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<http://fpif.org/a-global-counter-trump-movement-is-taking-shape/>

## A Global Counter-Trump Movement Is Taking Shape

By John Feffer

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Let's hope that Donald Trump is the political version of syrup of ipecac.

Reminder: The whole world is watching. How we deal with this president's fundamentally anti-American policies will have tremendous international ramifications. In fact, the rest of the world is already dealing with the "Trump effect."

After all, while Trump is our emetic, he's the rest of the world's smelling salts. Some key countries around the world are already coming to their senses about the threat of dangerous populists. The test cases will be France and Germany. But a progressive backlash appears to be building elsewhere as well.

### Against Le Pen

Marine Le Pen is the smiling face of the new fascism.

She's a twice-divorced Catholic who supports a woman's right to choose. But she's also a dangerous populist with virulently anti-immigrant, anti-multicultural, anti-EU views. She's more law-and-order than Rudy Giuliani. And her anti-globalization rants appeal to some on the left, which means that her National Front party is doing well in areas that once voted for the French Communists.

Marine Le Pen is also a frontrunner in the presidential race slated for later this spring. She leads her rivals in the latest polls with 27 percent. It's enough to generate predictions of a Trump-like upset.

Until recently, her major challenge came from someone with views nearly as abhorrent as hers. Francois Fillon, the candidate of the conservative Republicans, was clearly hoping to steal votes from Le Pen, the *New York Times* reported, when he “positioned himself as a staunch defender of French values, vowing to restore authority, honor the Roman Catholic Church, and exert ‘strict administrative control’ over Islam.”

Yet the upright Fillon hasn't turned out to be as scrupulous as he pretended. A scandal involving alleged payments to family members for parliamentary work has caused Fillon to slip considerably in the polls.

This would ordinarily represent an opportunity for the left. But the socialist and left parties haven't been able to reconcile their differences and unite against the center-right and the National Front.

Which leaves independent politician Emmanuel Macron as the most appealing candidate who can go up against Le Pen. Macron isn't an easy politician to pin down. He was the economy minister in Francois Hollande's Socialist government, but he's infuriated the more obdurate of the French left by embracing free trade, challenging union privileges, and speaking out against the 35-hour workweek (at least for younger workers). On the other hand, Macron is EU-friendly, pro-immigrant, a fan of Germany over Russia, and committed to the full progressive agenda on social issues.

Despite his establishment credentials, Macron is presenting himself as an outsider. He's channeled Trump by railing against the elite — those who take advantage of their entrenched economic and political privileges — and he wants to shake up France with *En Marche!* movement. He's also channeled Obama by emphasizing his own youth and dynamism.

Macron isn't afraid to make waves. He took a hit in the polls recently when he argued that French colonial policy in Algeria amounted to a “crime against humanity” and refused to back down from implicating the French state in these acts.

However you define him politically — and he himself avoids labels — Macron is the best bet that French progressives have of defeating Le Pen in a second round of voting. As long as Le Pen doesn't secure an outright majority in the first round, most of the French electorate will have an opportunity to gang up against the neo-fascist threat — just as they did when her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, made it to the second round in 2002.

Macron can also ensure that France doesn't end up with Fillon's only slightly less repugnant version of National Front politics (the equivalent of defeating Trump only to elect Ted Cruz).

## **Taking Back Germany**

For Angela Merkel, it's the best of times and the worst of times.

The rise of Donald Trump and the retreat of the United States from international affairs have placed Merkel and Germany at the moral center of the “West” because of their acceptance of refugees and non-acceptance of Vladimir Putin. Domestically, however, while Merkel's immigration policies have infuriated the German right, the economic policies that have impoverished Greece and threatened the cohesion of the European Union have angered the German left. The Christian Democratic Party is consequently slumping at the polls.

Despite all the press that Franke Petry and her far-right Alternative fur Deutschland party have gotten in the Western press — including this almost admiring piece in *The New Yorker* — the anti-immigrant party only polls around 10 percent. The real beneficiary of the Trump victory in Germany has been Martin Schulz, the head of the Social Democratic Party. Schulz has effectively used the threat of nationalism and Trump-like politics to bring his party neck and neck with Merkel's Christian Democrats. Writes Anthony Faiola in *The Washington Post*:

*In a country that stands as a painful example of the disastrous effects of radical nationalism, Schulz is building a campaign in part around bold attacks on Trump. He has stopped well short of direct comparisons to Adolf Hitler, but Schulz recently mentioned Trump in the same speech in which he heralded his party's resistance to the Nazis in the lead-up to World War II.*

Schulz is the former president of the European parliament, where he also served as a member for two decades. As such, Schulz has become the face of the new MEGA campaign: Make Europe Great Again. Having been active at the European level for so long, Schulz is also something of an outsider to domestic German politics. Like Trump, he prides himself on being self-taught. Unlike Trump, he actually reads books.

The Social Democrats might not succeed in dislodging Merkel. But they'll help keep the extremists out of power and may just manage to get enough votes to necessitate a grand coalition. With the European Union threatening to implode, such an example of trans-partisan governance at the heart of the continent could reassure those fed up with political polarization that compromise — and indeed, politics as we know it — can still thrive in modern democracies.

Less optimistic is the situation in the Netherlands, where the party of extremist Geert Wilders is leading the polls. Wilders, whose mother's family came from Indonesia and whose wife is Hungarian, has built his career on anti-immigrant fanaticism. If he becomes prime minister, he's promised to guide his country out of the EU, close borders to immigrants, and close all mosques: Trump on steroids.

The Dutch elections take place in mid-March. Even if Wilders wins a plurality of the votes, it's not likely that he'll be able to form a government. No other parties are willing to join hands with such a toxic politician. The Dutch might be crazy enough to vote for Wilders — but they're not crazy enough to actually work with him.

## **Outside Europe**

Closer to home, the Trump effect is providing the Mexican left with its greatest boost in years. Huge demonstrations have taken place around the country to protest the energy policies of Enrique Peña Nieto's government and the immigration and trade policies of Donald Trump. Nieto's popularity is embarrassingly low — 12 percent, lower even than Trump's.

Veteran left politician Andrés Manuel López Obrador is the major benefactor of all this dissatisfaction. He's a perpetual outsider to Mexico's national politics. But, like Bernie Sanders, he acquired considerable experience as a mayor — of Mexico City from 2000 to 2005. "He ran a populist and popular administration which kept subway fares low, built elevated freeways and partnered with the billionaire Carlos Slim to restore the city's historic center," writes David Agren in *The Guardian*. "He also provided stipends to seniors and single mothers, initiatives initially denounced as populism but replicated by others including Peña Nieto."

AMLO, as he is often called, is currently the presidential frontrunner, though elections won't take place until July 2018. But he's not holding his fire until then. "Enough of being passive," AMLO said recently. "We should put a national emergency plan in place to face the damage and reverse the protectionist policies of Donald Trump."

With Justin Trudeau in Canada and a possible leftist leader in Mexico, Donald Trump would be caught in a potential North American containment strategy. Perhaps, in a reversal of the Cold War dynamic, Europe would establish military bases in Montreal and Tijuana to make sure that the United States doesn't overstep its bounds.

Further afield, South Korea will be holding an election this year after a decade of conservative rule. The current president, Park Geun-Hye, has popularity figures even lower than Nieto or Trump. She's been embroiled in an impeachment process over corruption charges, her conservative party has changed its name to escape any associations with her reign, and no truly viable conservative candidate has emerged to extend the right's hold on power. Ban Ki-Moon, the former UN general secretary, was briefly the Hail Mary candidate for conservatives before dropping out of the running.

The current frontrunner, Moon Jae-in, is an establishment progressive who used to work in the Roh Moo-Hyun administration. He would resurrect some of Roh's policies such as a more balanced approach to the United States and China as well as some form of principled engagement with North Korea. But he's not the only progressive alternative. There's also the mayor of Seongnam, Lee Jae-Myeong, who styles himself the Sanders of South Korea.

The election is officially scheduled for December, but if Park is impeached, the date would be moved up. No doubt many in the United States wish the South Korean electoral rules pertained here: impeachment followed by new elections. Impeachment is still an option, of course, but the prospect of President Pence isn't reassuring.

In November, Donald Trump's victory seemed to be part of a global rejection of liberal internationalism — from Russia to the UK to the Philippines. Certainly many in the Trump administration, most notably strategic advisor Steve Bannon, hope to use their newly acquired juice to help their compatriots, like Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, take power as well.

But threats have a marvelous mobilizing effect. Donald Trump may be an inspiration to some. For many others, however, Trump is a whiff of something evil-smelling that jolts progressive politics all over the world out of its swoon.