

## Analysis

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## Washington Watch

## Our election agenda in the Trump Era

By Dr James J Zogby

The "Trump Era" has posed special challenges for Arab Americans not only in foreign and domestic policy, but also in confronting the hostile political culture which the president has nurtured. As a result, we've been busy, especially in this election season - forced to work on many fronts, all at the same time.

Not since the 1980s have we seen so many Republican campaigns using anti-Arab or anti-Muslim bigotry against Democratic opponents - with most instances tied to charges that the Democrat has received financial support from questionable sources (from the Arab sounding names on their donors lists); is supported by individuals who are opponents of Israel or supporters of the BDS movement; are themselves linked by family ties to Palestinian terrorism; or are just not sufficiently supportive of Israel or Trump's moving the Embassy to Jerusalem.

In addition, there has been an uptick in anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant (or more recently, Trump's "unknown Middle Easterners") scare tactics that have contributed to making this a challenging and important election. What follows is a snapshot of the many issues and areas that define our agenda as we approach critical mid-term elections.

First and foremost is our basic commitment to preparing Arab Americans for the election through voter registration, voter education, and voter mobilization. This is the "bread and butter" of our work. As we have seen in the past, the best antidote to attacks is to become stronger. And so this year, "Yalla Vote" organizers were hired to register new voters in their communities, build networks of volunteers, and strengthen relationships with community organizations. With the support of this volunteer network, more than 50 "Yalla Vote" registration events were organized across the country. The effort now shifts to preparing to get out the Arab American vote on Nov 6.

We are especially proud of the fact that this year, a record number of Arab Americans filed for US House, US Senate, or gubernatorial seats, with dozens more running in local races. Because they won't face any opposition in November, two exciting and historic candidates have won: Rashida Tlaib in Michigan and Ilhan Omar in Minnesota. Both Rashida, a Palestinian American, and Ilhan, a Somali/Yemeni American, will be the first Muslim women to serve in Congress.

The campaign still to watch is that of Ammar Campa-Najjar, a Palestinian/Mexican American running in California. Ammar, a Democrat, is running an extraordinary race and polling well within the margin of error in what is considered a heavily Republican district. Most likely owing to the closeness of the contest, his Republican opponent has launched a vicious campaign of the worst anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry we have seen in a congressional race in some time.

In addition to these newcomers, Arab American incumbents expected to easily win reelection in November are four Republican Congressmen, Representatives: Darin LaHood of Illinois, Ralph Abraham and Garret Graves of Louisiana, and Justin Amash of Michigan. So if all goes well, come January, there may be seven Arab Americans in Congress.

### Hate crime

Now to the issues we are addressing. In July we published "Underreported, Under Threat: Hate Crime in the United States and the Targeting of Arab Americans." Our report provides a long overdue analysis of targeted violence against Arab Americans and exposes multiple issues that affect hate crime reporting and data collection across the country. We are now working with Members of Congress to address these issues and identify bipartisan action on the problem of underreporting as a 2019 priority for our hate crime work.

Two years ago, we began legislative work on combating the rampant decades-old problem of discrimination against Arab Americans during air travel. Last week, that work bore fruit. President Trump signed the new FAA reauthorization bill which includes, a section we worked on requiring training policy for its employees and contractors regarding racial, ethnic, and religious non-discrimination.

In the next year we will face a number of challenges to free speech in the form of state and federal government efforts to place penalties on individuals or groups that support BDS against Israel and other efforts to broaden the definition of anti-Semitism to include criticism of Israel. These initiatives seek to silence pro-Palestinian human rights activism on college campuses and ongoing work in a number of mainstream Christian denominations to divest their church funds from Israeli enterprises. Additionally, we continue to address a range of other concerns that affect not only our community but all Americans - issues like: opposition to the Muslim and Refugee Ban, immigration reform that protects diversity and family unification, opposition to government surveillance programs that infringe on civil liberties, and support for a compassionate policy on the admission of refugees. It is, to be sure, a full agenda. But it is one we are ready to take on because we know we must - in order to insure the future of our community and our country.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



## Is populism a disease? Or a cure?

Populist nationalism is here to stay. Many still believe it a phase which, like surliness in adolescence, will pass and be succeeded by orderly, thoughtful maturity. But they will find that the political world, already changed, will disappoint them. Liberalism, however defined, is not politics' default position: mainstream politicians are in a fight ring facing young contenders buoyed by a string of victories.

So predicts a book published this week, "National Populism" by Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, two British academics who - in contrast to their cheerful surnames - go to some pains to warn that anti-liberal politics is likely to grow. Unlike other authors - such as Yascha Mounk in his "The People vs. Democracy" - they do not write to warn and condemn, but to understand, even sympathize with, a movement which seeks to restore "the primacy of the nation over distant and unaccountable international organizations" and to reassert "the importance of stability and conformity over the never-ending and disruptive instability that flows from globalization."

These goals - as Thomas Frank, one of the first authors to explore rising populism in "What's the Matter with Kansas?" writes - are not to be despised, being a lower-class response to decades of social marginalization and economic stagnation - "populism isn't the name for this disease; it's the cure."

Disease or cure, its present successes in the United States and in Europe prompt the question: what if it succeeds in at least some of its aims, and embeds itself as a governing rather than a disruptive force? And more urgent, what if it fails, and the tens of millions who support one or other national form of populism find themselves deprived of Frank's "cure"?

Success would mean that policies - which include much reduced immigration, repatriation of illegal immigrants and more determined integration of ethnic minorities who remain, together with trade barriers and efforts to reduce the effects of globalization - would be successful and popular. Failure, on the other hand, could see debt rising to unsustainable levels, trade barriers and disinvestment by foreign companies causing unemployment, and national businesses suffering from the loss of both unskilled and highly-skilled immigrants.

Success for populist parties would mean that they

would displace the left - or would come from the left, since populism is not confined to the right. Their "cure" borrows heavily from the left - indeed, controls on trade and foreign investment, preferential treatment for national workers and heavy, and state-led investment in national infrastructure feature in the policy lists of the populist parties, and have all recently been programs of the left. In some cases - in France where the leading left group, "La France Insoumise" ("France Unbound") favors a 100 billion euro (\$114 billion) economic stimulus and selective nationalization, and in the United Kingdom, where Labour has rediscovered its radical socialism and plans nationalizations of



### Failure by populists could be catastrophic

rail, mail and water together with higher taxes on the rich - they still are.

It's easy to see populism, whether of right or left, becoming a dominant strain, fighting it out with pro-globalist parties, including left-center parties like the US Democrats, the German Christian Democrats and French President Emmanuel Macron's Republique en Marche. The latter have on their side the fact of a world in constant, disruptive change. But it's an option which has increasingly been felt as senseless by the millions who see themselves as its victims.

The political issue in a world in which populist governments will have been seen, at least partly, to succeed (and no government ever can succeed more than in part) would be to ensure that these policies become part of a reasonably stable political system and not, as now, a center of constant contention. This is possible; something like it already exists, in the adoption by mainstream parties of

policies, particularly on immigration and integration, which had been regarded as outside of a right-left consensus.

Failure by the populists could be catastrophic. In Italy presently, the Lega-5 Star coalition government has been high in the polls for months - and now faces a direct confrontation with the European Union, on a budget which the Union insists contains a far higher figure for the deficit, 2.4 percent, than that agreed. Matteo Salvini, who heads the Lega and is the effective leader of Italy, seems to relish the confrontation. A tough stance defending a budget aimed to increase growth and jobs against an austerity-obsessed EU would play well in the European Parliament elections in May.

But almost every economist, in and out of Italy, sees disaster ahead - and thus the government dropping its plans, or losing a fight with the EU. The majority of Italians who voted for one or other of the coalition parties and who have been told to expect shorter working lives, a minimum income for those under a certain income level and a flat tax, would be shorn of their hopes. The collapse of the government, and its substitution by a more "mainstream" administration, would leave millions of embittered Italians looking for someone to blame - and would be directed, by the formerly governing populists, to international institutions with the EU in first place, as well as national "traitors."

Something of this kind would happen wherever populists took and lost power. In the United States, Democrats could win control of the House of Representatives in the Nov. 6 midterm elections with a net gain of 23 seats out of the 435 up for election. Less likely, but not impossible, they could take over the 100-seat Senate with a net gain of two more places. Were the Republicans thus to lose control of Congress then the Trump motor would be slowed.

Populism thus remains, win or lose - and is certain to be more disruptive if governments who rule in its name are expelled from office. The US Democrats are presently driven, significantly, by Trump hatred. Not only may that not be enough to take back Congress, but it is certainly not enough to produce a civilized polity. Populist leaders are confrontational, mendacious and ruthless - but those who follow them need to have their fears, resentments and beliefs addressed, if politics is not to descend further. — Reuters

## Austria, Hungary stand apart on 'lost grandeur' of past

A century after their dismemberment in the aftermath of World War I, Austria and Hungary take two very different approaches to their Habsburg past - one choosing Imperial kitsch, the other a return to strident nationalism. Both countries were carved out of the Austro-Hungarian empire after its defeat alongside Germany in the First World War. And both were stripped of swathes of territory and millions of inhabitants under the 1919 Treaty of St Germain, concluded with Austria, and the Treaty of Trianon signed with Hungary the next year.

But a hundred years on, that upheaval resonates in very different ways in Vienna and Budapest, according to Oliver Rathkolb, director of Vienna University's Institute of Contemporary History. "In a study a few years ago we asked people in the two countries if Saint Germain and Trianon still meant anything to them. We got two totally different results: In Austria, it had no importance, in contrast to Hungary," Rathkolb told AFP. "The myth of Trianon and the dismemberment of Greater Hungary has been promoted for internal political ends even in the communist era, and even more so after 1989," he says.

Nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban has even risked the ire of neighboring governments by cultivating Hungarian minorities on his country's borders and offering them Hungarian citizenship. Even if many ethnic Hungarians in other countries "don't quite identify with Orban's strongman version of democracy, he is able to spin a national fairytale that resonates", says Nandor Bardi, a historian of ethnic minorities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. According to Bardi, "it is no coincidence that he makes keynote speeches - for example the famed speech about molding Hungary into an 'illiberal state' - in Tusnad

in Transylvania," a region of modern-day Romania that belonged to Hungary under the empire.

### 'Doctrines of victimhood'

Austria, though, has put its imperial past behind it and "has benefited from its status as a small, neutral country", having joined the European Union but not NATO, Rathkolb says. The key to understanding these two different approaches to history, according to Rathkolb, is grasping the distinct "doctrines of victimhood" the two countries developed during their very different experiences over the past century. In Austria, "the myth of Saint-Germain become obsolete after 1945" when the country again faced defeat, this time as part of Nazi Germany.

After the war the country tried to distance itself from Germany by reinventing itself as the "Nazi's first victim" and trying to minimize Austrians' role in the atrocities of the Third Reich. The Habsburg past also proved useful in marking out a distinctly Austrian identity, as well as being "a skillfully exploited tourist attraction," with Emperor Franz Josef and his wife Elisabeth - also known under the moniker Sissi - turned into kitsch icons. Meanwhile Austria made the most of its neutral status during the Cold War, attracting the UN and several other major international organizations to open headquarters in Vienna.

However in Hungary, the myth of Trianon remains very much alive in the national subconscious and has been "skillfully revived by Orban" after his return to power in 2010. He can now "easily mobilize the electorate" with a narrative which paints Hungary as having constantly been the victim of history: first under Trianon, then communism, then liberalism, and today because of allegedly EU-backed immigration, says Rathkolb. Indeed, during this year's election campaign Orban claimed Brussels wanted to rob Hungarians of their country, "not with the stroke of a pen, as happened one hundred years ago at Trianon; now they want us to voluntarily hand our country over to others."

By contrast, "Austria doesn't labor under its past role as a big power and the nostalgia for Franz-Josef and Sissi is superficial. But in Hungary the belief persists that it was the country most wronged by the events of 1919-20," says



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban waves on the podium after delivering a speech during an event to commemorate the 62nd anniversary of Hungarian uprising against Soviet occupation in front of Terror Haza (Museum of Terror) in Budapest on Oct 23, 2018. — AFP

Austrian political scientist Anton Pelinka. Pan-German nationalism is still one strain of thought within the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), currently in coalition with the center-right.

Even though in recent years the party has had to distance itself from that ideology, it has recently taken a leaf from Orban's book in floating the idea of Austrian citizenship for the German- and Ladin-speaking minorities in the Italian province of South Tyrol, which was also part of the Habsburg empire. But Rathkolb thinks that even "this suggestion lacks support and will probably end up quietly disappearing from the agenda". — AFP