

# The Emerging Worldwide Alliance of Parties on the Far Right, Led by Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump

Lawrence S. Wittner

Political parties on the far right are today enjoying a surge of support and access to government power that they have not experienced since their heyday in the 1930s.

This phenomenon is [particularly striking in Europe](#), where massive migration, sluggish economic growth, and terrorism have stirred up zealous nationalism and Islamophobia, but it resonates through large areas of the world including the Asia-Pacific. In France, the National Front—founded in 1972 by former Nazi collaborators and other rightists employing anti-Semitic and racist appeals—has tried to soften its image somewhat under the recent leadership of Marine Le Pen. Nevertheless, Le Pen’s current campaign for the French presidency, in which she is one of two leading candidates facing a runoff, includes speeches delivered against a screen filled with immigrants committing crimes, jihadists plotting savage attacks, and European Union (EU) bureaucrats destroying French jobs, while she assails multiculturalism and promises to “restore order.” In [Germany](#), the Alternative for Germany party, established three years ago, won up to 25 percent of the vote in state elections in March 2016. Led by Frauke Petry, the party calls for sealing the EU’s borders (by shooting migrants, if necessary), forcing the migrants who remain to adopt traditional German culture, and thoroughly rejecting Islam, including a ban on constructing mosques. According to the party platform, “Islam does not belong in Germany.”

Elsewhere in Europe, the story is much the same. In Britain, the United Kingdom Independence Party ([UKIP](#)), led until recently

by Nigel Farage, arose from obscurity to become the nation’s third largest party. Focused on drastically reducing immigration and championing nationalism (including pulling Britain out of the EU), UKIP absorbed the constituency of neo-fascist groups and successfully led the struggle for Brexit. In the Netherlands, a hotly-contested parliamentary election in March 2017 saw the far right [Party for Freedom](#) emerge as the nation’s second largest political party. Calling for [recording the ethnicity](#) of all Dutch citizens and closing all Islamic schools, the party is headed by Geert Wilders, who has been tried twice in that country for inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims. In Italy, the Northern League ([so-named](#) because it originally pledged to liberate industrious Italian workers in the north from subsidizing lazy Italians in the south), [demands](#) drastic curbs on immigration and removal of Italy from the Eurozone. Its leader, Matteo Salvini, contends that Islam is “incompatible” with Western society.

Other European parties of the far right include Hungary’s [Jobbik](#) (the country’s third-largest party, which is vehemently hostile to immigration, the EU, and homosexuality), the [Sweden Democrats](#) (now vying for second place among Sweden’s parties, with roots in the white supremacist movement and a platform of heavily restricting immigration and opposing the EU), Austria’s [Freedom Party](#) (which, founded decades ago by Nazis, nearly won two recent 2016 presidential elections, vigorously opposes immigration, and proclaims “yes to families rather than gender madness”), and the [People’s Party-Our Slovakia](#) (which supports leaving the EU and the Eurozone and whose

leader has argued that “even one immigrant is one too many”).

Only one of these rising parties is usually referred to as fascist: Greece’s **Golden Dawn**. Exploiting Greece’s economic crisis and, especially, hatred of refugees and other migrants, Golden Dawn has promoted virulent nationalism emphasizing the supposed racial superiority of Greeks to emerge as Greece’s third-largest party. Golden Dawn spokesman, **Elias Kasidiaris**, is known for sporting a swastika on his shoulder and for reading passages in parliament from the anti-Semitic hoax, the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” The party also employs a swastika-like flag, as well as gangs of black-shirted thugs who beat up immigrants. Party leaders, in fact, are **on trial** for numerous crimes, including violent attacks upon migrants.



**Greece’s Golden Dawn**

Other far right parties in Europe, although striving for greater respectability, also provide reminders of 1920s- and 1930s-style fascism. Addressing a Northern League rally, Italy’s bombastic **Salvini** wore a black shirt while supporters waved neo-Nazi symbols and photos of Benito Mussolini. In Hungary, Jobbik’s platform includes a call to “stop hushing up such taboo issues” as “Zionist Israel’s efforts to

dominate Hungary and the world.” Meanwhile, the leaders of **Alternative for Germany** have revived words once employed by the Nazis. In January 2017, one leader created a scandal when, addressing a party youth gathering, he criticized Germany’s commemoration of Holocaust crimes. That same month, speaking at a rightwing gathering in Germany, **Wilders** used the occasion to lament that “blonde” Europeans were becoming “strangers in their own countries.”

Asian politicians similarly play on popular fears and hatreds in their successful efforts to move their countries rightward. In India, the **BJP**, a Hindu nationalist party with a past that included violent attacks upon the nation’s Muslim minority, grew substantially and captured control of parliament. Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP opposes Muslim immigration, supports a program of social and economic conservatism, and trumpets the slogan “**India First.**” In the **Philippines**, where the government had long fought Muslim separatists on the island of Mindanao, Rodrigo Duterte, who gained fame and popularity for his ruthless “war on drugs,” was elected president in May 2016. By the following January, the death toll from his extrajudicial killings reached 6,200 people. Responding to EU criticism of his human rights record, **Duterte** replied in his characteristic “strongman” style: “Fuck you!” In **Japan**, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, leading the misnamed Liberal Democratic Party, strengthened the party’s grip on power by repeatedly transmitting rightwing nationalist signals, which appealed to people who rejected criticism of Japan’s role in World War II and possessed an image of a traditional, pure, authoritarian nation, uncontaminated by Western liberalism. **Abe** has sought to eliminate Article 9, the peace provision of Japan’s Constitution while expanding the role of the Japanese military in support of US campaigns throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Around the globe, the same trend is in evidence. In the United States, of course, [Donald Trump](#) won a startling victory in his run for the presidency, employing attacks on Mexican migrants, Islamophobia, calls for law and order, and promises to “make America great again.” The Republican Party, moving rightward for years before Trump captured the party nomination, quickly embraced this agenda. In Russia, Vladimir Putin and his United Russia party solidified their grip upon power, with [Putin telling parliament](#) that social and religious conservatism provided the only ways to keep Russia and the world from slipping into “chaotic darkness.” [Defending “traditional values,”](#) Putin attacked multiculturalism, aligned himself with the Orthodox Church, promoted a mystical, authoritarian nationalism, and fostered a [government crackdown](#) on Russia’s Muslims.

Although these parties and leaders of the far right have some differences, they also share some key characteristics. Uninterested in challenging economic and social inequality, they develop their popular appeal by flaunting extreme nationalism, hostility to immigrants and minorities, a disdain for multiculturalism, and, in most cases, a call to return to “traditional values.”

Not surprisingly, then, they usually get on very well. Responding to Donald Trump’s election, a [spokesman for Golden Dawn](#) praised it as a victory for “clean ethnic states.” He added: “A great global change is starting, which will continue with nationalists prevailing.” In January 2017, [three of the top stars](#) of the rising far right—Le Pen, Petry, and Wilders—shared the platform at a rightwing conference in Germany, at which they promised a new day for Europe. That same month, Abe paid a [very friendly visit](#) to Duterte, spending a weekend at his Philippines home.

Europe’s far right parties have been particularly [enthusiastic about Putin](#). Unlike

most other European political groupings, they applauded his war against Georgia and military meddling in Ukraine. When Putin invited representatives of their parties to observe the referendum to have Russia annex Crimea, they dutifully attended the event, after which France’s National Front, Britain’s UKIP, Austria’s Freedom Party, and Italy’s Northern League endorsed its legitimacy. Hailing Russia’s president as a true patriot, Le Pen lauded him as a defender of “the Christian heritage of European civilization.” Farage, asked which world leader he most admired, responded without hesitation: Putin! The leader of Austria’s Freedom Party, [Heinz-Christian Strache](#), praised Putin as a “pure democrat.” Indeed, Europe’s far right parties blame the EU and NATO for the crisis in the Ukraine, support lifting EU sanctions on Russia, and back Russia’s military intervention in Syria. In the European parliament, their representatives vote in favor of Russian interests nearly all the time.

In turn, Russia’s president has [assisted these parties](#) in their struggle for power. In 2014, the National Front received an 11 million euro loan from a Russian bank to help finance its successful municipal election campaign. During the current French presidential campaign, the National Front applied for a substantially larger Russian bank loan, Russian media outlets are working hard for Le Pen, and Putin has [received her in Moscow](#) with the kind of buildup usually accorded a head of state. In [Germany](#), Russian media and social networks played up a false story of an alleged gang rape of a 13-year old girl by migrants, prompting tens of thousands of Germans to take to the streets in protest and generating startling electoral gains by Alternative for Germany. That party has denied allegations that Russia is providing it with funding, but not the possibility that Russia is behind the mysterious appearance of millions of copies of its campaign newspaper and thousands of its election signs. Meanwhile, the youth group of

Alternative for Germany has forged an alliance with Putin's United Russia party.

The story is much the same in other nations. In Austria, the Freedom Party appears to be receiving Russian financial assistance through a thinly veiled intermediary, a prominent Russian oligarch. Russian cooperation with Austria's far right became official in December 2016, when the United Russia party signed a [cooperation agreement](#) with the Freedom Party. In Britain, the Russian government, despite formal statements of neutrality, clearly [sided with](#) UKIP's Brexit campaign. Enamored of Farage, it provided him with frequent guest appearances on Russia Today and, following passage of the Brexit referendum, even offered him his own show on that state-funded network. In the Netherlands, Russia's disinformation and propaganda arms have worked to assist Wilders and his Party for Freedom by trumpeting false news stories.

The relationship between Duterte and Putin seems to be [exceptionally warm](#). The two world leaders met for the first time at a November 2016 international conference in Lima, Peru, and Duterte was reportedly "starstruck" by the Russian leader. In conversations with reporters, the Filipino president went on at length about Putin's smiles and laughter. "It's something that you feel," he said, "because his laugh is big." According to Duterte, the Russian president repeatedly invited him to visit Russia, and Duterte finally promised to do so after Putin promised to present him, when he visited, with a gun. "I like Putin," Duterte told the press. "We have similarities." Feeling "like we've known each other for so long," they had immediately become "[fast friends](#)." This instant camaraderie with Putin contrasted sharply with Duterte's relationship with U.S. President Barack Obama, whom he referred to on numerous occasions as the "[son of a whore](#)."

Putin, in turn, was quick to offer Russian [support for the Duterte regime](#). In early

January, after a four-day visit to the Philippines, a senior Russian naval officer announced in a media interview that the Russian Navy stood ready to help the island nation fight terrorism. "The problem here is terrorism," he said, "and we will show you what we can do." Reiterating Moscow's backing, the Russian ambassador stated that Russia was willing to provide sophisticated arms to Duterte's government, including light weapons, submarines, and helicopters. According to Filipino government officials, their nation was "open to cooperating with the Russian Ministry of Defense through education and training exchanges on counter-terrorism operations."

No one, however, has inspired the rising far right more than Donald Trump. As early as March 2016, [Salvini](#) was enthusiastic about the U.S. business magnate, and in late April he traveled to Pennsylvania to participate in a Trump rally. Here he held a "Trump: Make America Great Again" sign and afterward had a 20-minute meeting with the Republican presidential front-runner that consummated their alliance. [Farage took part](#) in Trump's presidential campaign that August in Mississippi, where he shared the rally platform with him and lauded him before the cheering crowd. In October 2016, [Golden Dawn](#) endorsed Trump on the floor of the Greek parliament, hailing the "patriotic wind" sweeping through Europe and North America. Furthermore, if U.S. intelligence agencies are correct, Vladimir Putin set [Russian covert operations](#) in motion to help secure Trump's political triumph.

Naturally, Trump's election victory sent a surge of euphoria through the far right. From France, [Le Pen](#) lauded it as "a sign of hope," showing "that people are taking their future back." [Farage](#), addressing a victory party near the White House, declared: "Brexit was great, but Trump becoming the president of the USA is Brexit plus, plus, plus." Farage, in fact, was the first British politician to meet with Trump after



the latter's election. He [posed for photographs](#) with the president-elect in the gold-plated elevator of Trump Tower. Exhilarated by Trump's election, the leaders of Alternative for Germany immediately dispatched a [congratulatory telegram](#) to him. At a [celebration in Munich](#), a party leader told the cheering crowd that what Trump had done in the United States, their party would do in Germany. "America First is coming to Deutschland," he boomed, with the crowd erupting in thunderous applause.



**French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen**

As might be expected, Trump's executive orders banning refugees and other immigrants from predominantly Muslim nations sent parties of the far right into ecstasy. In [Greece](#), thousands of Golden Dawn supporters surged into the streets, carrying torches and waving their Nazi-like flags. "Well done," President Trump, exulted [Wilders](#); "it's the only way to stay safe and free." In a National Front rally brimming with nationalist fervor, [Le Pen](#) declared that Americans had "kept faith with their national interest," while National Front supporters shouted joyously: "This is our country!" Trump's action was [also lauded by](#) the Northern League, Alternative for Germany, and the whole panoply of ultra-right parties. Although government officials of most nations condemned Trump's immigrant ban, [India's prime minister](#) conspicuously refrained from any criticism, while India's [foreign secretary](#)

argued that the world should not "demonize" Trump.

Viewing Trump as a kindred spirit, as well as the leader of the world's most powerful nation, the parties of the far right are keen on cementing an alliance with him. Upon Trump's election, [Alternative for Germany](#) informed him that it was a "natural ally" at his side. [Farage](#) was so eager to court Trump that he met with him three times during the first weeks of Trump's presidency. [Salvini](#) told the rightwing Breitbart News that his party shared many of the policies of the new administration and was a logical ally. "On many issues," the Italian leader said, "we see eye-to-eye with President Trump and we look forward to partnering with his administration." Arguing that "a direct channel with the new American president is crucial," Salvini promised to quickly establish "direct, serious, non-mediated contact" with the Trump administration.

Asia's rightwing politicians are just as anxious to become collaborators with Trump. Only a week after Trump's election victory, Abe flew to the United States to have [a personal meeting](#) with the president-elect at Trump Tower. Japan's prime minister thereby became the [only world leader](#) to meet with Trump in the months before his inauguration. In late March 2017, [Duterte](#) told a meeting of Filipinos in Myanmar that, although he had previously told Obama to "go to hell," "President Trump and I are okay," and "I can assure him also of our friendship and cooperation." Although Duterte said he was not yet ready for a formal military alliance with the United States, he was prepared to "give all, whatever it is," to be allied with the Trump administration.

But what is the attitude of Trump and his circle toward these leaders of the far right? Apparently, it is quite favorable. When Trump, during his campaign for the presidency, first spoke with Salvini, he [told him](#): "Matteo, I hope you become prime minister of Italy soon."

Moreover, Trump, as a fan of Farage and keen supporter of Brexit, has not only met with Farage on numerous occasions, but has [publicly declared](#) that the rightwing leader would make a good British ambassador to the United States. Only two days before the first round of the French presidential election, Trump offered [a tacit endorsement](#) of Le Pen, stating that, when it came to “what’s been going on in France,” she was the “strongest” candidate.

Trump has also displayed a remarkable affection for rightwing politicians in power. Political observers have been struck by Trump’s [consistent admiration](#) for Vladimir Putin, whom Trump

has [praised](#) for his “strong control” over Russia. “He’s been a leader,” said Trump, “far more than our president has been.” So intertwined have Trump and his associates been with Russian officialdom that the FBI is conducting a criminal [investigation of collusion](#) between Trump campaign officials and the Russian government during the U.S. presidential election campaign.

Similarly, Trump has been a strong fan of India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi. [During his presidential campaign](#), the U.S. corporate tycoon told a Hindu-American gathering that, if he was elected, “we would be best friends.” Praising Modi as a very energetic leader with whom he hoped to work, he predicted that they were “going to have a phenomenal future together.” Modi was one of the first national leaders that Trump phoned upon becoming president. According to [a White House statement](#), Trump said that he considered India a “true friend and partner in addressing challenges around the world,” and was looking forward to welcoming Modi to the United States later in the year. In turn, Modi said that he had had a “warm conversation” with Trump, and that the pair had “agreed to work closely in the coming days.”

Trump has also been remarkably cozy with other rightwing Asian leaders. According to [Duterte](#), Trump—during a December 2016 phone conversation with him—endorsed the Filipino president’s murderous campaign against drug users and dealers, telling Duterte that he was handling it the “right way.” In February 2017, [Abe](#) flew to the United States for another meeting with Trump, this time at the White House, where he was greeted by America’s president with a hug. Then they and their families flew off to Florida, where Trump and Abe played golf at one of his lavish resorts while their wives toured the area. Trump announced that the two men had a “great time” together, topping it off with a “high-five.”

Some of Trump’s aides have been even more outspoken in praising parties and leaders of the far right. For years, [Steve Bannon](#)—who managed the final portion of Trump’s election campaign and who is now the president’s top political strategist—ran Breitbart, a far right news service that he described as “the platform for the alt-right.” Under his leadership, Breitbart worked assiduously to provide favorable publicity for UKIP, Alternative for Germany, the Party for Freedom, and other rightwing parties. [Farage recalled](#) that “when Bannon opened up the Breitbart office in London and began to give the arguments that I was making . . . a very, very big audience,” this turned the tide for Brexit. Consequently, Farage publicly offered “a personal thank you and tribute to Steve Bannon for having the foresightedness of doing that with Breitbart,” for which he was “extremely grateful.”

And the project continues. In November 2016, after Breitbart announced plans to expand to Berlin and Paris, [Reuters](#)—citing sources “close to Bannon”—reported that “the aim is to help elect right-wing politicians in the two countries.”

Bannon’s alliance with the far right is not merely a marriage of convenience, but is based

on a [deep-seated nationalist ideology](#) and love of power that he shares with it. “I think strong countries and strong nationalist movements in countries make strong neighbors,” Bannon told an audience of conservative religious activists in 2014. These were “the building blocks that built Western Europe and the United States, and I think it’s what can see us forward.”

Sometimes, the Trump administration’s intense nationalism seems built on a very unsavory past. Bannon, who wrote Trump’s “America First” inaugural address, is [an admirer](#) of a nationalist rightwinger, Charles Maurras, a vicious anti-Semite and supporter of France’s World War II Nazi-dominated regime who, after the war, was sentenced to life imprisonment as a collaborator. [Sebastian Gorka](#), a Hungarian immigrant who worked for Bannon at Breitbart and, like Bannon, is now a White House advisor, was recently named by officers of a quasi-Nazi Hungarian nationalist group as a sworn member of their organization. Although Gorka denied this allegation, he did wear its medal to a Trump inaugural ball and did add a “v” middle initial to his name, a practice that comports with the group’s traditions.

Other Republican officeholders have also displayed an affinity with Europe’s far right politics. In March 2017, U.S. Representative [Steve King](#) publicly praised Geert Wilders, who, in his latest anti-immigrant tirade, had referred

to Moroccans as “scum.” “Wilders understands that culture and demographics are our destiny,” King declared, with admiration. “We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies.” In September 2016, he posted online a photo of Wilders and himself, warning of “cultural suicide by demographic transformation.”

Although numerous public officials condemned King’s latest racist broadside, White House press secretary Sean Spicer refused to comment on it. Trump was also silent on King’s remarks. But, [back in 2014](#), when Trump had campaigned for the Iowa congressman’s election, he called King a “special guy, a smart person, with really the right views on almost everything.” With their ideologies so in sync, said Trump, “we don’t have to compare notes.”

In this fashion, then, political forces around the world have been drawing together in recent years into a far right international. Although its future remains uncertain, especially if Putin and Trump come to a parting of the ways, it certainly has plenty of political momentum at present. “Long live Trump, long live Putin, long live Le Pen, and long live the League,” exulted the Northern League’s [Salvini](#) in early 2017. “Finally, we have an international alliance.”

*This is an expanded version of an article that was originally published by the History News Network.*

**Lawrence S. Wittner** is Professor of History Emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of the award-winning scholarly trilogy, *The Struggle Against the Bomb* and its abbreviated version, *Confronting the Bomb* — both published by Stanford University Press.