

May 29, 2014

The Reform Conservatism movement gets a three part look from [Jennifer Rubin](#). In the first part she asks the authors why they are making the effort now.

***Bits and pieces of reform conservatism have been around since the original neo-cons of the 1950, and we've had compassionate conservatism. But it seems you are talking about a more fundamental revision in how the right looks at government. What prompted you to put it all together in a cohesive way? GOP political defeat? Obamacare?***

Yuval Levin: *The context for this is really not so much a failure of conservatism as the failure of liberalism. The liberal welfare state has never been a very good match for the realities of American life, and that problem is getting worse and worse all the time as our economy and our society are increasingly moving away from a consolidated, centralized, "big institution" way of life. Americans understand that our institutions of government are not functioning well in the 21st century, and that the country's economic performance and the prospects of the middle class and of those who want to join the middle class are held back by these failures. We're not living in a situation in which the left has a winning formula and the right has to learn from it (or vice versa). Both parties have been somewhat intellectually exhausted, but conservatives are in a far better position to recover from that and to offer the public an agenda that applies conservative principles to today's problems in ways very well suited to the concerns and anxieties of working families. The idea behind this book is really to put in one place some of the key conservative policy ideas that form the backbone of that kind of middle-class agenda.*

Ramesh Ponnuru: *Every generation of conservatives has to apply conservative principles to the circumstances in which they find themselves, and I don't think we are trying to change those principles so much as do that work for our generation. I do think that Republicans' failure to make conservatism relevant to today—to supply a compelling answer to the question, how would a conservative agenda make life better for my family and my country—has contributed to their recent defeats.*

Peter Wehner: *Republican defeats aren't the sole reason I think this effort is necessary, but it's part of the reason. The Republican Party is the political home of the conservative movement, and so when it fails, conservatism is set back. The GOP needs a better, more comprehensive and more modern governing vision. "Room To Grow" is our effort to meet that need. I'd add that there's a tendency among some on the right to simply disparage government rather than to put forward ideas to improve (and responsibly re-limit) it; to speak only about its size and to ignore its purposes; to talk about abstract theories at the expense of practical solutions to problems facing middle-class Americans. We're offering a conservative alternative to the failures of liberalism and doing so in a way that's both principled and potentially popular, that's consistent with our tradition and relevant to the challenges of our times. ...*

For the next part, [Rubin](#) asks about differences with Libertarians.

***The reform conservative idea makes a break with libertarians insofar as you recognize a large but limited government is here to stay and government does have a role in setting the ground rules for people to succeed. Is that inevitable, and, as an electoral matter, do Republicans still come out ahead?***

Levin: The role for government envisioned in these proposals is certainly an important role, but it is far more limited than the government we have now. It's about helping people succeed, rather than doing everything for them. Many libertarians would probably agree that this is the sort of role government should play, and it's certainly a set of policy proposals that's closer to where a lot of libertarians are than much of what the Republican Party has offered and done in the past few decades. But it's not based in a radically individualist notion of society. It's based in something more like Mike Lee's idea of the rugged American community — an idea with real liberty at its core. A lot of Americans can relate to that way of thinking about how our society works, so the politics of it do look more promising than the politics of the Republican agenda of the last few years.

Ponnuru: Libertarians come in many varieties, and I would think this agenda would have some appeal to the more practically minded among them. The government has done quite a lot to cartelize higher education, and libertarians have been among those most keen on pointing this out. As Andrew Kelly's chapter points out, there are a lot of ways to start breaking up that cartel — ways that don't pretend that we're going to just get rid of federal support for higher education.

Wehner: Our agenda isn't a libertarian ideal of course — there are, after all, intrinsic tensions that exists between conservatism and libertarianism — but if its policies were enacted into law most libertarians would, I think, be rather pleased; and they'd certainly be happier with what government would be doing than is now the case. Libertarians would be supportive, I should think, of our efforts to offer a different way of thinking about government, to move from administering large systems of service provision to empowering people to address the problems they confront on their own terms; to provide people with the resources and skills they need to address the challenges they face rather than to try to manage their decisions from on high. ...

In the third and final part Jennifer Rubin asks about the "other" marriage debate. **Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) talks about the "other" marriage debate. How does government and should government work to promote marriage, delayed childbearing and other behaviors that keep people out of poverty?**

Levin: Obviously the role and the potential of public policy is always going to be very limited when it comes to these kinds of issues, but there are ways that government could do far less damage and some modest ways of making it easier for people to make constructive choices. Several of the chapters of this book address those kinds of questions, and in particular the chapters by Brad Wilcox and Scott Winship. You can read summaries and the full chapters here.

Ponnuru: It might be helpful merely to publicize the "success sequence": Your odds of living in poverty are pretty low if you complete high school, get married and have children in that order. Policy might be able to help at the margin, by ending the marriage penalties that are implicit in various government programs — including Obamacare — and by lowering the tax burden on parents.

Wehner: This is an area where the government's capacity to improve things is especially limited. The truth is we don't really know what government can do to strengthen the institution of marriage and a marriage culture. As the marriage scholar Ron Haskins has pointed out, as the rates of single parenthood have risen and the consequences have become clear, all levels of

*government from local to federal have attempted to implement policies to address the problem — and all have met with very limited success. I agree with Ramesh; good policies might make some difference on the margins. But we're dealing with something extraordinary and unprecedented. In 2000, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan was asked to identify the biggest change he had seen in his 40-year political career. He responded that it was that the family structure had come apart all over the North Atlantic world, that it had happened in a historical instant, and that something that was not even imaginable in 1960 has now happened. What we have learned is that wise public policies in areas like crime, drug use, welfare and education can limit some of the damaging effects from the collapse of marriage. But that is quite a different matter from government being able to rebuild the institution of marriage. ...*

At the end of last week we spent some time with India's election. This week another major electoral turnaround was registered in Europe. [John Fund](#) calls it a "European Earthquake."

*How big was the "Euroskeptic" uprising in the elections for the European Parliament on Sunday? Martin Schulz of Germany, who is the left-wing candidate to become the next president of the European Commission, admitted that the results across the 28 member countries showed voters' "total loss of trust" in pro-Europe parties. Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister who heads a centrist bloc of deputies in the Parliament, told a reporter that he, too, is now a Euroskeptic who wants reform in Brussels.*

*But the reality is that most committed supporters of an ever more powerful European Union will be tempted to ignore Sunday's results, hoping that public dissatisfaction with bailouts and bureaucrats will abate. But the public might not play along. The best economic estimates are that Europe is facing another "lost decade" of economic growth — stagnant economies will do nothing to reduce sky-high unemployment among young people, and the need for more Eurocrisis bailouts will keep taxes high.*

*In Britain, the political earthquake was huge as the United Kingdom Independence Party, an avowedly Euroskeptic party, won 29 percent of the vote and became the first party other than the Conservatives and Labor to place first in a nationwide election in 108 years. Graham Watson, a defeated Liberal Democratic member of the European Parliament from Cornwall, told the BBC, "Britain is now more anti-European-integration than at any time since Napoleon." Daniel Hannan, a National Review contributor and Conservative member of the European Parliament, told me last month that "the elites who promised us that greater centralization of power in Brussels would lead to peace have instead delivered what I warned against: animosity between nations and the rise of extremists." ...*

**[Bret Stephens](#)** has more.

*... When a political genius named Jean Monnet began the work of creating the European Economic Community in the 1950s, he understood, as the historian Brendan Simms notes, that "unity could only be achieved through stealthy cooperation between the major European governments, beginning with the economy."*

*The best achievements of European institutions have all stemmed from removing restrictions—to trade, travel, residency and financial transactions. But for at least 30 years, the EU has mainly been in the business of imposing restrictions on everything from the judicial sentences that national courts can impose to the shape of the vegetables that Europeans get to eat. Stealth Europe transmogrified into Busybody Europe.*

*A decade ago it was conventional wisdom to observe that Europe had become a zone of perpetual peace, an agent of soft power and international law, Venus to America's Mars. But history is coming back to Europe, and not just at the far margin in places like Donetsk. The European Parliament may be mostly toothless as a political institution. But now there's no blinking at the fact that fascism is no longer just a piece of Europe's past but also a realistic possibility for its future.*

*There will be a temptation to bury the implications of this vote for another five years. But if youth unemployment remains at 25% in France and 57% in Spain, these elections will only be the beginning of another ugly chapter in European civilization. Mr. Putin can sense that the ghosts hovering over the continent work in his favor.*

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## Right Turn

### Reform conservatism's architects (part 1)

by Jennifer Rubin

Last week a group of conservative scholars, former officials and journalists rolled out "[Room To Grow: Conservative Reforms for Limited Government and a Thriving Middle Class](#)." The book and the reform conservative movement it champions came about after anti-government right-wingers blew themselves over the government shutdown, Obamacare proved to be as bad as conservatives said and multiple government scandals disillusioned voters and cast doubt on the workability of a giant liberal welfare state. Three authors of "Room to Grow" and I discussed their book and conservative reform. Below is the first part of our discussion (part 2 will be posted tomorrow):

***Bits and pieces of reform conservatism have been around since the original neo-cons of the 1950, and we've had compassionate conservatism. But it seems you are talking about a more fundamental revision in how the right looks at government. What prompted you to put it all together in a cohesive way? GOP political defeat? Obamacare?***

Yuval Levin: The context for this is really not so much a failure of conservatism as the failure of liberalism. The liberal welfare state has never been a very good match for the realities of American life, and that problem is getting worse and worse all the time as our economy and our society are increasingly moving away from a consolidated, centralized, "big institution" way of life. Americans understand that our institutions of government are not functioning well in the 21st century, and that the country's economic performance and the prospects of the middle class and

of those who want to join the middle class are held back by these failures. We're not living in a situation in which the left has a winning formula and the right has to learn from it (or vice versa). Both parties have been somewhat intellectually exhausted, but conservatives are in a far better position to recover from that and to offer the public an agenda that applies conservative principles to today's problems in ways very well suited to the concerns and anxieties of working families. The idea behind this book is really to put in one place some of the key conservative policy ideas that form the backbone of that kind of middle-class agenda. Many conservatives, for understandable reasons, have been focused in the past few years on restraining the Democrats, on preventing terrible things from happening. And that's crucial. But to make our case to the public, we have to also provide people with a vision of what a conservative approach to governing would involve now and how it would help people address the problems and challenges they're facing.

Ramesh Ponnuru: Every generation of conservatives has to apply conservative principles to the circumstances in which they find themselves, and I don't think we are trying to change those principles so much as do that work for our generation. I do think that Republicans' failure to make conservatism relevant to today—to supply a compelling answer to the question, how would a conservative agenda make life better for my family and my country—has contributed to their recent defeats.

Peter Wehner: Republican defeats aren't the sole reason I think this effort is necessary, but it's part of the reason. The Republican Party is the political home of the conservative movement, and so when it fails, conservatism is set back. The GOP needs a better, more comprehensive and more modern governing vision. "Room To Grow" is our effort to meet that need. I'd add that there's a tendency among some on the right to simply disparage government rather than to put forward ideas to improve (and responsibly re-limit) it; to speak only about its size and to ignore its purposes; to talk about abstract theories at the expense of practical solutions to problems facing middle-class Americans. We're offering a conservative alternative to the failures of liberalism and doing so in a way that's both principled and potentially popular, that's consistent with our tradition and relevant to the challenges of our times.

***When you present the ideas, some conservatives say, 'All that is nice, but can you cut government?'. What is the problem or the challenge with that perspective?***

Levin: There's nothing at all wrong with that perspective, but the question is *how* do we reduce the size and scope and reach of government? The answer to that can't be that what we want is just the liberal welfare state at a slightly lower cost so we just trim some pennies off the top. That's how conservatives have sounded to the country sometimes in recent years, and it's very important to clarify to people that what we're after is a different approach to government, that sees the role of government not as managing society or administering huge systems but rather facilitating success—setting the rules, enabling competition that improves how we provide public services, and making it possible for people to have the options and resources to meet the challenges they face. The reforms in this book would cut the size of government very substantially—especially because the health entitlement programs are the biggest drivers of growing federal spending and the health proposals in this book would reform them in ways that dramatically curtail those costs. But what's proposed here is a much bolder conservative leap to the right than just cutting the level of federal spending. This is about reconceiving the role of government along the lines of the conservative vision of society, in which what matters most about society happens in the space between the individual and the state, and government exists to enable society to thrive in that space rather than crowding it out and taking it over. This book takes that general vision and shows what it means in detail in particular policy areas.

Ponnuru: In pretty much every area the book considers, the idea is to move to a more modest conception of government. We want taxes, regulations and the flow of government money to do a lot less to shape health care, for example. We want government to do a lot less of this than Obamacare does, certainly, but also a lot less than the government did before Obamacare. But we do avoid the mistake of thinking that just cutting spending will get you there. More generally, we think it's important for conservatives to understand that while voters have a healthy skepticism of government and a desire to make it smaller, they also want to see problems solved and thus it's important to show how these impulses can be reconciled: how, that is, limited-government conservatism solves problems or allows us to make progress on them.

Wehner: Cutting government is, of course, important, but it can only really happen in a sustainable way if it comes in the context of reforms that would make government more effective, more efficient, more modern and more market-oriented. Education is a good example. Spending less on education, or getting rid of the Department of Education, might make sense. But improving education requires a series of reforms geared toward greater choice and competition, more transparency and more accountability. The proposals offered up by Rick Hess in "Room To Grow" would certainly do a lot more to educate students than cutting the federal and state education budgets. This whole discussion is also taking place within a certain context. Right now the problem with conservatives isn't that they're not talking enough about the evils of big government; it's that they're not talking enough about how conservative policies are going to improve, on a daily basis, the lives of middle-class Americans.

## Right Turn

### Reform conservatism's architects (part 2)

by Jennifer Rubin

Yesterday I shared the [first part](#) of my discussion with three key thinkers in the growing reform conservatism movement: Yuval Levin, Peter Wehner and Ramesh Ponnuru. Affirmative, forward-looking and enamored of a vibrant but limited federal government, reform conservatism offers a way forward for the GOP. Although his wording was again maladroit, Karl Rove got it partially right when he said Hillary Clinton is "old and stale." Actually her *ideas* are, as the slow-motion collapse of the liberal welfare state plays out before our eyes:



*U.S. Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah)*

***The reform conservative idea makes a break with libertarians insofar as you recognize a large but limited government is here to stay and government does have a role in setting the ground rules for people to succeed. Is that inevitable, and, as an electoral matter, do Republicans still come out ahead?***

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Ponnuru: Libertarians come in many varieties, and I would think this agenda would have some appeal to the more practically minded among them. The government has done quite a lot to cartelize higher education, and libertarians have been among those most keen on pointing this out. As Andrew Kelly's chapter points out, there are a lot of ways to start breaking up that cartel — ways that don't pretend that we're going to just get rid of federal support for higher education.

Wehner: Our agenda isn't a libertarian ideal of course — there are, after all, intrinsic tensions that exists between conservatism and libertarianism — but if its policies were enacted into law most libertarians would, I think, be rather pleased; and they'd certainly be happier with what government would be doing than is now the case. Libertarians would be supportive, I should think, of our efforts to offer a different way of thinking about government, to move from administering large systems of service provision to empowering people to address the problems they confront on their own terms; to provide people with the resources and skills they need to address the challenges they face rather than to try to manage their decisions from on high.

***When you talk about moderation, incrementalism and humility in the reform conservative movement some of our friends on the right think this is just about moving the deck chairs around on the Titanic. Can you talk about how a conservative reform mind-set and rhetorical style do not mean timidity either on policy or politics?***

Levin: Maybe there's an element of temperamental moderation in some of our work, but it's certainly not about moderation as a substantive matter. What we're proposing would take the Republican Party well to the right of where it has been in recent years, in the sense that it offers a practical vision of government that is not just a cheaper and smaller version of the Great Society welfare state but is an applied conservatism built around an idea of American society in which the role of government is a decidedly supporting role. Look at each of these proposals— from the Obamacare replacement to tax reform, education reforms, safety net reforms, financial reforms and the anti-cronyism agenda and what you find is a much more ambitious conservative policy agenda. Incrementalism is of course unavoidable in politics — you have to get where you're going step by step. But it has to be informed by where you want to go, and that vision in this case is hardly timid. Humility is an essential conservative virtue: humility about what government can achieve, and about how much we can ever know about how to address large, complicated social problems. But getting to a government that embodies that humility, starting from the government we have now, which decidedly doesn't, is going to require some very major steps to the right and some very bold reforms, and those are what you see in this book.

So while there is certainly a strong case for humility (which could even be called timidity) in how government should approach society, getting to a government that works that way will require boldness and energy, and that's what we propose.

Ponnuru: Replacing Obamacare, making colleges innovate and cut costs, providing tax relief to middle-class families: None of that is especially timid. The modesty of this agenda consists of its willingness to work with the grain of American society rather than try to reshape it according to an ideological plan. (As an aside, though, I do think that boldness is overrated as a selling point for an agenda.)

Wehner: I don't think the agenda that we're offering is at all timid. It's rather bold, I would say, but it's also realistic. It's operating within the realities of American political life, which is what you would expect a conservative approach to do. It isn't a pipe dream, and it's not radical. Speaking of which: My preference would be for the rhetoric of conservatism, or at least some of those who claim to speak for conservatism, would be somewhat less radical and the proposals they champion somewhat more far-reaching. In the 2012 presidential race, for example, Michele Bachmann portrayed herself as a crusader on behalf of smaller government. Yet when it came to an acid test like reforming Medicare, a huge driver of our debt, she was rather timid. What works, I think, is restrained rhetoric, combined with a certain substantive boldness, combined with greater policy precision. One final point: It is a reform agenda that will actually succeed in relimiting government. Apocalyptic language and ferocious anti-government rhetoric may be therapeutic, but the real-world results would be to leave the liberal welfare state untouched.

***Here, I'm probably touching on a third rail, but Jeb Bush talks about the role immigrants in reviving and rejuvenating American society [and] in that space government should open up and create ground rules for success. Doesn't that have to be part of the equation?***

Levin: The problems with our broken immigration system certainly need to be addressed. A reform of immigration laws that secures the border, allows for more higher-skilled immigration and reconceives of how we think about lower-skilled immigration so that we guard the interests of low-income Americans while offering opportunities for people motivated to join our society would of course be an improvement over our current immigration laws, and some of the authors of the essays in this book (myself included) have proposed versions of such proposals. It's an issue on which there is a fair bit of common ground but obviously also some very divisive disagreements on the right that have not proven easy to resolve, and we certainly wouldn't presume we could resolve them here.

Ponnuru: Conservatives, obviously, disagree among themselves about immigration policy, but I think people on both sides of the divide ought to be able to embrace a lot of the conservative reforms in this book. My own view is that we should move sequentially on immigration: first pairing increased enforcement at the border and workplace with an amnesty limited to people who were brought here as minors, then moving to a broader amnesty once we know the enforcement is working. And we should keep in mind that immigration has brought a lot of economically insecure people into our country, which increases the need for conservatives to offer an agenda that makes it easier for people to climb the economic ladder.

Wehner: I agree with Yuval and Ramesh. There's a fair amount of common ground on immigration among most conservatives, from border security to increasing the number of high-skilled immigrants to rethinking the overriding preference we give to so-called family reunification to assimilation to deporting illegal immigrants who have committed violent crimes.



There are even some common assumptions when it comes to those in America who are here illegally. Let me be specific. Even most of those who are visible critics of illegal immigration don't support mass deportation, while on the flip side those who are less worried about the effects of illegal immigration don't tend to support blanket amnesty. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, there's a tendency to exaggerate the divisions that exist rather than focus on the things we share in common. It shouldn't be all that difficult to settle on an immigration approach that most people on the right can support, if not in every respect than certainly as an improvement to the current system.

## Right Turn

### [Reform conservatism's architects \(part 3\)](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

Here is the third and final part of my discussion with reform conservatism advocates Yuval Levin, Peter Wehner and Ramesh Ponnuru.



*Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.) helped roll out the reform conservative agenda last week at a panel at the American Enterprise Institute.*

***Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) talks about the “other” marriage debate. How does government and should government work to promote marriage, delayed childbearing and other behaviors that keep people out of poverty?***

Levin: Obviously the role and the potential of public policy is always going to be very limited when it comes to these kinds of issues, but there are ways that government could do far less damage and some modest ways of making it easier for people to make constructive choices.

Several of the chapters of this book address those kinds of questions, and in particular the chapters by Brad Wilcox and Scott Winship. You can read summaries and the [full chapters here](#).

Ponnuru: It might be helpful merely to publicize the “success sequence”: Your odds of living in poverty are pretty low if you complete high school, get married and have children in that order. Policy might be able to help at the margin, by ending the marriage penalties that are implicit in various government programs — including Obamacare — and by lowering the tax burden on parents.

Wehner: This is an area where the government’s capacity to improve things is especially limited. The truth is we don’t really know what government can do to strengthen the institution of marriage and a marriage culture. As the marriage scholar Ron Haskins has pointed out, as the rates of single parenthood have risen and the consequences have become clear, all levels of government from local to federal have attempted to implement policies to address the problem — and all have met with very limited success. I agree with Ramesh; good policies might make some difference on the margins. But we’re dealing with something extraordinary and unprecedented. In 2000, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan was asked to identify the biggest change he had seen in his 40-year political career. He responded that it was that the family structure had come apart all over the North Atlantic world, that it had happened in a historical instant, and that something that was not even imaginable in 1960 has now happened. What we have learned is that wise public policies in areas like crime, drug use, welfare and education can limit some of the damaging effects from the collapse of marriage. But that is quite a different matter from government being able to rebuild the institution of marriage.

***Last question: In stressing experimentation do conservatives need to make a federalism pitch on practical grounds (better services, highlight success stories) rather than on a theoretical basis citing the 10th amendment? Other than block granting what would a surge in federalism require?***

Levin: Experimentation involves much more than federalism, of course, but to the extent it’s about federalism it is certainly about more than just block grants. In areas like health care, education, employment and the like it would also involve removing federal regulatory barriers that prevent the states from trying different approaches to addressing public problems, and it would involve making the relationship between the federal government and the states much clearer and much less entangled, so that each level of government is acting where it has some comparative advantage and we don’t have the kind of deeply problematic intermingling of responsibilities, funds and incentives that now distorts so much public policy in America. Here again, the relevant chapters (by Jim Capretta, Rick Hess, Andrew Kelly and Scott Winship, among others) put the matter very well, and Ramesh’s chapter on conservative constitutionalism really helps to clarify the issue.

Ponnuru: The first thing it would require is that we get federalism right in our own minds. The point of federalism is not to empower state governments; it’s to promote accountability and choice and in that way to encourage limited and effective government. That means: no more expanding state governments on the federal dime. In education, I think we’d be taking a step forward, as Rick Hess explains in the book, by making the goals the feds set for states to receive federal money clearer while freeing the states to meet those goals however they want.

Wehner: When I worked for Bill Bennett when he was Secretary of Education, we put out a series of booklets on What Works in American education. As a general matter that is, I think, a

very good way to approach governing, with emphasis on experience, on empirical evidence, on real-world successes. And we can certainly learn a great deal from the states. The argument for federalism, then, is practical, not just theoretical, and we should do more to publicize what works in the states. I'd only add one other thought: federalism is consistent with conservatism in that it assumes a certain degree of modesty and humility. We don't pretend politicians in Washington, D.C. know all the answers, that one size fits all, and programs that work in some states might work less well in other states. After the arrogance of the Obama years — when the president and those in his administration have acted as if they are all-knowing, all-seeing, all-wise — there is something refreshing about a more modest approach to governing.

## National Review

### European Earthquake

#### *The voters demonstrate their Euroskepticism, but will elites listen?*

by John Fund

How big was the “Euroskeptic” uprising in the elections for the European Parliament on Sunday? Martin Schulz of Germany, who is the left-wing candidate to become the next president of the European Commission, admitted that the results across the 28 member countries showed voters’ “total loss of trust” in pro-Europe parties. Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister who heads a centrist bloc of deputies in the Parliament, told a reporter that he, too, is now a Euroskeptic who wants reform in Brussels.

But the reality is that most committed supporters of an ever more powerful European Union will be tempted to ignore Sunday’s results, hoping that public dissatisfaction with bailouts and bureaucrats will abate. But the public might not play along. The best economic estimates are that Europe is facing another “lost decade” of economic growth — stagnant economies will do nothing to reduce sky-high unemployment among young people, and the need for more Eurocrisis bailouts will keep taxes high.

In Britain, the political earthquake was huge as the United Kingdom Independence Party, an avowedly Euroskeptic party, won 29 percent of the vote and became the first party other than the Conservatives and Labor to place first in a nationwide election in 108 years. Graham Watson, a defeated Liberal Democratic member of the European Parliament from Cornwall, told the BBC, “Britain is now more anti-European-integration than at any time since Napoleon.” Daniel Hannan, a National Review contributor and Conservative member of the European Parliament, told me last month that “the elites who promised us that greater centralization of power in Brussels would lead to peace have instead delivered what I warned against: animosity between nations and the rise of extremists.”

In bemoaning the bureaucratization, Hannan mentioned the remarkable showing of France’s National Front, which came in first in Sunday’s vote with 25 percent. (It won only 6 percent of the vote in the 2009 European Parliament elections.) While the party has moderated its xenophobic message since founder Jean-Marie Le Pen retired as its leader, the Front still harbors enough sketchy characters to make UKIP leader Nigel Farage promise that he will not formally cooperate with them in the European Parliament.

All across Europe, voters have lost faith in traditional parties in direct proportion to the collapse of economic growth. In countries with free-market growth policies — such as the Baltic states — ruling parties actually gained votes in Sunday's vote. But in Spain, France, Greece, and other countries, the traditional major parties of the Left and Right won less than half the vote. Even in Germany, the large nation most clearly committed to European integration, an openly Euroskeptic party pulled in 7 percent of the vote and will enter the European Parliament for the first time.

The reason for all this ferment is clearly economic dissatisfaction. In France, where growth is zero, two-thirds of voters recently told pollsters for the *Financial Times* that the economy is worse now than it was a year ago. In Italy, too, most voters said the economy is weaker than it was a year ago. Asked if they felt more secure in their jobs, 58 percent of Italians answered: "No, not at all." In the five largest European countries, more than half of voters in the [FT poll](#) agreed with the statement that their country had "too many immigrants from the EU."

Sadly, European Union leaders have in the past demonstrated a bullheaded refusal to listen to voters who are skeptical of European centralization. The bureaucrats at the helm ignore referendums that go against the wishes of Brussels, dismiss protests against economic bailouts, and give only lip service to addressing the public's desire for greater accountability and transparency.

Hannan says that despite such a record, there is still time for Europe to preserve the best of the postwar progress it's made in bringing nations together — the free movement of goods, services, capital, and tourists — while avoiding the mistakes of misbegotten political union. "The voters are making their views clear," he told me. "The question now is whether any of the political elites will finally pay attention and engage in real reform."

**WSJ**

## **The Ghosts of Europe**

***Why fascism is back in fashion from Athens to Paris.***

by Bret Stephens

On the view that there's a silver lining to most things, consider the European election results. Yes, fascism is back, officially, ugly as ever. But at least Americans might be spared lectures from the bien-pensant about the crudeness of U.S. politics vis-à-vis Europe's.

Now, whenever I hear about the National Front, I'll reach for my Second Amendment.

Many are the blameworthy in this disgrace to a continent, but let's start with the most blameworthy: the French electorate. Last week, Jean-Marie Le Pen, National Front founder and the party's hyena in winter, suggested a method for how Europe could solve its "immigration problem": "Monseigneur Ebola," he said, "could sort that out in three months."

One in four French voters cast their ballots for the National Front, edging out the center-right UMP and trouncing the governing Socialists. On election night Sunday, Mr. Le Pen's daughter and current party leader, Marine Le Pen, declared: "Our people demand just one politics. The politics of the French, for the French." What's French for Ein Volk ?

Ms. Le Pen is supposed to be softer and smoother face of her father's party, but the evidence of that is hard to see. Last month she paid a visit to Moscow, lambasted the European Union for declaring a "Cold War" on Russia and embraced separatism in Ukraine. As for [Vladimir Putin](#), she praised him in a recent interview as a "patriot" who "upholds the sovereignty of his people" and defends "the values of European civilization."



*National Front leader Marine Le Pen and her father, Jean-Marie, in 2012.*

Values, presumably, such as invading and intimidating neighbors, stuffing ballot boxes, jailing dissidents and attempting to restore the reputation of the Soviet Union.

The Kremlin has also made overtures to Hungary's Jobbik party, which took nearly 15% of the vote in last week's election, as well as to Greece's Golden Dawn, which got 9.4%. These parties aren't neo-fascist, in the early Benito Mussolini mold. They're neo-Nazi, in the late Ernst Röhm mold. Golden Dawn marches under a swastika-like banner. As for Jobbik, when the World Jewish Congress held a meeting in Budapest last year, the party organized a rally to denounce "the Israeli conquerors, these investors, [who] should look for another country in the world for themselves because Hungary is not for sale."

This, too, is a voice of "European civilization."

Next up on the guilty list is Europe's elite political class, the let-them-eat-cake aristocracy of reptiles that still hasn't figured out why their political forbears were marched up to the guillotine.

In the [New York Times](#), former Le Monde editor Sylvie Kauffmann wrote about the rehabilitation of [Dominique Strauss-Kahn](#), or DSK, just three years after the former International Monetary Fund chief famously fell from grace. A new French documentary on the euro crisis gives DSK prominent billing. "Watching the documentary at home," Ms. Kauffmann relates, "Antoine Cachin, a French business consultant, said, 'D.S.K. stood out as the smartest one,' adding:



'That's what I like about him. He made you feel intelligent. He gave the impression that France has a strategy.' "

Mr. Strauss-Kahn's contribution to French political economy, when he was finance minister in the late 1990s, was the 35-hour workweek, the scheme to increase employment by treating people as matters of arithmetic. When the French smart set become nostalgic for DSK, you begin to understand, almost, how 25% of the French electorate winds up voting for thugs.

And then there is Brussels.

When a political genius named Jean Monnet began the work of creating the European Economic Community in the 1950s, he understood, as the historian Brendan Simms notes, that "unity could only be achieved through stealthy cooperation between the major European governments, beginning with the economy."

The best achievements of European institutions have all stemmed from removing restrictions—to trade, travel, residency and financial transactions. But for at least 30 years, the EU has mainly been in the business of *imposing* restrictions on everything from the judicial sentences that national courts can impose to the shape of the vegetables that Europeans get to eat. Stealth Europe transmogrified into Busybody Europe.

A decade ago it was conventional wisdom to observe that Europe had become a zone of perpetual peace, an agent of soft power and international law, Venus to America's Mars. But history is coming back to Europe, and not just at the far margin in places like Donetsk. The European Parliament may be mostly toothless as a political institution. But now there's no blinking at the fact that fascism is no longer just a piece of Europe's past but also a realistic possibility for its future.

There will be a temptation to bury the implications of this vote for another five years. But if youth unemployment remains at 25% in France and 57% in Spain, these elections will only be the beginning of another ugly chapter in European civilization. Mr. Putin can sense that the ghosts hovering over the continent work in his favor.