

# WHEN AND WHY NATIONALISM BEATS GLOBALISM

And how moral psychology can help explain and reduce tensions between the two, by **Jonathan Haidt**

What on earth is going on in the Western democracies? From the rise of Donald Trump in the United States and an assortment of right-wing parties across Europe through the 23 June Brexit vote, many on the Left have the sense that something dangerous and ugly is spreading: right-wing populism, seen as the Zika virus of politics. Something has gotten into ‘those people’ that makes them vote in ways that seem—to their critics—likely to harm their own material interests, at least if their leaders follow through in implementing isolationist policies that slow economic growth.

Most analyses published since the Brexit vote focus on economic factors and some version of the ‘left behind’ thesis<sup>1</sup>—globalisation has raised prosperity all over the world, with the striking exception of the working classes in Western societies. These less educated members of the richest countries lost access to well-paid but relatively low-skilled jobs, which were shipped overseas or given to immigrants willing to work for less. In communities where wages have stagnated or declined, the ever-rising opulence, rents and confidence of London and other super-cities has bred resentment.

A smaller set of analyses, particularly in the United States, has focused on the psychological trait of authoritarianism<sup>2</sup> to explain why these populist movements are often so hostile to immigration, and why they usually have an outright racist fringe.

Globalisation and authoritarianism are both essential parts of the story, but in this essay I will put them together in a new way. I’ll tell a story with four chapters that begins by endorsing the distinction made by the intellectual historian Michael Lind,<sup>3</sup> and other commentators, between globalists and nationalists—these are good descriptions of the two

teams of combatants emerging in so many Western nations. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French National Front, pointed to the same dividing line last December when she portrayed the battle in France as one between ‘globalists’ and ‘patriots’.

But rather than focusing on the nationalists as the people who need to be explained by experts, I’ll begin the story with the globalists. I’ll show how globalisation and rising prosperity have changed the values and behaviour of the urban elite, leading them to talk and act in ways that unwittingly activate authoritarian tendencies in a subset of the nationalists. I’ll show why immigration has been so central in nearly all right-wing populist movements. It’s not just the spark, it’s the explosive material, and those who dismiss anti-immigrant sentiment as mere racism have missed several important aspects of moral psychology related to the general human need to live in a stable and coherent moral order. Once moral psychology is brought into the story and added on to the economic and authoritarianism explanations, it becomes possible to offer some advice for reducing the intensity of the recent wave of conflicts.



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## Chapter one: rise of the globalists

As nations grow prosperous, their values change in predictable ways. The most detailed longitudinal research on these changes comes from the World Values Survey (WVS),<sup>4</sup> which asks representative samples of people in dozens of countries about their values and beliefs. The WVS has now collected and published data in six ‘waves’ since the early 1980s; the most recent survey included 60 countries. Nearly all of the countries are now far wealthier than they were in the 1980s, and many made a transition from communism to capitalism and from dictatorship to democracy in the interim. How did these momentous changes affect their values?

Each country has followed a unique trajectory, but if we zoom out far enough some general trends emerge from the WVS data.<sup>5</sup> Countries seem to move in two directions, along two axes: first, as they industrialise, they move away from ‘traditional values’ in which religion, ritual and deference to authorities are important, and toward ‘secular rational’ values that are more open to change, progress and social engineering based on rational considerations. Second, as they grow wealthier and more citizens move into the service sector, nations move away from ‘survival values’ emphasising the economic and physical security found in one’s family, tribe and other parochial groups, toward ‘self-expression or ‘emancipative values’ that emphasise individual rights and protections—not just for oneself, but as a matter of principle, for everyone. Here is a summary of those changes from the introduction to Christian Welzel’s enlightening book *Freedom Rising*:

. . . fading existential pressures [i.e., threats and challenges to survival] open people’s minds, making them prioritize freedom over security, autonomy over authority, diversity over uniformity, and creativity over discipline. By the same token, persistent existential pressures keep people’s minds closed, in which case they emphasize the opposite priorities . . . the existentially relieved state of mind is the source of tolerance and solidarity beyond one’s in-group; the existentially stressed

state of mind is the source of discrimination and hostility against out-groups.

Democratic capitalism—in societies with good rule of law and non-corrupt institutions—has generated steady increases in living standards and existential security for many decades now. As societies become more prosperous and safe, they generally become more open and tolerant. Combined with vastly greater access to the food, movies and consumer products of other cultures brought to us by globalisation and the internet, this openness leads almost inevitably to the rise of a cosmopolitan attitude, usually most visible in the young urban elite. Local ties weaken, parochialism becomes a dirty word, and people begin to think of their fellow human beings as fellow ‘citizens of the world’ (to quote candidate Barack Obama in Berlin in 2008). The word ‘cosmopolitan’ comes from Greek roots meaning, literally, ‘citizen of the world’. Cosmopolitans embrace diversity and welcome immigration, often turning those topics into litmus tests for moral respectability.

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For example, in 2007, former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown gave a speech that included the phrase, ‘British jobs for British workers’. The phrase provoked anger and scorn from many of Brown’s colleagues in the Labour party. In an essay in *Prospect* magazine David Goodhart described the scene at a British centre-left social event a few days after Brown’s remark:

The people around me entered a bidding war to express their outrage at Brown’s slogan which was finally triumphantly closed by one who declared, to general approval, that it was ‘racism, pure and simple’. I remember thinking afterwards how odd the conversation would have sounded to most other people in this

country. Gordon Brown's phrase may have been clumsy and cynical but he didn't actually say British jobs for white British workers. In most other places in the world today, and indeed probably in Britain itself until about 25 years ago, such a statement about a job preference for national citizens would have seemed so banal as to be hardly worth uttering. Now the language of liberal universalism has ruled it beyond the pale.<sup>6</sup>

The shift that Goodhart notes among the Left-leaning British elite is related to the shift toward 'emancipative' values described by Welzel. Parochialism is bad and universalism is good. Goodhart quotes George Monbiot,<sup>7</sup> a leading figure of the British Left:

Internationalism . . . tells us that someone living in Kinshasa is of no less worth than someone living in Kensington . . . Patriotism, if it means anything, tells us we should favour the interests of British people [before the Congolese]. How do you reconcile this choice with liberalism? How . . . do you distinguish it from racism?

Monbiot's claim that patriotism is indistinguishable from racism illustrates the universalism that has characterised elements of the globalist Left in many Western nations for several decades. John Lennon wrote the globalist anthem in 1971. After asking us to imagine that there's no heaven, and before asking us to imagine no possessions, Lennon asks us to:

Imagine there's no countries; it isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too  
Imagine all the people living life in peace.  
You may say I'm a dreamer,  
but I'm not the only one.  
I hope some day you'll join us,  
and the world will be one.

This is a vision of heaven for multicultural globalists. But it's naiveté, sacrilege and treason for nationalists.

## Chapter two: globalists and nationalists grow further apart on immigration

Nationalists see patriotism as a virtue; they think their country and its culture are unique and worth preserving. This is a real moral commitment, not a pose to cover up racist bigotry. Some nationalists do believe that their country is better than all others, and some nationalisms are plainly illiberal and overtly racist. But as many defenders of patriotism have pointed out, you love your spouse because she or he is yours, not because you think your spouse is superior to all others. Nationalists feel a bond with their country, and they believe that this bond imposes moral obligations both ways: Citizens have a duty to love and serve their country, and governments are duty bound to protect their own people. Governments should place their citizens' interests above the interests of people in other countries.

There is nothing necessarily racist or base about this arrangement or social contract. Having a shared sense of identity, norms and history generally promotes trust. Having no such shared sense leads to the condition that the sociologist Émile Durkheim described as 'anomie' or normlessness. Societies with high trust, or high social capital, produce many beneficial outcomes for their citizens: lower crime rates, lower transaction costs for businesses, higher levels of prosperity, and a propensity toward generosity, among others. A liberal nationalist can reasonably argue that the debate over immigration policy in Europe is not a case of what is moral versus what is base, but a case of two clashing moral visions, incommensurate (*à la* Isaiah Berlin). The trick, from this point of view, is figuring out how to balance reasonable concerns about the integrity of one's own community with the obligation to welcome strangers, particularly strangers in dire need.

So how have nationalists and globalists responded to the European immigration crisis? For the past year or two we've all seen shocking images of refugees washing up alive and dead on European beaches, marching in long lines across south-eastern Europe, scaling fences, filling train stations, and hiding and dying in trucks and train tunnels. If you're a European globalist, you were

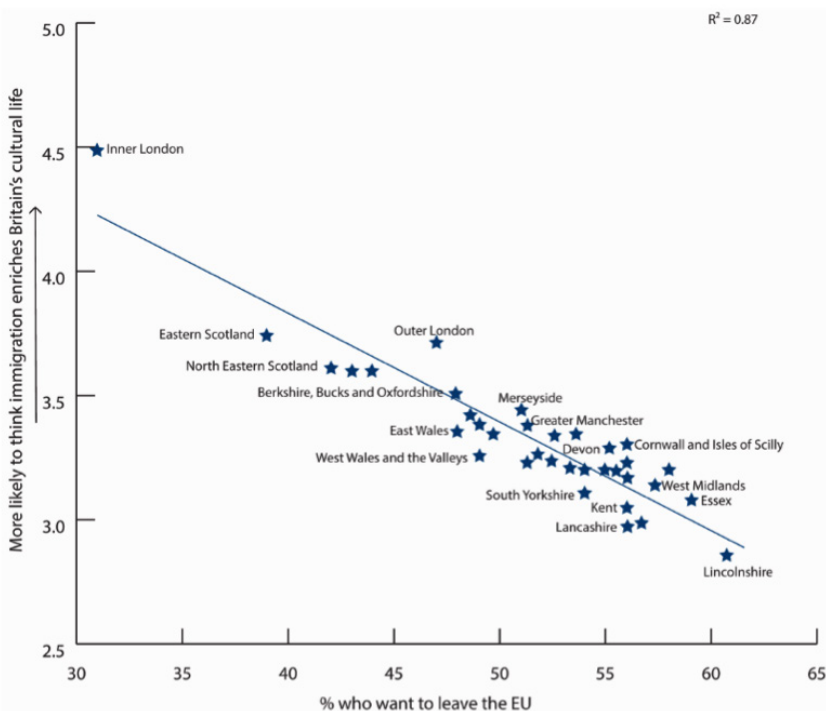
probably thrilled in August 2015 when Angela Merkel announced Germany's open-door policy to refugees and asylum seekers. There are millions of people in need, and (according to some globalists) national borders are arbitrary and immoral.

But the globalists are concentrated in the capital cities, commercial hubs and university towns—the places that are furthest along on the values shift found in the World Values Survey data. The Figure shows this geographic disjunction in the UK, using data collected in 2014. Positive sentiment toward immigrants is plotted on the Y axis, and desire for Britain to leave the EU on the X axis. Residents of Inner London are extreme outliers on both dimensions when compared to other cities and regions of the UK, and even when compared to residents of outer London.

But if you are a European nationalist, watching the nightly news may have felt like watching the spread of the Zika virus, moving steadily northward from the chaos zones of southwest Asia and north Africa. Only a few right-wing nationalist leaders tried to stop it, such as Victor Orban in Hungary. The globalist elite seemed to be cheering the human tidal wave onward, welcoming it into the heart of Europe, and then demanding that every country accept and resettle a large number of refugees.

And these demands, epicentred in Brussels, came after decades of debate in which nationalists had been arguing that Europe has already been too open and has already taken in so many Muslim immigrants that the cultures and traditions of European societies were threatened. Long before the flow of Syrian asylum seekers arrived in Europe there were initiatives to ban minarets in Switzerland and burkas in France. There were riots in Arab neighbourhoods of Paris and Marseilles, and attacks on Jews and synagogues throughout Europe. There were hidden terrorist cells that planned and executed the attacks of September 11 in the United States, attacks on trains and buses in Madrid and London, and the slaughter of the *Charlie Hebdo* staff in Paris.

### British towns that favour Brexit have more negative views of immigrants. Inner London is an outlier.



**Source:** John Springford, Philip McCann, Bart Los and Mark Thissen, 'Brexiting Yourself in the Foot', Insight (Centre for European Reform, 13 June 2016) using 2014 data from Nick Vivyan and Chris Hanretty, 'Estimating Constituency Opinion', [www.constituencyopinion.org.uk/data](http://www.constituencyopinion.org.uk/data)

By the summer of 2015 the nationalist side was already at the boiling point, shouting 'enough is enough, close the tap', when the globalists proclaimed, 'let us open the floodgates, it's the compassionate thing to do, and if you oppose us you are a racist.' Might that not provoke even fairly reasonable people to rage? Might that not make many of them more receptive to arguments, ideas and political parties that lean toward the illiberal side of nationalism and that were considered taboo just a few years earlier?

### Chapter three: Muslim immigration triggers the authoritarian alarm

Nationalists in Europe have been objecting to mass immigration for decades, so the gigantic surge of asylum seekers in 2015 was bound to increase their anger and their support for right-wing nationalist parties. Globalists tend to explain these reactions as 'racism, pure and simple', or as the small-minded small-town selfishness of people who don't want to lose either jobs or benefits to foreigners.



Racism is clearly evident in some of the things that some nationalists say in interviews, chant at soccer matches, or write on the internet with the protection of anonymity. But ‘racism’ is a shallow term when used as an explanation. It asserts that there are some people who just don’t like anyone different from themselves—particularly if they have darker skin. They have no valid reason for this dislike; they just dislike difference, and that’s all we need to know to understand their rage.

But that is not all we need to know. On closer inspection, racism usually turns out to be deeply bound up with moral concerns. (I use the term ‘moral’ here in a purely descriptive sense to mean concerns that seem—for the people we are discussing—to be matters of good and evil; I am not saying that racism is in fact morally good or morally correct.) People don’t hate others just because they have darker skin or differently shaped noses; they hate people whom they perceive as having values that are incompatible with their own, or who (they believe) engage in behaviours they find abhorrent, or whom they perceive to be a threat to something they hold dear. These moral concerns may be out of touch with reality, and they are routinely amplified by demagogues. But if we want to understand the recent rise of right-wing populist movements, then ‘racism’ can’t be the stopping point; it must be the beginning of the inquiry.

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Among the most important guides in this inquiry is the political scientist Karen Stenner. In 2005 Stenner published a book called *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, an academic work full of graphs, descriptions of regression analyses, and discussions of scholarly disputes over the nature of authoritarianism. (It therefore has not had a wide readership.) Her core finding is that authoritarianism is not a stable personality trait. It is rather a psychological predisposition to become intolerant when the person perceives a certain kind of threat. It’s as though some people have a

button on their foreheads, and when the button is pushed, they suddenly become intensely focused on defending their in-group, kicking out foreigners and non-conformists, and stamping out dissent within the group. At those times they are more attracted to strongmen and the use of force. At other times, when they perceive no such threat, they are not unusually intolerant. So the key is to understand what pushes that button.

The answer, Stenner suggests, is what she calls ‘normative threat’, which basically means a threat to the integrity of the moral order (as they perceive it). It is the perception that ‘we’ are coming apart:

The experience or perception of disobedience to group authorities or authorities unworthy of respect, nonconformity to group norms or norms proving questionable, lack of consensus in group values and beliefs and, in general, diversity and freedom ‘run amok’ should activate the predisposition and increase the manifestation of these characteristic attitudes and behaviors.

So authoritarians are not being selfish. They are not trying to protect their wallets or even their families. They are trying to protect their group or society. Some authoritarians see their race or bloodline as the thing to be protected, and these people make up the deeply racist subset of right-wing populist movements, including the fringe that is sometimes attracted to neo-Nazism. They would not even accept immigrants who fully assimilated to the culture. But more typically, in modern Europe and America, it is the nation and its culture that nationalists want to preserve.

Stenner identifies authoritarians in her many studies by the degree to which they endorse a few items about the most important values children should learn at home, for example, ‘obedience’ (versus ‘independence’ and ‘tolerance and respect for other people’). She then describes a series of studies she did using a variety of methods and cross-national datasets. In one set of experiments she asked Americans to read fabricated news stories about how their nation is changing. When they read that Americans are changing in

ways that make them more similar to each other, authoritarians were no more racist and intolerant than others. But when Stenner gave them a news story suggesting that Americans are becoming more morally diverse, the button got pushed, the ‘authoritarian dynamic’ kicked in, and they became more racist and intolerant. For example, ‘maintaining order in the nation’ became a higher national priority while ‘protecting freedom of speech’ became a lower priority. They became more critical of homosexuality, abortion and divorce.

One of Stenner’s most helpful contributions is her finding that authoritarians are psychologically distinct from ‘status quo conservatives’ who are the more prototypical conservatives—cautious about radical change. Status quo conservatives compose the long and distinguished lineage from Edmund Burke’s prescient reflections and fears about the early years of the French revolution through William F. Buckley’s statement that his conservative magazine *National Review* would ‘stand athwart history yelling “Stop!”.’

Status quo conservatives are not natural allies of authoritarians, who often favour radical change and are willing to take big risks to implement untested policies. This is why so many Republicans—and nearly all conservative intellectuals—oppose Donald Trump; he is simply not a conservative by the test of temperament or values. But status quo conservatives can be drawn into alliance with authoritarians when they perceive that progressives have subverted the country’s traditions and identity so badly that dramatic political actions (such as Brexit, or banning Muslim immigration to the United States) are seen as the only remaining way of yelling ‘Stop!’. Brexit can seem less radical than the prospect of absorption into the ‘ever closer union’ of the EU.

So now we can see why immigration—particularly the recent surge in Muslim immigration from Syria—has caused such powerfully polarised reactions in so many European countries, and even in the United States where the number of Muslim immigrants is low. Muslim Middle Eastern immigrants are seen by nationalists as posing a far greater threat of terrorism than are immigrants from any other region or religion. But Stenner invites us to look past the security threat and

examine the normative threat. Islam asks adherents to live in ways that can make assimilation into secular egalitarian Western societies more difficult compared to other groups. (The same can be said for Orthodox Jews, and Stenner’s authoritarian dynamic can help explain why we are seeing a resurgence of right-wing anti-Semitism in the United States.) Muslims don’t just observe different customs in their private lives; they often request and receive accommodations in law and policy from their host countries, particularly in matters related to gender. Some of the most pitched battles of recent decades in France and other European countries have been fought over the veiling and covering of women, and the related need for privacy and gender segregation. For example, some public swimming pools in Sweden now offer times of day when only women are allowed to swim.<sup>8</sup> This runs contrary to strong Swedish values regarding gender equality and non-differentiation.

So whether you are a status quo conservative concerned about rapid change or an authoritarian who is hypersensitive to normative threat, high levels of Muslim immigration into your Western nation are likely to threaten your core moral concerns. But as soon as you speak up to voice those concerns, globalists will scorn you as a racist and a rube. When the globalists—even those who run the centre-right parties in your country—come down on you like that, where can you turn? The answer, increasingly, is to the far right-wing nationalist parties in Europe, and to Donald Trump, who has engineered a hostile takeover of the Republican party in America.

*The Authoritarian Dynamic* was published in 2005 and the word ‘Muslim’ occurs just six times (in contrast to 100 appearances of the word ‘black’). But Stenner’s book offers a kind of Rosetta stone for interpreting the rise of right-wing populism and its focus on Muslims in 2016. Stenner notes that her theory ‘explains the kind of intolerance that seems to “come out of nowhere”, that can spring up in tolerant and intolerant cultures alike, producing sudden changes in behavior that cannot be accounted for by slowly changing cultural traditions.’

She contrasts her theory with those who see an unstoppable tide of history moving away from

traditions and ‘toward greater respect for individual freedom and difference’, and who expect people to continue evolving ‘into more perfect liberal democratic citizens’. She does not say which theorists she has in mind, but Welzel and his World Values Survey collaborators, as well as Francis Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ thesis, seem to be likely candidates. Stenner does not share the optimism of those theorists about the future of Western liberal democracies. She acknowledges the general trends toward tolerance, but she predicts that these very trends create conditions that hyper-activate authoritarians and produce a powerful backlash. She offered this prophecy:

[T]he increasing license allowed by those evolving cultures *generates the very conditions guaranteed to goad latent authoritarians to sudden and intense, perhaps violent, and almost certainly unexpected, expressions of intolerance*. Likewise, then, if intolerance is more a product of individual psychology than of cultural norms . . . we get a different vision of the future, and a different understanding of whose problem this is and will be, than if intolerance is an almost accidental by-product of simple attachment to tradition. The kind of intolerance that springs from aberrant individual psychology, rather than the disinterested absorption of pervasive cultural norms, is bound to be more passionate and irrational, less predictable, less amenable to persuasion, and *more aggravated than educated by the cultural promotion of tolerance* [emphasis added].

Writing in 2005, Stenner predicted that ‘intolerance is not a thing of the past, it is very much a thing of the future.’

#### Chapter four: what now?

The upshot of all this is that the answer to the question we began with—What on earth is going on?—cannot be found just by looking at the nationalists and pointing to their economic conditions and the racism that some of them do indeed display. One must first look at the globalists,

and at how their changing values may drive many of their fellow citizens to support right-wing political leaders. In particular, globalists often support high levels of immigration and reductions in national sovereignty; they tend to see transnational entities such as the European Union as being morally superior to nation-states; and they vilify the nationalists and their patriotism as ‘racism pure and simple’. These actions press the ‘normative threat’ button in the minds of those who are predisposed to authoritarianism, and these actions can drive status quo conservatives to join authoritarians in fighting back against the globalists and their universalistic projects.

If this argument is correct, then it leads to a clear set of policy prescriptions for globalists. First and foremost: Think carefully about the way your country handles immigration and try to manage it in a way that is less likely to provoke an authoritarian reaction. Pay attention to three key variables: the percentage of foreign-born residents at any given time, the degree of moral difference of each incoming group, and the degree of assimilation being achieved by each group’s children.

Legal immigration from morally different cultures is not problematic even with low levels of assimilation if the numbers are kept low; small ethnic enclaves are not a normative threat to any sizable body politic. Moderate levels of immigration by morally different ethnic groups are fine, too, as long as the immigrants are seen as successfully assimilating to the host culture. When immigrants seem eager to embrace the language, values and customs of their new land, it affirms nationalists’ sense of pride that their nation is good, valuable and attractive to foreigners. But whenever a country has historically high levels of immigration, from countries with very different moralities, and without a strong and successful assimilationist program, it is virtually certain that there will be an authoritarian counter-reaction, and you can expect many status quo conservatives to support it.

Stenner ends *The Authoritarian Dynamic* with some specific and constructive advice:

[A]ll the available evidence indicates that exposure to difference, talking about difference, and applauding difference—

the hallmarks of liberal democracy—are the surest ways to aggravate those who are innately intolerant, and to guarantee the increased expression of their predispositions in manifestly intolerant attitudes and behaviors. Paradoxically, then, it would seem that we can best limit intolerance of difference by parading, talking about, and applauding our sameness . . . Ultimately, nothing inspires greater tolerance from the intolerant than an abundance of common and unifying beliefs, practices, rituals, institutions, and processes. And regrettably, nothing is more certain to provoke increased expression of their latent predispositions than the likes of ‘multicultural education’, bilingual policies, and nonassimilation.

If Stenner is correct, then her work has profound implications, not just for America, which was the focus of her book, but perhaps even more so for Europe. Donald Tusk, the current president of the European Council, recently gave a speech to a conclave of centre-right Christian Democratic leaders (who, as members of the educated elite, are still generally globalists). Painfully aware of the new authoritarian supremacy in his native Poland, he chastised himself and his colleagues for pushing a ‘utopia of Europe without nation-states’. This, he said, has caused the recent Eurosceptic backlash: ‘Obsessed with the idea of instant and total integration, we failed to notice that ordinary people, the citizens of Europe, do not share our Euro-enthusiasm.’<sup>9</sup>

Democracy requires letting ordinary citizens speak. The majority spoke in Britain on 23 June, and majorities of similar mien may soon make themselves heard in other European countries, and possibly in the United States in November. The year 2016 will likely be remembered as a major turning point in the trajectory of Western democracies. Those who truly want to understand what is happening should carefully consider the complex interplay of globalisation, immigration and changing values.

If the story I have told here is correct, then the globalists could easily speak, act and legislate in ways

that drain passions and votes away from nationalist parties, but this would require some deep rethinking about the value of national identities and cohesive moral communities. It would require abandoning the multicultural approach to immigration and embracing assimilation.

The great question for Western nations after 2016 may be this: How do we reap the gains of global cooperation in trade, culture, education, human rights and environmental protection while respecting—rather than diluting or crushing—the world’s many local, national and other ‘parochial’ identities, each with its own traditions and moral order? In what kind of world can globalists and nationalists live together in peace?

## Endnotes

- 1 See for example Luke Kawa, ‘Get Ready to See This Globalization “Elephant Chart” Over and Over Again’, *BloombergMarkets* (26 June 2016), <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-06-27/get-ready-to-see-this-globalization-elephant-chart-over-and-over-again>
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- 3 Michael Lind, ‘This is What the Future of American Politics Looks Like’, *Politico Magazine* (22 May 2016), <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/2016-election-realignment-partisan-political-party-policy-democrats-republicans-politics-213909>
- 4 <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>
- 5 Jonathan Haidt, ‘How Capitalism Changes Conscience’, see <http://www.humansandnature.org/culture-how-capitalism-changes-conscience>
- 6 David Goodhart, ‘Last Hope for the Left’, *Prospect* (April 2012), <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/arts-and-books/haidt-weird-liberals-righteous-mind-america>
- 7 George Monbiot, ‘The New Chauvinism’, *The Guardian* (9 August 2005), available at <http://www.monbiot.com/2005/08/09/the-new-chauvinism/>
- 8 Elisabeth Braw, ‘Sweden Stirs Debate with Women-Only Swimming, in Nod to Muslims’, *Christian Science Monitor* (30 May 2016), <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2016/0530/Sweden-stirs-debate-with-women-only-swimming-in-nod-to-Muslims>
- 9 Quoted in Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, ‘Tusk Blames Utopian EU Elites for Eurosceptic Revolt and Brexit’, *The Telegraph* (1 June 2016), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/05/31/tusk-blames-utopian-eu-elites-for-eurosceptic-revolt-and-brexite/>