



Historical Dynamics of the Far Right in the Capitalist World-System

Şefika Kumral

*University of North Carolina at Greensboro; The Centre for Asian Studies in Africa (CASA),
University of Pretoria.*

s_kumral@uncg.edu

Şahan Savaş Karataşlı

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
skaratasli@uncg.edu

Abstract

*This article develops a *longue durée* world-systems account of the contemporary resurgence of the far right. Against interpretations that treat far-right politics as an anomaly or a contingent product of authoritarian leaders, we argue that it has recurrently emerged during moments of world hegemonic crisis, when crises of capitalist accumulation deepen, geopolitical rivalry intensifies, and worldwide social unrest begins to generate broader crises of authority at both domestic and international levels. Comparing three historical conjunctures—the breakdown of Dutch world hegemony and the rise of Bonapartism, the terminal crisis of British world hegemony and classical fascism, and the crisis of U.S. world hegemony and the contemporary far right—we show that these formations belong to the same broad historical family, even though they cannot be reduced to one another. We argue that what links these movements is not a fixed ideology or organizational model, but a recurring political logic: the attempt to resolve systemic chaos through exclusion, repression, militarization, and the hierarchical reconstitution of the nation and world order. The article’s central contribution is to specify the ways in which the contemporary far right resembles, and differs from, its historical predecessors. We argue that it is a new and geographically uneven formation shaped by neoliberal financialization, uneven development between the Global North and South, and consequences of “new imperialism”.*

Keywords: Far-right; fascism; populism; Bonapartism; world-systems analysis; systemic chaos; world hegemony



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The Return of the “F” words

Writing “The Hegemony Unraveling” in 2005, Giovanni Arrighi observed that “The ‘E’ and ‘I’ words, empire and imperialism, are back in fashion” because, in the aftermath of the events of September 11, the Bush Administration sought to cope with the deepening crisis of the U.S. world hegemony by “embracing a new imperial programme – that of the Project for a New American Century” (Arrighi 2005:23). Two decades later, different words are back in circulation: the “F” words: far-right and fascism. Across the capitalist world-system, from the United States to India, from France to Turkey, from Italy to Hungary, Brazil, Israel, and beyond, the last two decades have seen the rapid rise of leaders, movements, and parties described as far-right, illiberal, authoritarian, ultra-nationalist, even fascist or neo-fascist (Akram-Lodhi 2022; Robinson 2019; Kumral 2025). Many of these movements have become very successful in mobilizing masses, winning elections, rewriting constitutions, and unmaking democratic rights, liberties and reforms (Judis 2016; Chase-Dunn, Grimes and Anderson, 2019; Fraser, 2019; Mudde, 2010). They have attacked and criminalized courts, unions, journalists, immigrants, feminists, religious minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and dissenting university professors. They have normalized talk of enemies within and civilizational enemies without, and the use of violence against these perceived enemies. They have done all this not only in the peripheries of the capitalist world-system, where authoritarianism was long assumed to belong, but also in its very core, which has long declared itself the sanctuary of freedom and the model of liberal democracy for the rest of the world (Davidson & Saull, 2017; Mudde 2007; also see Kumral & Karataşlı, 2020).

Although today there is wide recognition that something in the present conjuncture has generated a revival of authoritarian, anti-democratic, illiberal and far-right forms of politics there is little consensus about what has produced it, why it has intensified now, or how this new formation should be named. Are we witnessing a revival of fascism, neo-fascism, a new far right, authoritarian populism, patrimonial Bonapartism, or something else? This uncertainty is not merely terminological as it reflects a deeper difficulty in grasping a political formation that unmistakably resembles earlier authoritarian and national-chauvinist forms of politics that arose in similar, analogous conjunctures in world history, yet also departs from them in important ways. This difficulty is further compounded by the fact that the contemporary far right does not assume a single form across the capitalist world-system. It manifests itself differently in different zones of the world-system, including—but not limited to—the declining powers of the Global North, the emerging powers of the Global South, and the war-ridden zones of the world periphery that have been shaped by new imperialism and proxy warfare among great powers.

To better understand the current moment, this article compares previous historical epochs marked by world-hegemonic crisis and transition (Arrighi and Silver 1999), along with the

different forms of authoritarian national-chauvinist political formations that emerged within them, by tracing the recurrent, evolutionary, and divergent patterns that connect them. Building on and further extending the world-systems tradition on the subject (see Kumral 2014; Karatasli 2013:407-410; Chase-Dunn, Grimes and Anderson 2019; Plys 2022) and other *longue durée* approaches to far right (Saul 2023), we advance three main arguments. First, we argue that the resurgence of far-right politics today is deeply linked to the crisis and unraveling of U.S. world hegemony and the emerging “systemic chaos” (Arrighi 1994)¹. As such, it is not the first of its kind. Across the *longue durée* of historical capitalism, authoritarian national-chauvinist politics—which we define as an illiberal form of politics that seeks to hierarchically reorder both the nation *internally* through exclusion and repression and the interstate system *externally* through military domination and expansion—has repeatedly emerged in moments when crises of accumulation, geopolitical rivalry, and social unrest converge into a broader crisis of authority and a crisis of hegemony. Periods of world-hegemonic crisis and breakdown—such as the collapse of Dutch hegemony in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the decline of British hegemony in the early twentieth century, and the unraveling of U.S. hegemony in the early twenty-first century—have all proven especially fertile ground for such political formations. What we recognize today as the far right² is a historically evolved subtype of this broader family of authoritarian-chauvinist politics that tends to thrive during periods of systemic chaos.

Second, we argue that these world-systemic crises have not produced one fixed or transhistorical form of far-right politics. Rather, they have generated historically distinct but related subtypes of authoritarian national-chauvinist formations. Bonapartism, classical fascism, and the contemporary far right belong to the same broad historical family of responses to systemic crisis, even though they cannot be reduced to one another due to their radical differences. Each emerged under different world-hegemonic conditions and assumed distinct ideological, organizational, and geopolitical forms. What links them, however, is not a fixed ideological template or a transhistorical organizational model, but a recurring political logic linked to the deepening of the world hegemonic crisis: the attempt to resolve emergent “systemic chaos”

1 Following Arrighi (1994), we use “systemic chaos” to refer to periods in which declining hegemonic leadership, deepening economic crisis, intensified interstate competition, and accumulating social conflicts undermine the capacity of existing institutions, rules, and norms to organize the world-system. Systemic chaos arises when contradictions and conflicts escalate beyond the limits that existing institutions can contain, when new rules and norms emerge without fully displacing older ones, or when both processes occur simultaneously (Arrighi 1994: 30).

2 In this paper, far right is defined as a form of politics that aims to combine exclusionary nationalism with authoritarian and hierarchical conceptions of social and political order, to reconstruct the nation as threatened by internal and/or external enemies, and to interpret these threats by “fixating on the international and its spatial and racial dimensions as the basis of politics” (Saul 2025: 476).

through exclusion, repression, militarization, and the forceful reconstitution of the nation and the inter-state system along hierarchical lines.

Third, and most centrally, we argue that the contemporary far right is a new and geographically uneven formation produced by the specific contradictions of the declining U.S.-centered world order. Its distinctiveness lies, first, in the transformation of labor and class politics under neoliberal financialization. The contemporary far right has risen amid the fragmentation of organized labor, the weakening of socialist alternatives, and the spread of precarious working-class life. Yet labor remains central, now in altered form. In the declining powers of the Global North, the far right mobilizes downwardly mobile workers and middle classes whose prior securities have been eroded by deindustrialization, financialization, and neoliberal globalization. In emerging powers of the Global South, it appeals to upwardly mobile yet insecure groups who identify their own fragile ascent with the nation's promised rise in the world hierarchy (Kumral 2022).

Its distinctiveness lies, second, in the new forms that imperialism have assumed in the twenty-first century. Rather than emerging from direct world war among great powers, contemporary far-right politics has taken shape in a fragmented imperial landscape marked by proxy wars, militarized borders, liquid imperialism, and overlapping forms of global and regional intervention. These new imperial conditions have also intensified a recurrent political dynamic that resembles a political boomerang connecting imperialist expansion to far-right politics, observed in all previous hegemonic cycles. Thus, although imperial expansion can be initiated or sustained by liberal, conservative, or centrist forces, the far right often becomes the most consistent representative of the chauvinist logic unleashed by that expansion by treating later retreat, compromise, or peace as betrayal, weakness, or national humiliation (Kumral 2014); and by returning the coercive techniques first developed or normalized in the imperial peripheries back to the core, to be redeployed not only against external enemies but also against internal enemies.

As a whole, we show that like the return of the “E” and “I” words, the return of the “F” words is linked to the deepening crises of the capitalist world-system and its corresponding world-hegemonic orders. In the long history of capitalism, the resurgence of authoritarian national-chauvinist politics, the “F” words, has repeatedly accompanied new forms of imperialist expansion and rivalry because both arise from the same underlying condition: periods of world-hegemonic crisis and breakdown.

To explain why this is the case, first, we develop a world-systems framework for understanding the far right as a recurrent response to moments when crises of accumulation, geopolitical rivalry, and social unrest converge into systemic chaos. Second, we examine the historical evolution of authoritarian national-chauvinist politics through Bonapartism, classical fascism, and the contemporary far right, showing how each emerged from a distinct

world-hegemonic crisis and transition while also revealing broader evolutionary patterns across historical capitalism. Third, we turn to the divergent patterns that distinguish the contemporary far right from its earlier counterparts, emphasizing its historically specific foundations in neoliberal financialization, fragmented labor, uneven development, and new forms of imperialism. In the conclusion, we discuss the crisis of the global left alongside the internal contradictions of the contemporary far right, especially its dependence on capital and its inability to provide durable material security to its popular base.

Capitalism, Crisis and the General Tendency of the Far Right

From a *longue durée* world-systems perspective, what we broadly today call far-right politics would not be an aberration or an anomaly but an organic and recurrent feature of historical capitalism and its crisis. It is an outcome of the same contradictions that periodically destabilize capitalist accumulation and the political orders it sustains (Saul et al. 2014). Although, in principle, far-right movements of various forms can emerge at any moment and in any location within the capitalist world-system, the uneven development of capitalism across space and time has produced distinct historical patterns that can be discerned in retrospect.

Viewed across the *longue durée* of capitalist development, it becomes apparent that these movements have not appeared in a random or uniform manner but have especially clustered in particular epochs of systemic crisis, where economic crises, geopolitical crises, and social crises interacted and produced a more general political crisis of authority in many parts of the world. Periods of world-hegemonic crisis and breakdown (Arrighi and Silver 1999), such as the collapse of Dutch hegemony in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the decline of British hegemony in the early twentieth century, and, once again, the unraveling of U.S. hegemony in the early twenty-first century -- have all been characterized by interlinked economic, geopolitical, and social crises, and have proven especially fertile ground for the rise of far-right politics (Kumral 2014:64-84; Karatasli 2020: 258-259).

To grasp the connection between the development of historical capitalism and the recurrent emergence of the far right, it is necessary first to understand, as best analyzed by Karl Marx (1990), capitalism's inherent tendency to generate crises. Because of its economically, geopolitically and socially polarizing nature, capitalism cannot persist without producing recurrent disruptions in the economic, geopolitical and social spheres. Periodically, these disruptions undermine the political arrangements between rulers and subjects that once secured bourgeois hegemony in the capitalist world-system.

As Karl Marx (1990:920) observed in his discussion of the historical dynamics of primitive accumulation, and as later elaborated by Fernand Braudel ([1979] 1984) and Giovanni Arrighi

(1994), each major systemic crisis that undermined the economic leadership of the centers of historical capitalism coincided with a phase of financial expansion in the capitalist world-system, during which declining centers of the capitalist world economy sought to resolve profitability crises through speculation, intermediation, and lending to new emergent markets rather than through renewed value production. Yet, while these financial “fixes” provide temporary relief by generating super-profits in the short run, they have consistently deepened underlying contradictions and crises in the medium run and ultimately brought an end to the economic supremacy of these declining centers of capital accumulation. By redistributing wealth from labor to capital, weakening labor-absorbing productive investment, and intensifying inter-state rivalries, financialization has consistently fused economic, geopolitical, and social crises into a single systemic crisis, a terminal crisis, that sets the stage for world-hegemonic breakdown and the violent restructuring of global and national orders through periods of systemic chaos (see Arrighi 1994; Silver 2019; Karatasli 2023).

In periods of hegemonic crisis and systemic chaos, three contradictions tend to converge and produce a general crisis of political authority. Although the ways in which these contradictions interacted across the time and space of historical capitalism, and connected to broader political crises, have varied historically, we can identify several recurring patterns.

Economically, established paths of capitalist accumulation reach their limits and produce deep systemic crises due to overaccumulation, intensified competition, or falling profit rates. Economic crises at this level compel some sections of the capitalist class to destroy previous regimes of accumulation, invent new strategies through technological innovation, restructure capitalist relations, expand to new territories, widen the sphere of dispossession, and rely increasingly on violence and warfare as a final solution.

Geopolitically, great-power rivalries and inter-imperialist conflicts intensify as ruling elites externalize the pressures of stagnation and overaccumulation, and as imperial and aspiring imperial states compete for power and territorial expansion within an increasingly unstable world order, where the decline of the former hegemon opens new opportunity structures for rising powers to climb the ladders of global influence and prestige through militarized expansion. Annexations, invasions, and military occupations become more frequent as they turn into indispensable means of displacing crises abroad and securing new zones of profit and influence (Karatasli and Kumral 2013).

Socially, the contradictions of capitalist exploitation, dispossession, and inequality reach an unprecedented scale, and the oppression, suffering, and hardship of the oppressed and exploited masses grow more acute than usual. The inability of ruling classes to meet the basic needs, security, and aspirations of working populations generates waves of revolt, rebellion, revolution, and counter-revolution that challenge, alter, or renegotiate social compacts and power relations

between rulers and ruled. At the world-scale, this dynamic produces antisystemic movements that challenge the structures of the capitalist world-system (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989). In such moments, social movements from below can, at times, transform power hierarchies through revolutionary upheaval. Such conjunctures also give rise to what Lenin ([1915] 1964) called *revolutionary situations*: periods when the ruling classes can no longer govern in the old way due to a crisis among the ruling elite, the suffering and the want of the exploited classes become more acute than is typical, and the political activity of the masses sharply increases. Far-right projects find their most fertile ground when and where the popular classes, antisystemic movements and revolutionary upheavals become strong enough to challenge existing power structures but not strong enough to seize and consolidate state power, or to defeat the emerging counter-movements (see Arrighi 1985).

At such moments of interlinked crises at the systemic level, established ruling elites in many parts of the world lose their capacity to govern through a stable balance of coercion and consent. As their ability to generate consent declines, the need for a type of politics based on coercion, repression, and exclusion grows. These interlinked crises across the economic, geopolitical, and social spheres create the political vacuum in which far-right movements thrive. As Giovanni Arrighi once wrote, “as systemic chaos increases, the demand for ‘order’—the old order, a new order, any order—tends to become more and more general among rulers, among subjects, or both” (Arrighi 1994: 30). The soil of systemic crisis and disorder becomes fertile ground for authoritarian, far-right leaders, parties, and movements that promise such an old or new “order” amid systemic chaos.

Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) notion of *organic crisis* offers a useful conceptual lens to capture this convergence of crises (see Saull 2023) that produce a systemic chaos pregnant with violent solutions. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci distinguished between *conjunctural* crises, i.e. short-term disturbances rooted primarily in economic fluctuations, and *organic* crises, which are structural and long-lasting crises that involve the simultaneous breakdown of economic, political, and ideological relations that sustain a given order. During such moments of organic crisis, he wrote, “A crisis of authority is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or the general crisis of the State” (Gramsci 1971: 210). What makes an organic crisis distinct is that it does not merely disrupt accumulation or governance but erodes the very mechanisms through which ruling classes secure consent, and therefore produces an interregnum during which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (Gramsci 1971: 276). “When such crises occur,” writes Gramsci, “the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic “men of destiny” (Gramsci 1971: 210).

While Gramsci framed these dynamics at the national level, he did not fully extend this insight to the world scale. From a *longue-durée* perspective, however, it becomes evident that capitalism periodically produces certain conjunctures that generate multiple organic crises across the capitalist world-system at once. These global organic crises, what would later be theorized as phases of “systemic chaos”, marked by the hegemonic crisis at the global level (Arrighi 1994; Arrighi and Silver 1999), mark the dissolution of one world order, decline of one world hegemon, and the contested gestation of another hegemonic world order (also see Galanis, Koutny and Weber 2024).

Historical Dynamics: Bonapartism, Fascism, and the New Far-Right

As we will examine more closely in the following sections, the systemic crisis conditions that give rise to the far right do not unfold evenly across the capitalist world-system. Crises of accumulation, legitimacy, and hegemony take distinct forms at different historical epochs, and in different social and geopolitical settings. Furthermore, the uneven development of capitalism, combined with the particular histories and cultural compositions of different regions, has shaped the forms these movements have assumed. This diversity has produced distinct articulations of far-right politics and regimes across the core, semiperipheral, and peripheral zones of the world-economy, making it difficult to treat the far right as a unitary or homogeneous phenomenon. Yet across this diversity of manifestations certain structural regularities and similar tendencies persist.

Far Right and National-Chauvinism

Very broadly speaking, one recurrent regularity is that far-right movements tend to emerge as a specific subtype of authoritarian national-chauvinist responses to moments when the capitalist world-system and its hegemonic order enter systemic crisis. In such periods, far-right politics seeks to *deepen* existing systemic chaos and disorder in order to create the conditions in which it can impose its own version of stability and “order” through exclusion, repression, and the reconstitution of the nation and the inter-state system along *chauvinist* lines.

Here, chauvinism must be understood in a dual sense. *Internally, within a given nation*, it is a form of politics that asserts the supremacy of a dominant cultural group -- national, racial, ethnic, religious, or gendered -- over others, legitimizing the hierarchy between those who are destined to rule and those who must submit. *Externally, within the international system*, chauvinism serves as a bridge between nationalism and imperialism as Hannah Arendt acutely observed (1945: 457). It extends the same logic of domination beyond national borders, projects domestic hierarchies outward by dividing the world into superior and subordinate nations (or those destined to colonize or be colonized; or to rule and be ruled), and by justifying militarism,

annexation, and occupation as necessary means to achieve a new national order within a new world order.

It is important to note, however, that chauvinism does not originate with the far right. In periods of intensified great-power rivalry and inter-imperialist warfare, chauvinist politics often begins within liberal and conservative mainstreams and gradually saturates the political field. During such moments -- particularly in times of total war -- a wide spectrum of liberal, conservative, and even many socialist forces adopt chauvinist discourses and practices, mobilizing their populations against internal and external “enemies” in the name of defending the state and the nation. What distinguishes the far right is its consistency and intensity in carrying chauvinism to its logical extreme (Kumral 2014). Whereas other political currents deploy chauvinism instrumentally and are ready to abandon it when circumstances shift and a “restoration” looks possible, the far right turns it into a grand strategy and a totalizing worldview. It applies the logic of violent exclusion and domination not only toward external adversaries but also toward the internal ones, such as minorities, opposition forces, or entire “dangerous” social classes within the nation. In doing so, it transforms chauvinism into a more general and consistent principle of political organization which has the capacity to fuse internal repression with external aggression as a means of reconstructing a new hierarchical order amid hegemonic crisis and systemic chaos.

The result is a *political boomerang* that links mainstream liberal, conservative, and centrist politics to the far right: the very techniques of control and domination first developed and used by liberal and conservative elites against foreign enemies or colonized populations in the world’s peripheries return home, to the core and to the heart of capitalist civilization, reconfigured and radicalized by the far right to discipline, this time, the very domestic society and construct a new authoritarian order grounded in class, socio-cultural (racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural) and international (or “civilizational”) hierarchies.

The Tragedy and Farce of Bonapartism

To understand how far-right politics has unfolded in the history of the capitalist world-system, we must begin from a simple but often overlooked premise: the far right has never appeared in a single, fixed, or transhistorical form but has transformed across epochs and geographies. Like capitalism and nationalism, this peculiar form of politics possesses a chameleon-like capacity to adapt to its surroundings, to reshape its discourse, organizational form, and chosen enemies according to the prevailing conditions of each era and each geography (Paxton 2004:13-15). Thus, from one systemic cycle of accumulation to the next (and from one world hegemony to another), its outward appearance has transformed dramatically. What remains more consistent is a political reflex: the effort to resolve interlinked crises through

authoritarian national-chauvinism that fuses internal and external forms of domination, suppresses or co-opts radicalizing masses, and turns crisis into an opportunity to forge a new form of loyalty to the state, the nation, and the leader who claims to embody both.

During the breakdown of Dutch world hegemony and the transition toward British world hegemony, soon after the conventional political categories of “left” and “right” emerged from the struggles of the French Revolution, Bonapartism crystallized as an early modern repertoire of authoritarian nationalism that would later become central to the genealogy of far-right politics (Rémond 2016; Nord 2021).

This was a period of intertwined economic, geopolitical, and social crises that accompanied the disintegration of Europe’s feudal order, the collapse of Dutch-centered mercantilism, and the erosion of the Westphalian balance of power. Economically, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the financial expansion that had sustained Dutch profits produced the terminal crisis of the Dutch systemic cycle of accumulation, which affected all Europe and the transatlantic world. Speculative overextension, mounting public debts, and the stagnation of transatlantic trade after the 1750s culminated in a general economic crisis by the early nineteenth century. The mercantilist regime of accumulation that had defined the Dutch-led world economy in a world where the feudal mode of production was still dominant could no longer expand profitably and began to unravel. These conditions cleared the ground for the rise of industrial capitalism. Geopolitically, the period from the Seven Years’ War (1754-63) to the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) witnessed world-scale conflicts that shattered the stability of the Westphalian order and created European “world war-like conditions” until 1815 (Arrighi et al., 1999: 56-58). Socially, these crises coincided with revolutionary upheavals on both sides of the Atlantic including the revolts of the Thirteen Colonies (1765-83), the French Revolution (1789-99) and Haitian revolution (1791-1804), and a wider wave of anti-colonial and popular insurgencies that shook Europe and the Atlantic world (Silver & Slater 1999:163-172). By the 1810s, the convergence of economic, social, and geopolitical crises had closed one systemic cycle of accumulation and world hegemony and prepared the terrain for the British-centered world hegemonic and industrial capitalist order that would follow.

It was in this crisis-ridden environment of hegemonic breakdown and transition that Bonapartism crystallized as an early modern repertoire of authoritarian national-chauvinism. This claim requires two clarifications, both central to the argument that follows. First, unlike Shaw (1936), who sees Napoleon Bonaparte and Louis Bonaparte among the first fascists, we do not treat Bonapartism as a fully formed far-right formation in the later nineteenth- or twentieth-century sense, let alone fascism. Bonapartism did not yet possess the racial doctrines or anti-socialist mass parties that would later define the modern far right. Rather, following Richard Saull’s broader understanding of far-right politics as an authoritarian, nationalist, and

counter-revolutionary response to systemic crises within capitalism (Saul 2023, Vol. I:36–43), we approach Bonapartism as a genealogical precursor through which this political logic first acquired a distinctly modern form (see also Rémond 2016).

Second, our discussion of Bonapartism does not begin with the widely discussed Louis Bonaparte's rule. While Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* remains indispensable for revealing the class logic of Bonapartism—the rise of an executive power that claims to stand above society while suppressing popular self-organization and stabilizing bourgeois order—Marx's own contrast between tragedy and farce points to a longer genealogy of Bonapartism. The political form Marx analyzed under Louis Bonaparte had already been inaugurated by Napoleon Bonaparte, whose regime fused post-revolutionary modernization with authoritarian rule, imperial expansion, and the repression of popular-democratic forces.

This point, however, is often obscured by the modernizing and universalistic dimensions of Napoleonic rule. After all, Napoleon did not simply abolish the achievements of the French Revolution. It is well known that in France and in many territories under French influence, his regime codified equality before the law, weakened feudal privilege, emancipated Jews to a certain extent, rationalized administration, and reformed education. Yet these revolutionary achievements were joined to deeply counter-revolutionary and reactionary practices. The political trajectory after 1799 itself betrayed revolutionary principles: the Coup of Eighteenth Brumaire overthrew the republican Directory, and Napoleon soon replaced the Consulate with a hereditary Empire, produced a new nobility, titles, and an imperial court, and thus revived the very monarchical forms the Revolution had sought to destroy (see Lefebvre 1969; Farrell 1945). More importantly, Napoleon Bonaparte sealed the defeat of the popular-democratic energies of the Revolution by suppressing the remnants of the revolutionary left. His regime expanded the police state and made surviving Jacobins, radical republicans, neo-Jacobins, and egalitarian militants shaped by Babeuf's legacy primary targets of repression. Political censorship and surveillance reached the point where private correspondence could be opened and monitored; press freedom was effectively extinguished, with only a handful of pro-government newspapers remaining by 1811 and the leftist press being swept away (Lefebvre 1969: 86-90). Revolutionary festivals such as Bastille Day lost official support, and symbols of popular revolution, such as the red cockade, receded from public life. In Farrell's (1945) formulation, the people who had once expressed "the will of the nation" in the streets with arms in hand were displaced by a bourgeois-imperial order that claimed to embody the nation from above.

Even more strikingly, in 1802 Napoleon's regime restored slavery and the slave trade in French colonies, reversing one of the most radical emancipatory promises of the Revolution (Lefebvre 1969: 171). In Haiti, this project was inseparable from the attempt to crush the Black

revolutionary challenge to French imperial rule. At the same time, the Napoleonic Code drastically limited women's legal rights, subordinating married women to their husbands and tightening divorce laws—another reversal of revolutionary-era gains. And the politically pragmatic Concordat of 1801 with the Catholic Church, a supporter of the counter-revolution (Lefebvre 1969: 37), rolled back the Revolution's more radical secularizing thrust by reestablishing Catholicism, as a state-recognized religion and making the Church a central instrument of social order. Taken together, these counter-revolutionary practices reveal a distinct regime that preserved select social transformations while systematically crushing the democratic, anti-colonial, and egalitarian promises of 1789–1794.

Napoleon Bonaparte's rule was a radical form of national-chauvinism. Indeed, the very term chauvinism originates from Nicolas Chauvin, a semi-legendary Napoleonic soldier celebrated (and later mocked) for his fanatical devotion and blind loyalty to the emperor and the French nation. Moreover, for the first time, a political leader consciously and most systematically fused nationalism with militarism, imperial expansion, and internal repression to forge a new order out of systemic chaos. Napoleon's regime sought to bring "order" to a society exhausted by revolution and war, yet the "order" it produced rested on the subordination and depoliticization of the popular and "dangerous" classes within the nation (internally) and the subjugation of other nations within an expanding imperial system with the pretext of spreading the revolution (externally). What distinguished Bonapartism was precisely this synthesis of authoritarianism and external conquest as emphasized by Arendt's notion of chauvinism as a bridge that links nationalism and imperialism.

Amid the systemic breakdown of the Westphalian interstate order and the mercantilist regime of accumulation that had sustained Dutch world hegemony, Napoleon Bonaparte redrew the political geography of Europe on a scale unseen since the Peace of Westphalia. Yet what shocked contemporaries was not conquest itself, after all, European rulers had long waged wars of conquest and expansion in an uninterrupted manner overseas, in the world periphery. However, the audacity with which Napoleon challenged and began to erase the established territorial boundaries of sovereign states within "civilized" Europe, which had not significantly changed since 1648³.

Interestingly, Bonapartism reappeared after the revolutions of 1848 through Napoleon's nephew, Louis Bonaparte, who offered another authoritarian solution to the intertwined economic and social crises that defined the revolutionary year of 1848 (Marx [1852] 1979). Like

3 This broad generalization, of course, must be taken with a pinch of salt as there were some major changes before Napoleon's rise, especially the three partitions of Poland between 1772 and 1795, as well as smaller shifts within the Holy Roman Empire. Still, most of these were seen as isolated cases that did not challenge the basic idea of stable, sovereign states in Europe, which Napoleon's conquests would openly overturn.

his uncle, Louis Bonaparte rose to power in a context characterized by the threat of popular insurgency from below. His regime subordinated the working classes through a mixture of repression and paternalistic control as he combined limited social reforms with the destruction of independent labor organization. Although the 1848 revolutions themselves did not erupt into large-scale inter-imperialist warfare, Louis Bonaparte ultimately generated such a war in an effort to restore national prestige and consolidate his rule. His disastrous campaign against Prussia in 1870 ended in defeat and capture. This brought down the Second Empire and revealed the hollowness and farce of Louis Bonaparte's authoritarian "order."

Despite their popular rhetoric, both Bonapartes sought not to empower the people but to contain them. They transformed rising social unrest from below into a mandate for a new centralized, military order (Saul 2023). Both Napoleons rose in moments of deep social crisis, when peasants, workers, and revolutionaries were pushing for deep systemic transformation, and when no single fraction of the ruling classes could fully dominate. Importantly, the working masses were strong enough to shake the foundations of the state but not strong enough to seize power. As Engels put it, "the proletariat was not yet able to rule France, the bourgeoisie could no longer do so" (Engels 1891). This was a key political finding that emerged out of Marx's ([1852] 1979) analysis in *Eighteenth Brumaire*. Bonapartist leaders stepped into that vacuum, crushed popular movements, sidelined assemblies, and ruled through plebiscites and other mechanisms that mimicked democracy while concentrating power in the hands of the state and the elites. Through this intervention into the stalemate, the Bonapartist state apparatus, together with its bureaucracy, police, and the military, elevates itself to a position of relative autonomy and presents itself as the "savior of the nation" from the chaos. In their effort to consolidate power, Bonapartist regimes especially thrived under socially atomized conditions among the oppressed and exploited masses, who had not yet developed strong collective organizations that would sustain popular, organized movements of the exploited and the oppressed. To reach these fragmented and isolated groups, they relied on direct, plebiscitary, and spectacular appeals, and operated through a logic of power sustained by personal loyalty and patronage (see Riley 2018).

Classical Fascism of the Interwar Period

During the terminal crisis of British world hegemony, far-right national-chauvinism re-emerged in a very different, far more violent, totalizing and ideologically coherent form that is widely known as *fascism*. Looking at the common and divergent features of Bonapartism and fascism, August Thalheimer (1928) famously argued that "the best starting point for an investigation of fascism is [...] the analysis of Bonapartism" (also see Saul 2023, Vol I). For Thalheimer, both regimes emerged from a profound crisis of bourgeois rule, when the balance of class forces made neither bourgeois democracy nor proletarian revolution possible. Yet, unlike

Bonapartism, which sought to stabilize bourgeois domination through the mediation of an authoritarian state, fascism represented a mass-based counterrevolution that annihilated autonomous class organizations and mobilized the petty bourgeoisie to crush the working class.

There were other similarities in the macro climate that gave rise to both Bonapartism and fascism that Thalheimer does not mention. Interestingly, like Bonapartism in the earlier epoch, fascism was also the joint product of and response to the greatest geopolitical conflict seen to that date, (i.e. World War I), the rise of revolts and revolutions around the world (i.e. communist revolutions), and a major crisis of capitalism (i.e. Great Depression of the 1930s). Not coincidentally, many explanations of classical fascism focus on the different elements of these interlinked crises in geopolitical, social, and economic spheres, including the effects of the World War I (Payne 1980; Nolte 1969); the “severe socio-economic crisis which threatens a considerable section of society with loss of status and even economic ruin, and which plunges society into a widespread feeling of uncertainty and fear” (Kitchen 2003: 58), decline of the middle classes in the midst of crisis and disillusionment from the radical change working classes would bring (Dobb 1937; Trotsky 1944; Lipset 1981), emergent political crisis, triggered also by war and social unrest, which renders existing regimes incapable of governing their societies (Mann 2004; Poulantzas 1974), and, the urgent necessity to protect existing regimes from proletarian revolutions through the use of open dictatorship (Thalheimer 1928; Dimitrov 2002). What mattered, however, was not the isolated effects of these economic, political, social or ideological crises but their joint interactive effect, which was linked to the “breakdown of the nineteenth-century liberal world order established under the British world hegemony” (Arrighi 1985: 255; also see Kumral 2014).

Although classical fascism erupted during the interwar period, like Bonapartism in the earlier long century, the soil that gave rise to fascism also dates back to the crisis of the British world hegemony (Kumral 2014). The long depression of 1873–1896 had marked the exhaustion of British-led industrial capitalism and the transition toward financialization (Arrighi et al., 1999: 66-72). Although this shift generated short-term super-profits for the City of London and ushered in a brief *Belle Époque* for Britain, it also revealed the structural limits of British world hegemony. Not only were the foundations of Britain’s hegemony, based on industrial productivity, commercial preeminence, and control over trade routes, rapidly eroding, but the “Second Industrial Revolution” in steel, electricity, and chemicals, later extended to automobiles and armaments, shifted the center of productive dynamism toward new rising powers such as Germany and the United States. Economic competition and crisis went hand in hand with intensification of geopolitical rivalries. As Britain’s capacity to reproduce its dominance declined, the balance of power within the capitalist world-system became increasingly unstable. The Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) foreshadowed a new age of inter-imperialist competition.

European powers, facing stagnation at home, turned outward in search of markets, colonies, and raw materials, accelerating the “new imperialism” of the late nineteenth century. These same tensions eventually culminated in the First World War.

The aftermath of the war brought these contradictions to a breaking point and brought about the terminal crisis of the British world hegemony. The global economy was left devastated; old continental empires crumbled; national currencies collapsed. The 1929 financial crash and the ensuing Great Depression of the 1930s completed the disintegration of the nineteenth-century capitalist civilization, producing mass unemployment, bankruptcies, hunger, and a crisis of subsistence on an unprecedented scale. This went hand in hand with rising tide of antisystemic movements, social revolts and revolutions across Europe and the colonial world. The 1905–1908 wave of revolutions, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and a proliferation of anticolonial uprisings marked the growing strength of mass movements from below (Silver and Slater 1999: 185-292). Although communist movements were especially successful in seizing power in Russia (and later in other parts of Asia), they remained less organized and more reluctant to seize state power in Europe. While liberal and parliamentary systems lost legitimacy, and the old elites proved too divided to restore order, socialist and communist movements were *strong enough to threaten the status quo but not sufficiently organized to seize and consolidate power*.

It was in this vacuum, created by the collapse of liberal-bourgeois hegemony from above and the incomplete revolutionary challenge from below, that classical fascism arose primarily in Italy and Germany. Like Bonapartism, fascism promised to end the systemic chaos by imposing a new authoritarian national-chauvinist “order” through the restructuring of the *nation* internally, and the reorganization of the inter-state system externally. And like Bonapartism, fascism revolved around the cult of a leader who claimed to be the embodiment of the nation and its destiny.

Yet, fascism was not Bonapartism. For one thing, its methods were far more terrorizing and totalizing than Bonapartism. As Saull (2023) observed “[t]he recourse to systematic state terror that characterized fascism was absent [from Bonapartism]” (Saull 2023: 119). Moreover, as Dylan Riley (2018) emphasizes, whereas Bonapartism rested on the atomization of the oppressed and exploited classes and the plebiscitary appeal to these dispersed populaces, fascism reacted to the challenge of organized labor movements and communist movements; and it sought to respond to them through mass incorporation and total mobilization of the masses. Integral to this, fascists were far more ideologically coherent and committed, and their link to the masses was far stronger and organized than Bonapartists. Fascist parties were mass parties that absorbed civil society into themselves and transformed the social disorganization of society into a new form of hyper-organization. In place of Bonapartist plebiscitary acclamation, they demanded continuous

participation and regimentation as they fused the state, the party, and the people into a single apparatus of control, which was symbolized by the head of the state. Fascist parties mobilized the masses directly through paramilitary violence and civil society (Riley 2010).

The “order” fascists were creating depended not only on the destruction of independent labor movements and the elimination of the left but also the subordination of all social classes to the new-nationalist state. Economically, they sought to restore and revive capitalist accumulation through corporatism and imperial expansion. Socially, especially in Germany, they pursued the construction of a racially homogeneous and politically obedient nation through the oppression, exclusion, and extermination of Jews, minorities, communists, Roma, immigrants, homosexuals. And geopolitically, they were aggressively expansionist. As Benito Mussolini claimed, fascism represented the revolt of what Enrico Corradini called the “proletarian nations” -- not the colonies, but semiperipheral states such as Italy and Germany -- who were productive and dynamic, yet deprived of the rewards and recognition they believed were their due within the global hierarchy of nations, much like the proletariat within the capitalist class structure in a given society (Talmon 1981). Fascists not only externalized the logic of class warfare by seeing their nations as the proletarian people in respect to the rest of the world; but they also internalized the logic of war by turning the nation itself into a battlefield. Terror and mass extermination became instruments of constructing radical national *palingenesis*: i.e. rebirth of a nation (Griffin 1991).

Here again, one should be reminded of the political boomerang. As Aimé Césaire ([1955] 1972) observed, what shocked Europeans about fascism in the 1930s was not the use of such violence on human beings. After all, European rulers (under conservative or liberal leaderships) had long been exercising the use of such violence in their colonies and against their colonial subjects in the world periphery. What was shocking to Europeans was that these same violent techniques of domination were now being applied within Europe’s own borders, against the Europeans. The racial hierarchies, mass killings, and ideological justifications of human oppression, once reserved for the colonial subjects in the world periphery, were now being redirected against Europe’s own populations in the hands of the fascists.

The New Far-Right of the 21st Century

In recent decades, under the terminal crisis of U.S. world hegemony, we have been witnessing the emergence of another analogous wave of far-right national-chauvinism across the world. Although academic and media attention to the far right surged with the rise of Donald Trump in the United States, these developments were part of a much broader global trend already underway. Since the 1990s, far-right and right-wing populist movements had been gaining strength across Europe, while in many parts of the Global South, right-wing authoritarian figures had already come to power well before Trump’s ascent, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in

Turkey in the early 2000s, Viktor Orbán in Hungary in 2010, Narendra Modi in India in 2014, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines in 2016. Much as economic crises are labeled the “Latin American crisis,” the “East Asian crisis,” or the “Middle Eastern crisis,” when they primarily affect regions in the periphery or semiperiphery, but suddenly become “global” once they strike the core countries, the rise of the far right was long treated as a series of regional anomalies until it reached the world’s hegemonic center. Only when far-right supremacy appeared in the leading powers of the liberal world order, the United States and the United Kingdom, did it come to be widely recognized as global rather than exceptional (Kumral and Karataşlı 2020).

This lopsided assessment often prevented scholars from recognizing that the far-right tendencies dominating the world in the post-2007/08 era, when the U.S. world hegemony entered its terminal crisis, had already been gradually unfolding since its signal crisis, which began in the late 1960s and reached its peak with the 1973 OPEC shock and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system. These developments marked the limits and the exhaustion of the Fordist-Keynesian regime of accumulation that dominated the U.S. world hegemony and triggered the transition toward the U.S.-led neoliberal financialization of the world economy. This shift towards financialization, combined with the collapse of the U.S.S.R. between 1989 and 1993, temporarily restored capitalist profitability through the suppression of organized labor, the dismantling of social compacts between labor and capital, deregulation, deindustrialization of the global North, and the full commodification of land, labor, nature, and public enterprises (through privatization), alongside the globalization of production on an unprecedented scale. Yet rather than resolving capitalism’s structural contradictions, financialized neoliberal globalization merely displaced and deepened them. By the time of the 2007–2008 financial crash, the U.S.-centered world order had entered its terminal crisis phase.

Economically, the 2007–2008 crisis, like its predecessors, revealed the contradictions of the financial expansion of the world-economy as well as debt-driven growth strategies built on the myth of self-regulating markets. The prolonged stagnation that followed, continuing unevenly to this day, has generated widening social inequality, precarious labor markets, and pervasive insecurity across much of the world. In the 1990s, the restructuring of production through deindustrialization, deregulation, and the globalization of manufacturing allowed capitalists in the core, particularly in the United States and Western Europe, to temporarily restore profitability by relocating production to low-wage regions of the Global South. Yet by the turn of the twenty-first century, this strategy began to backfire. The very regions that had served as sites of cheap labor—above all China, but also India and other peripheral and semiperipheral economies of the Global South—had become new centers of material expansion of trade and production and begun to erode the productive base of the old hegemonic powers. The outcome

was a world economy increasingly polarized between financialized stagnation in the core and industrial resurgence in parts of the periphery. As previous periods of world-hegemonic crisis and transition broadly coincided with major transformations of capitalism associated with the First and Second Industrial Revolutions, the present conjuncture has likewise unfolded alongside a comparable transformation through the digital revolution, the rise of platform monopolies, artificial intelligence, and new forms of data extraction and rentier power, leading some scholars to speak of technofeudal (Varoufakis 2024) or neo-feudal (Dean 2025) tendencies within contemporary capitalism. Rather than overcoming financialized stagnation, these developments have intensified monopoly power, precarious labor, and the unprecedented concentration of wealth, thereby deepening both geopolitical rivalry and nationalist resentment within declining centers of accumulation.

Geopolitically, the same period has been marked by the return of great-power rivalries and the normalization of permanent warfare as structural features of the system. As U.S. primacy eroded, inter-imperialist competition intensified. The United States, increasingly weakened economically by rising challengers in Asia, especially China, became ever more reliant on coercive military power to maintain global influence, as evidenced by the post-9/11 military invasions and the subsequent expansion of the “war on terror” across Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Yet the U.S.’s inability to win these wars or secure stable dominance encouraged other hegemonic challengers to pursue their own militarized expansions. The declining hegemon’s claim to legitimate leadership is no longer taken for granted, and aspiring imperial states seek to climb upward through militarized expansion. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, for instance, marked the first act of annexation of a European territory since the end of the Second World War. While many initially dismissed it as an isolated instance, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 shattered any remaining illusions that at the core of the world-system, in the European continent, there was a return to open war, conquest, and great-power aggression. Although a direct world war has not yet erupted, several conflicts, such as the Syrian civil war, have already assumed the form of internationalized civil wars involving multiple great powers. Moreover, as in previous epochs of hegemonic decline, the vacuum created by systemic crisis and geopolitical disorder has not only enabled far-right leaders to rise to power but these far-right leaders have also intensified militarism, international aggression and geopolitical conflicts.

Socially, the contradictions of neoliberal globalization, the dismantling of welfare compacts, the erosion of job security, and the intensification of dispossession, and their uneven effects on different social and racial groups within nations, combined with the destabilization of state structures due to intensified warfare, produced a wave of social revolts and revolutions that became especially visible after 2011–2013: from the “Arab Spring” to anti-austerity movements

in Southern Europe and Latin America, and from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter in the United States. Recent research on social movements and revolutions shows that, after 2008, levels of social unrest in the world-system reached heights comparable to the interwar period (Karataşlı 2019; Silver and Payne 2020), while the frequency of revolutionary situations in the early twenty-first century surpassed even that of the early twentieth (Beissinger 2022). Yet despite this global upsurge, these movements have not produced a durable social revolutionary alternative. Once again, popular classes have become strong enough to shake regimes but not strong enough to seize and consolidate state power or defeat the counter-revolution.

Yet once again, it was the convergence of these three interlinked crises that recreated the structural vacuum in which national-chauvinist politics and far-right projects thrived in the early twenty-first century. As in previous analogous periods, ruling classes began to lose their capacity to govern through a stable balance of coercion and consent; their ability to generate broad legitimacy eroded, while their dependence on coercion deepened. In this context, new far-right formations of various kinds presented themselves as the only forces capable of restoring “order.” Like Bonapartism and fascism before them, they promised to reforge national unity, allegedly corrupted by internal and external enemies, and to establish a new world order in which their nations would regain the power and prestige they believed rightfully theirs amid systemic breakdown.

Likewise, as in previous epochs, we can once again observe the dynamics of the political boomerang: coercive and authoritarian techniques first developed by liberal and conservative elites of North America and Western Europe to manage populations in the periphery, such as the orchestration of coups, the establishment of illiberal/authoritarian regimes, widespread militarized policing, permanent emergency rules, disrespect for the rule of law, racialized profiling, and the dehumanization of targeted populations, are now being re-imported, normalized, and radicalized by far-right movements within the core countries themselves. From drone warfare and biometric monitoring in the Middle East to data-driven policing and mass incarceration at home, practices of surveillance, counterinsurgency, and border militarization once tested abroad now shape everyday governance within the Western metropolises. What has shocked many observers in the core regarding the rise of the far right is not the existence of counterinsurgency campaigns, rigged elections, suppression of opposition, or the criminalization of dissent as such, but rather that these very techniques, once reserved for the world’s peripheries, have returned to the heart of capitalist civilization.

Divergent Patterns: Labor, Uneven Development and Imperialism

Importantly, however, many contemporary analysts have struggled to name this formation. It is alternately described as “far-right” (Tuğal 2024), “far-right populism” (Wodak 2019), “neo-fascism” (Foster 2017) “patrimonial Bonapartism” (Riley 2018), and other similar names. This ambiguity, this inability to precisely identify what we are actually witnessing, is itself very telling. The phenomenon clearly belongs to the same historical family of authoritarian national-chauvinist responses to world-systemic crises. Whether we call it a new form of Bonapartism, or fascism, or a new formation, at the level of political practice, however, the *family resemblance* between what we are observing today and these past analogies is unmistakable.

As in earlier hegemonic breakdowns, today’s far right also offers a radical, authoritarian national-chauvinist “order” that rests on exclusion and repression. *Internally*, this means turning segments of the population – such as the radicalized sections of the working class, migrants, racialized and religious minorities, dissidents, feminists, LGBTQ+ people, political opposition, welfare recipients, liberals – into threats to the “real nation” and calling for the disciplining of these “internal enemies,” the criminalization of protest, the militarization of policing, and the narrowing of democratic participation. *Externally*, they demand aggressive assertion of national interest through implicit or explicit threats of territorial expansion, militarization of the borders, engaging in open or proxy warfare, often justifying all these as defensive moves to protect the nation or parts of a broader civilizational struggle.

Yet, because such formations evolve alongside historical capitalism and adapt to changing historical conditions, the form we experience today not only resembles but also departs from earlier variants in important ways. To grasp what is historically distinctive about the contemporary far right, it is not enough to analyze the recurrences and similarities; we must make sense of some very important differences and divergences.

Labor Militancy and the Far-Right

One such divergence is about the relative strength of labor and working class movements. As we have seen, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by the deep crisis of liberal capitalism under the British world hegemonic order. This crisis was intensified by the growing power of labor and working class struggles. Across Europe and North America, waves of strikes, unionization, and the electoral rise of socialist and communist parties, especially in Germany, Italy, and Britain, challenged the foundations of existing regimes. Internationally, the Second and Third Internationals, along with the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, also gave working-class politics global influence.

In the early twentieth century, fascism emerged within this environment as a counter-revolutionary response to this rising crescendo of labor and Marxism. As Ernst Nolte (1969) observed, fascism was “anti-Marxism” that mirrored and modified the organizational and

ideological tools of the left while reasserting nationalism (Nolte 1969: 20-21). The strength of labor movements and their ultimate failure to seize power in late-developing and semiperipheral states such as Italy and Germany created the conditions for fascism's success. In Giovanni Arrighi's terms, these were societies where labor was "strong enough to disrupt accumulation but not strong enough to resist retaliation in the workplace or in the political arena" (Arrighi 1985: 256), which is a reformulation of Marx and Engels's description of the role of the proletariat during Bonapartism. This dynamic, especially observed in semiperipheral countries of the time, made them fertile ground for fascism as a so-called "third way" that attacked both liberalism and Marxism.

Even in the United States, the emerging world hegemonic power of the time, this relationship between the strength of labor mobilization and the far right response was evident. Even though the American far-right was largely shaped by the particular social historical context of the United States – including slavery, segregation and immigration – it was also affected by the particular epoch that gave birth to fascism in Europe. The interwar revival of the Ku Klux Klan reflected not only the country's racial and immigration hierarchies but also broader anxieties over finance, inequality, and class conflict. As one Klan leader "warned" in the 1920s, unrestrained financial manipulation and the erosion of the middle class risked "experiencing all the agonies of class conflict that can end only in economic chaos and political revolution" (McVeigh 2009:4).

Unlike the previous century, however, the crisis of neoliberal financialization and the U.S.-centered world hegemony in the current conjuncture has unfolded in the absence of strong organized labor and the lack of an explicit, internationalized socialist threat (Saull 2023, Vol 2). This absence of a mass socialist challenge gives the contemporary far right a distinctive character and helps explain several of its most important differences from classical fascism

Hegemonic Blocs of Far Right in the Global North and the Global South

First, to be clear, this by no means implies that labor and working class politics on the current wave of far-right mobilization are irrelevant. On the contrary, labor and the working classes remain central to the right-wing upsurge, albeit in new ways, closely linked to the uneven development of capitalism, and the differential manifestation of the crisis in the Global North and the Global South (Kumral 2022).

In the declining powers of the Global North, where deindustrialization and capital outflows in search of cheap labor and surplus-producing activities elsewhere have eroded historically established rights, privileges, and securities enjoyed by sections of the middle classes, labor aristocracies, and working classes, many declining social groups have turned toward nationalist and protectionist rhetoric promising to "bring back" lost jobs and national prestige. Far right

leaders and right-wing populists promise to restore economic supremacy not only by protecting their economies from emerging economic powers but also from immigrants, liberals, and socialists. Various scholars have also underlined right-wing populist electoral rise, particularly in the US and Northern Europe as part of a reaction from the forgotten “white working classes”. Donald Trump’s 2015 speech illustrates his appeal to declining groups’ frustrations in a clear way: “I will be the greatest jobs president that God ever created ... I’ll bring back our jobs from China, from Mexico, from Japan, from so many places. I’ll bring back our jobs and I’ll bring back our money” (Lamont, Park and Ayala-Hurtado 2017).

In the emerging powers of the Global South, however, the dynamic has taken a different form. Neoliberal globalization and pro-business growth dismantled formal labor structures, expanded informal and precarious employment, weakened traditional labor organizing, and opened space for alternative political ideologies to mobilize the working classes along religious and nationalist lines. Short periods of rapid growth, capital inflows, pragmatic redistribution to the poor and working masses, and credit expansion fostered both a temporary decline in poverty and the rise of new working classes and a “new middle class” -- a term used in India, for example, to describe precarious workers aspiring to join the middle-class ranks (Jaffrelet 2015). Far-right leaders in emerging economies of the Global South, such as India and Turkey built new hegemonic blocs by appealing to these upwardly mobile yet insecure strata (see Kumral 2022).

In short, the disorganization of working-class life has produced greater atomization across the world, but it has been most acute in the Global North. There, the exploited and the oppressed often appear as isolated individuals rather than as members of durable collective organizations. This social pattern has favored leadership that reaches “the people” through plebiscites, (social) media spectacle, and direct appeals, while ruling through personal loyalty and patronage. In form, that looks closer to Bonapartist rule than to interwar fascism’s party-saturated mass mobilization.

In many emerging states in the Global South, atomization is also a real and urgent problem, yet another dynamic cuts across it. In these emerging countries in the Global South, the far-right leaders and movements’ rhetoric of “rising powers” claiming their deserved place among leading nations more closely echoes Mussolini’s fascist discourse of “proletarian nations” seeking power and prestige within a hierarchical world order. It is important to note that this “rising powers” rhetoric strongly appeals to the “rising social groups” within these countries, who view their own precarious ascent as mirroring their nation’s struggle for recognition within the global hierarchy. Their identification with the imagined national ascent, combined with fear of losing their fragile social mobility in the hands of “incapable elites”, made them especially receptive to far-right promises of order, pride, and protection against both external domination and internal “enemies.” From this angle, the new far right politics in the emergent powers of the Global South (such as in

India and Turkey) occupies a position between Bonapartism and fascism, but tilted somewhat more toward the fascist pole than its counterparts in the Global North (Tugal 2024).

Labor Aristocracies, the Precariat and Imperialism

Second, a comparison between the interwar crisis of liberalism and today's crisis of neoliberalism from the angle of strength of labor reveals a striking reversal in the geography of far-right success and its relation to imperialism. In the early twentieth century, classical fascism triumphed primarily in late-developing and semiperipheral states such as Italy and Germany, while the hegemonic and more industrially advanced powers, such as Britain and France, avoided fascist takeovers despite having strong far-right mobilizations. In contrast, in the current conjuncture, far-right movements have *also* achieved their greatest successes within the hegemon itself (i.e. the United States) and other advanced capitalist countries.

This divergence can be understood by examining the distinct forms of imperialism and labor incorporation under British and U.S. world hegemonies. British imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries functioned as a mechanism for containing domestic class conflict. As Lenin observed, imperial expansion provided an economic and political “outlet” for capitalist crises and social tensions at home. Cecil Rhodes captured this logic in 1895 after witnessing the misery of the “surplus population” shouting “bread! bread!” in London: “The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists” (Rhodes 1964: 105). Rhodes's statement distilled the material foundation of British imperialism: the export of capital and surplus labor to the colonies, the extraction of super-profits from colonial exploitation, and the partial redistribution of those gains to create a “labor aristocracy” at home. By elevating certain segments of the working class above the rest, this imperialist mechanism of labor cooptation helped contain class conflict to a certain degree.

By contrast, the U.S.-led neo-imperialism that arose in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, had the exact opposite effect. Neoliberal globalization of the post-1980 era relocated much of the value-absorbing production from the Global North to the Global South and dismantled organized labor. In doing so, it eroded the strength of the industrial working class that had once underpinned social democracy and the New Deal compact that marked the Golden Age of U.S. capitalism. Far from financing a labor aristocracy, U.S. neo-imperialism further undermined the social foundations of its own hegemony by accelerating the unmaking of middle classes and working classes. From Afghanistan to Iraq, the U.S. military interventions did not produce territorial colonies or bring durable economic benefits for American citizens. Instead, these interventions and ever-increasing military spending drained public resources and deepened the U.S. economy's dependence on global financial markets, foreign creditors and cheap commodities from abroad, particularly China. The U.S., therefore, emerged as an empire without

imperial dividends for its citizens. Rather than producing a labor aristocracy and expanding middle classes, U.S. neo-imperialism imposed austerity and precarity, further undermining the social foundations of both middle and working class life.

As a result, whereas British imperialism temporarily neutralized class conflict through reform and co-optation, U.S. neo-imperialism has deepened the increasing mass precarity and surplus populations within its own core. The destruction of stable working-class livelihoods has made sections of the deindustrialized “white working class” in the United States – and their equivalents in other advanced capitalist countries – key constituencies of the new far-right bloc. In short, while British imperialism produced labor incorporation, American neo-imperialism has produced labor dispossession, creating a social foundation for far-right resurgence in the U.S. during its declining world hegemony.

When comparing how different forms of imperialism affected different forms of far-right, there is an even greater divergence in patterns: Unlike classical fascism, which was the child of the First World War, the contemporary far right has not emerged out of total war conditions that arose from inter-imperialist warfare. This anomaly partly reflects the historically unique situation of the post-1945 world order under the U.S. world hegemony; and the unprecedented concentration of military power in the hands of the United States even in a period of its world hegemonic decline. Although the U.S. has been losing its economic dynamism, it still maintains overwhelming military superiority compared to its rivals (Arrighi and Silver 1999: 275-278), which makes direct inter-imperialist wars among great powers less feasible than they had been in previous analogous epochs. Furthermore, the deterrent effect of nuclear warfare has further constrained open, direct confrontation. Consequently, great-power conflicts began to assume more indirect and proxy forms (Kumral 2025:503-5).

It is precisely this geopolitical condition that opens the door to what the Syrian sociologist Yassin al-Haj Saleh (2023) has described as “liquid imperialism”, whose effects are visible especially in the peripheral regions of the Global South. Borrowing from Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of liquid modernity, Saleh uses the term to describe a new, unstable configuration of imperial domination in which multiple global and regional powers converge on a single territory and begin to exercise an overlapping form of coercion without a coherent hierarchy or a manifest ideological justification. In this “liquid” form of imperialism, imperial powers no longer expand outward from fixed centers but flow into weakened states by establishing shifting alliances, using proxy forces, and relying on contingent occupations. The result is not the consolidation of a formal colonial empire but an amalgam of interventions that dissolve sovereignty and turn a particular society into a geography of permanent instability and indirect control. Syria stands as the paradigmatic case of this liquid imperialism. Since 2011, the country has been engulfed by the simultaneous interventions of the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel. Each of these

great and regional powers pursued their own imperial or subimperial (or regional hegemonic if you like) agendas under the pretext of fighting terrorism, protecting minorities, or maintaining stability. This convergence of powers transformed Syria into a battleground of proxy wars and an internationalized civil war. The Assad regime invited Russian and Iranian protection to maintain dynastic rule; the United States carved out zones of influence through coordination with Kurdish forces; and Turkey used “anti-terror” rhetoric to occupy parts of north Syria while engineering demographic changes in the region.

Thus, although the effects of this “new imperialist” occupation are only indirectly felt in the great powers of the Global North, they very much resemble total war conditions in Syria. That is precisely why, from our perspective, it is no coincidence that out of this new imperialist occupation in the Global South emerged a new political animal between 2013 and 2019: the Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL). Although its religious form has often obscured its true nature, in its relation to imperialism, that is, arising from the wreckage of war and pursuing a revisionist, expansionist logic – ISIS represented perhaps the closest phenomenon to classical fascism in the twenty-first century. It was a highly organized, ideologically coherent political formation that fused internal and external violence, exercising terror and state violence both within its territories and against external enemies. Crucially, ISIS was not merely a military or terrorist organization; it also sought to build popular consent and social organization by penetrating civil society. While the world was transfixed by the spectacular brutality of its executions and warfare, it largely overlooked how the same organization was simultaneously organizing picnics, reading groups, and community gatherings across parts of the Middle East, including Turkey. In this sense, ISIS combined fascism’s characteristic fusion of mass mobilization, ideological fervor, palingenetic nature (aiming to revive the former Islamic State and the Caliphate) and totalitarian social penetration with the conditions produced by liquid imperialism.

The Relationship between Class Struggle and Other Social Uprisings

Going back to the discussion on labor and social struggles, there is one additional divergence: As we have seen, the historical reversal, where the *decline*, rather than the *strengthening*, of the working class has fueled far-right resurgence, marks a profound historical contrast with the interwar era. Whereas classical fascism arose as a counter-revolutionary response to militant labor and socialist movements that threatened ruling-class power, the far right of the early twenty-first century has thrived amid the fragmentation and disorganization of labor. In this sense, what was once the *strength* of the working class that provoked fascism’s reaction has today become its *weakness*, creating a vacuum of collective organization and class solidarity that right-wing populism has sought to fill through its own brand of radical national-chauvinism in the twenty-first century.

The disintegration of traditional labor movements and political Marxism has left this vacuum wide open for new forms of organization from the right. The weakening or outright collapse of viable Marxist labor movements, for example, created an opening for religiously oriented right-wing forces to mobilize the working classes in many parts of the world. In countries where neoliberal restructuring dismantled formal employment and fragmented the industrial working class, religious movements became the primary organizers of everyday life in working-class neighborhoods. Grassroots mobilization in working class neighborhoods by the Hindu far right in India (Chidambaram 2012), the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Kandil 2011), and Islamist movements in Turkey (Tugal 2009) exemplify this pattern. These forces filled the void left by socialist and labor movements, provided social services, a sense of moral order, and a sense of belonging that the left once offered through cooperatives, class solidarity and trade unions.

A similar process took place even in core countries such as the United States. The neoliberal dismantling of public institutions and services such as affordable childcare, education, and social welfare through privatization has created a major gap in the everyday social reproduction of the working classes. This gap, produced by neoliberal capitalism, was filled by religious organizations, churches, and various forms of faith-based organizations. These organizations not only provided material assistance but also new social networks for working class populations who struggle to sustain their livelihood. Likewise, these organizations also offered a new moral and ideological framework through which existing inequalities in social life and difficulties in earning a decent wage are interpreted in ways other than in their relation to capitalism, exploitation and oppression. Yet, as some of these institutions increasingly blended their religious charity with exclusionary Christian nationalism, they have become crucial infrastructures of the far-right project.

As a consequence, unlike classical fascism, whose pioneers in Italy and Germany were largely secular and modernist in orientation, today's far right is often deeply infused with religious, civilizational, or moralist discourses, from Christian nationalism in the United States and Europe to Hindu nationalism in India, and Islamist-inflected authoritarianism in Turkey. This ideological reorientation also has its links to the decline of the left and socialism in the last quarter of the long twentieth century.

Yet this does not mean that collective mobilization of the oppressed or movements demanding alternatives to capitalism, which the fascists once saw as their greatest threat, have disappeared from the political landscape. On the contrary, the far-right ascendancy of the early twenty-first century has also followed an era of mass uprisings and global protest waves, indicating that the struggle for new political and economic orders remains unresolved. Indeed, this most recent phase of the far-right movements today has emerged in the aftermath of an *age of uprisings* from the Arab Spring and the wider cycle of revolts across the Middle East and North

Africa, to Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter in the United States, to the Indignados in Spain and anti-government protests in Brazil.

In the Global North, for example, many of these social struggles have continued to challenge the inequalities and oppressions reproduced under historical capitalism. Although strike activity began to decline after the 1945 settlement and dropped sharply during and after the 1973–1980 neoliberal restructuring period, new movements arose to express resistance in different forms and vocabularies. In the United States and Western Europe, civil rights, feminist, and LGBTQ+ movements rose to prominence from the 1960s onward, producing a “silent revolution” (Inglehart and Norris 2017) and transforming the terrain of popular struggle.

Although these movements are not continuations of classical class struggles, it would be equally erroneous to view them merely as “identity” movements divorced from class dynamics, since the oppressions they confronted often intersected with, and were intensified by, the material conditions of class. For instance, while police violence against African Americans cuts across class lines, its effects have been most acute among working-class Black communities, especially those drawn from what Marx called the *stagnant relative surplus population* -- i.e. the structurally unemployed and precariously employed segments of the reserve army of labor who cannot sustain their livelihoods. Likewise, while gender oppression affects women across social classes, working-class women are most exposed to sexual harassment and everyday forms of gendered exploitation in workplaces and service industries. These were the same conditions that fueled the resonance of the #MeToo movement beyond elite circles. The same holds true for many LGBTQ+ workers, who face disproportionate discrimination and precarity in employment, housing, and healthcare, underscoring the inseparability of sexual and gender oppression from capitalist labor dynamics.

Thus, while these movements did not revolve around wage labor or working class politics in the classical sense, they were not completely independent from the structures of domination and inequality integral to the joint reproduction of capitalist, racial, and patriarchal orders. Indeed, the transformative potential of these movements has tended to rise or fall with the extent to which their working-class elements came to the fore, or, conversely, their more elite strata became co-opted by ruling classes. During the 1990s, for example, elitist tendencies in many of these movements were selectively integrated into neoliberal governance schemes, which adopted the language of diversity and inclusion to legitimize widening inequalities while divorcing struggles over identity from struggles over class and keeping the masses away from the streets.

In the early twenty-first century, however, a new crescendo of large-scale mobilizations once again shook existing hierarchies of power. In the United States, the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests, rising demonstrations against police violence, and especially the 2020 Black Lives Matter

uprising—which became one of the largest protest waves in U.S. history, involving an estimated 15 to 26 million participants across all fifty states—played an analogous role to earlier forms of labor militancy: they were strong enough to challenge power hierarchies but not strong enough to seize power or resist retaliation, and thus provoked a powerful far-right backlash.

The same dynamic could be observed elsewhere in the world. In Turkey, Erdoğan's AKP shifted from an implicit form of authoritarian rule with a democratic and liberal face to an explicitly authoritarian regime after the 2013 Gezi Park uprising, which posed the most serious challenge to AKP hegemony since its rise to power. In Brazil, the 2013 anti-government protests similarly created an opening for reactionary forces and paved the way for Jair Bolsonaro's far-right presidency. A similar trajectory unfolded in India, where mass protests, such as the 2011 anti-corruption mobilization and 2012 Delhi anti-rape protests revealed crisis of governance, and preceded Narendra Modi's "anti-corruption" and "clean government" centered electoral campaign in 2014.

Thus, spontaneous uprisings of the oppressed and exploited, along with pro-democracy movements and social struggles, have re-emerged, as they always have, during periods of world-hegemonic crisis and transition, when economic, social, and geopolitical contradictions converge. Yet if these movements have thus far failed to transform their societies, or the world at large, it is not due to a lack of popular energy, but because of the enduring crisis of the global left, whose absence as an organized unity makes it impossible to merge these diverse uprisings with organized working-class politics, to articulate a coherent alternative and to mobilize and guide them toward the seizure of power and the defeat of counter-revolutionary forces.

Conclusion: The Crisis of the Global Left and the Crisis of the Global Right

Although the resurgence of the contemporary far right is unfolding in the absence of any strong labor or socialist movement, far-right leaders across the world consistently rage against "left-wing radicals," "Marxists," "communists," and "socialists," as if a revolutionary left were at the gates. Paradoxically, this moment very much resembles the eve of the 1848 revolutions, when Marx and Engels opened *The Communist Manifesto* with the line "A spectre is haunting Europe: the spectre of communism," and noted that there was no opposition party in Europe that was not branded "communist" by the ruling elites, even though no such party yet existed. The *Manifesto* was written precisely to intervene in this political-ideological vacuum by declaring the establishment of the Communist League, founded in June 1847. Although the effort was politically unsuccessful, it marked a turning point in the history of the Global Left. If the global left is to become a transformative force and intervene in this systemic crisis, it must first and foremost resolve its own crisis: the crisis of the left itself. Without doing so, the resurgent global right may continue to hold the upper hand in this prolonged era of crisis.

The crisis of the global left, however, does not mean that the resurgent far right will automatically become the victor of this new era. The far right, too, confronts a deep, though less examined and understood, crisis. This crisis lies in its changing relationship to capitalist dynamics. In earlier epochs, far-right regimes retained a certain *relative autonomy* from dominant fractions of the bourgeoisie. Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, rose as an arbiter among antagonistic classes during the breakdown of the old regime. His state apparatus disciplined both the aristocracy and the emergent bourgeoisie while safeguarding capitalist property relations. Likewise, interwar fascism, though closely allied with industrial and financial elites, was not their simple instrument. Mussolini and Hitler subordinated big capital to the political imperatives of their movements, regulating profits, directing investment toward rearmament, and occasionally coercing major firms into state-led projects.

Yet across successive systemic cycles of accumulation, as capitalism developed, capital's power over politics has grown, and the far right's room for maneuver has shrunk. Today's far-right formations in the Global North rarely enjoy the relative independence their predecessors once wielded. In contrast to earlier epochs of history, some of these contemporary far-right movements are led by billionaires themselves, funded by oligarchic networks, or structurally dependent on financial and corporate elites whose interests they serve. Where they deviate from those interests, they face swift market or institutional pushback. The result is a new configuration, resembling a two-headed hydra, in which capital and the far right share one body of power but struggle over who commands it. In this twenty-first century struggle, capital appears to have the upper hand, as most far-right policies are subservient to the interests of capital accumulation.

From the perspective of capital, whose centralization and concentration have reached unprecedented levels in world history, the ascent of far-right leaders to the helm of existing states presents an extraordinary opportunity to turn governments ever more directly into what Marx and Engels ([1848] 1978) once called "the executive committee of the bourgeoisie." These alliances allow dominant capitalist groups to remove the remaining obstacles (such as bureaucratic oversight, constitutional checks, democratic accountability, and international regulations) that might inhibit or slow the pace of accumulation.

From the perspective of far-right leaders, however, this relationship is a double-edged sword. Securing the backing of ultra-billionaires, major capital groups, and the accumulation of immense personal wealth may enhance their immediate power. Simultaneously, it deepens their dependence and limits their capacity to sustain mass support when the demands of capital clash with those of their popular base. As Karl Polanyi observed, historically, for example, the far right's mass appeal often relied on its ability to promise its version of economic protection against disastrous consequences of the self-regulating markets (Polanyi [1944] 2001). Nazi

Germany, for example, became the first major European state to achieve near full employment in the midst of the Great Depression, largely through massive public works and rearmament programs that tied the working classes to the regime. Arguably, this was also characteristic of the earlier Bonapartist regimes, which sought to cultivate popular support through state-led public works, infrastructural development, expanded public employment, and selective forms of social provision. Today, by contrast, such large-scale employment or welfare schemes are far more structurally constrained, especially in the Global North. The contemporary far right's close entanglement with megabillionaires and top capital groups forecloses even modest redistributive measures, leaving its mass base increasingly precarious and volatile. When talking about redistribution to the "working classes", the far right in Western Europe and North America seems to be talking the talk, but not walking the walk. Consequently, their rule appears little more than demagoguery. This tension helps explain why far-right governments in emerging powers of the Global South—such as India and Turkey—have sought to blend neoliberal orthodoxy with selective developmentalist and welfare-chauvinist policies, which helped them preserve a degree of autonomy and maintain popular legitimacy to the degree they were able to do such redistribution.

This tension may also help us make sense of another distinctive feature of the far right today: its continued operation within the institutional framework of formal democracies. Whereas classical fascism established totalitarian one-party regimes and fused the entire state and society into a single apparatus of mobilization, the far right of the early twenty-first century has so far functioned within the shell of electoral democracy, albeit in increasingly hollowed out and authoritarian forms. Rather than abolishing elections, these regimes manipulate them; rather than banning opposition, they neutralize it through mass surveillance, right-wing ideological propaganda, control of the judiciary, and the normalization of permanent states of emergency. From the perspective outlined above, one key reason for this difference may be found in the far right's altered relationship to capital. Unlike their interwar predecessors, today's far-right leaders' comparative advantage vis-à-vis their allies (such as the mega-billionaires, oligarchs, and corporate elites who finance them) rests instead on their ability to mobilize the masses within the political sphere in a seemingly competitive regime, where liberals, centrists, and the left are always ready to take power, even if they do not exist. Maintaining the façade of electoral democracy thus becomes essential to their role in the current order.

This is why, although the long historical entanglement between capitalism, crisis, and the far right will persist so long as the global left remains unable to act as a transformative force, the current conjuncture nonetheless presents a moment of possibility. The far right's own crises, namely its inability to deliver material security amid deep dependence on capital, and its need to preserve the façade of democracy to sustain legitimacy, have also opened cracks within the

existing order. These contradictions generate potential spaces for popular mobilization and for the rearticulation of mass politics around egalitarian and emancipatory aims. If, in earlier epochs, the rise of the left and labor movements provoked the ascent of the right, today the rise – and eventual failure – of the far right may in turn create the historical opportunity for the global left to resolve its long-standing crisis and reclaim the transformative and emancipatory initiative in shaping the coming world order out of this systemic chaos.

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About the Authors:

Şefika Kumral is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her research examines global social movements, the far right, democracy, and ethnic violence in world historical perspective.

Şahan Savaş Karataşlı is an Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Dr. Karataşlı examines dynamics of historical capitalism, inequality, social movements, labor, and nationalism from a world-systems perspective.

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