won six seats in the EU, a fairly decent showing. But then you even have in, Slovakia, the Prime Minister who just got almost killed and assassinated Robert Fico, who was a long time left liberal of the very mainstream kind, who also did a similar trajectory against immigration, against the war in Ukraine and then you can kind of put maybe Jean-Luc Melenchon in France in that pile as well, though with lots of differences. Is there any real viable path for the left to capitalise on populism and anti-establishment sentiment using this sort of politics?

SB: Well, I will say that, you know, especially since you're based in Brazil, you know, that left wing populism is the standard or the more popular, so to speak, form of populism historically in Latin America. So the fact that we're talking about right wing populism because we're focussed on, you know, sort of the aftermath of the European elections, that makes perfect sense because that is the dominant form of populism in Europe and indeed the West today. But it's not the only form of populism, although that term is really very broad. So one wants to be careful what one means when one says it. But, you know, generally when one talks about left wing populism, there are many parts of the world where that would be, again, the dominant form of populism. And historically, that was indeed the case in Latin America. We recently had an election in Mexico where a party that many people consider to be a left wing populist party, you know, its presidential candidate, won. And to get back to the question of why, I mean, look, there's a lot of reasons for that. Figures like Wagenknecht and Melenchon, they are problematic for a variety of reasons for voters, which, you know, you may or may not want to discuss further, but I would say a lot of this does...

GG: Sorry to interrupt, but I would love to hear a little bit about that, actually.

SB: So look, if you look at Wagenknecht, she has been a [inaudible] for many parts of the left for a generation now. And I think there's a lot of distrust of her and her motives both among mainstream parties and of course, among, now her former colleagues in the Linke. The particular package that she is trying to put together, which is not just, you know, far left on economic issues, but also really very conservative on a variety of social and cultural issues. She is very much, if you look, for instance, at the votes for the EU election, which they now have out, you can watch the vote streams, she is really trying to and did pull a significant number of votes from the AfD. Now that may be good because she is certainly more of a small d Democrat I would say, than the AfD is, but it does give you some sense of what kind of profile she is giving to voters and why therefore, that might be of, somewhat limited reach. I think there is a very strong plurality, perhaps even majority support for limiting, let's say, immigration in Germany, particularly illegal immigration, but dog whistling towards some of the things that I think folks think she is, that is to make some people [inaudible].

GG: This is all super illuminating. I just have a couple of more questions with respect for your time. I actually have a ton more, but I'm just gonna ask a couple more. Ursula von der Leyen, who is the president of the EU, is seeking a new term, re-election of five years. And it is interesting that we're spending so much time talking about this growing anti-establishment sentiment, when to me, in so many ways, she's kind of like the living, breathing embodiment

of establishment politics, not only in her ideological beliefs, but just in her kind of trajectory and her comportment, all of that. You couldn't invent, in a lab, a more establishment politician than she. Even though these status quo mainstream parties do have a majority, it's much bigger than the amount of votes she needs, do you regard her re-election is close to certain, or is there a decent chance that she won't be able to get those votes?

SB: So, as you mentioned, the coalition that had supported her in the past, is somewhat diminished, but still has the votes in Parliament to elect her. But, you know, these coalitions are not completely stable, right? So before the election, she was already kind of, you know, making nice with Meloni in particular, who has been, you know, a fairly strong supporter of the EU, you know, fairly strong supporter of the EU's efforts in Ukraine and elsewhere. And so she clearly understands that, as is the case in national parliaments, as the party spectrum has fragmented, it's no longer enough to kind of get the support of the mainstream parties behind you, right? So you want to have some sort of insurance policy, so to speak. So if she could potentially rely on support from some of those far right parties that are seen to have moderated, that would give her an alternative way of passing policies that she might not be able to get support for otherwise. So, for instance, the Green section of the EU Parliament said they simply will not, under any circumstances, work with far right parties. So if she is trying to pass something that, for instance, she cannot get support from the Greens on, you know, she may have no choice but to look to parties in that kind of, you know, whatever you want to call it, far right grouping, in particularly what is going to be contentious going forward is that Green New Deal, because the green parties really did suffer a significant loss at this election. And those environmental policies have been the subject of some very serious national level protests, farmers protests, things like that. So figuring out what to do about that is going to be a major challenge for her going ahead.

GG: So you mentioned Ukraine. I just want to ask you about that, because the German Green Party, for example, is one of the most vocal supporters of NATO and US financing of this war, prolonging the war. And so is von der Leyen. She's been steadfast in her views on that. But it seems like a common thread of almost all of these right wing parties is growing opposition to involvement in the war in Ukraine, for whatever their motives. I mentioned Robert Fico in Slovakia, who really ran on a platform of ending support for Ukraine, even though Slovakia, with its proximity to Russia, has been so pro Ukraine. What do you see, the role of that war and opposition to continuing NATO's involvement in it, to have been a factor in this election?

SB: So there are some parties, as you mentioned, like Fico in Slovakia that have been very wary indeed opposed to continuing support for Ukraine. Obviously, Orban is the kind of, you know, cheerleader of this particular group. That particular position is less popular in Western Europe, as has been mentioned already. Meloni is sort of, you know, whatever on board with supporting support for Ukraine. Even Marine Le Pen's party is kind of now relatively neutral on that, whereas before she had been accused of being a sort of closet-Putin supporter that does not go along with her desire to moderate her party. So that has essentially disappeared from sort of prominence in her platform. The Scandinavians are pretty hysterical about

Russia because it's on their border. So, you know, there are definitely parties that are wary of that. And the person that you mentioned before, Sahra Wagenknecht, would be a great example of that, right? She has been, along with the AfD, the most prominent voice for rolling back support for Ukraine, trying to push for a ceasefire, you know, that kind of thing. And I would say in the German context that does [inaudible] along with the comments that I mentioned earlier in a very specific slice of the German electorate, you know, that might limit her ability to attract more votes from the, let's say, mainstream left.

GG: All right. My last question, just quickly, President Macron, in response to this election, dissolved the legislature, the parliament, and called for snap elections. That kind of seems counterintuitive, right after an election where your own party gets crushed to then want to have another election. I'm sure he's very well aware of that question and has good motives for doing so. What are those motives? What is he hoping to achieve with these elections?

SB: Well, I'm a political science professor. I am not, you know, I do not have a crystal ball, so I do not know what was going on in his mind. I will say, that is quite a risky move that he made. He did not need to do this. Why he did this, I again, I cannot see inside his head, so I will try to sort of conjecture as best as possible. He is a risk taker and has a lot of faith in his ability, I think, to convince the electorate that he is the best choice and that the National Rally represents a bad choice. I think he is hoping to be able to once again, as he has in the past, although with diminishing effectiveness over time, rally all the pro-Republican, what you might call in the United States pro Democrat, small d Democrat, forces behind him when it comes to a choice between sort of allowing the National Rally to gain a dominant place in the Parliament and therefore to be able to name the Prime Minister. I think he thinks that he can still convince people that that would be a bad idea. But as the quote that I think you put up earlier in the broadcast says, should he lose that bet, he himself does not lose the presidency. He is a president who was elected independently. He will have to cohabitate with the prime minister from the National Rally, most presumably Jordan Bardella and that won't be the first time that has happened. He is somewhat paying a price for having a party, that is a party more in name only. It is really a vehicle for him individually and it does not have a platform or a profile significantly separate from him. So insofar as people are fed up with him, his party is going to pay that price.

GG: Professor Berman, this was super illuminating, so refreshing, after being subjected to days of American punditry that has a knowledge of these issues that are worse than superficial. So I really appreciate your taking the time to come on and help us understand all of this. Thanks very much.

SB: It's my pleasure.

GG: Have a good evening.

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END

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