

What's happened in India and Australia is a warning to the left.



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More than 600 million Indians cast their ballots over the past six weeks in the largest democratic election in the world. Donald Trump won.

A week ago, several million Australians went to the polls in another touchstone election. Trump won.

Citizens of European Union member states are voting in elections for the mostly toothless, but symbolically significant, European Parliament. Here, too, Trumpism will mark its territory.

Legislative elections in the Philippines this month, which further cemented the rule of Rodrigo Duterte, were another win for Trumpism. Ditto for Benjamin Netanyahu's re-election in Israel last month, the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil last October, and Italy's elevation of Matteo Salvini several months before that.

If past is prologue, expect the Trumpiest Tory — Boris Johnson — to succeed Theresa May as prime minister of Britain, too.

This is a potent form of politics, and it's why I suspect Trump will be re-elected next year barring an economic meltdown or foreign-policy shock. You may think (as I often do) that the administration is a daily carnival of shame. You may also think that conservatives are even guiltier than liberals and progressives of them-before-us politics: the 1-percenters before the 99 percent; the big corporations before the little guy, and so on.

But the left has the deeper problem. That's partly because it self-consciously approaches politics as a struggle against selfishness, and partly because it has invested itself so deeply, and increasingly inflexibly, on issues such as climate change or immigration. Whatever else might be said about this, it's a recipe for nonstop political defeat leavened only by a sensation of moral superiority.

Progressives are now speeding, Thelma and Louise style, toward the same cliff they went over in the 1970s and '80s. But unlike the '80s, when conservatives held formidable principles about economic freedom and Western unity, the left is flailing in the face of a new right that is

increasingly nativist, illiberal, lawless, and buffoonish. It's losing to losers.

It needn't be this way. The most successful left-of-center leaders of the past 30 years were Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. They believed in the benefits of free markets, the importance of law and order, the superiority of Western values, and a healthy respect for the moral reflexes of ordinary people. Within that framework, they were able to achieve important liberal victories.

Political blunders and personal shortcomings? Many. But neither man would ever have been bested by someone like Trump.

Anyone who thinks the most important political task of the next few years is to defeat Trump in the United States and his epigones abroad must give an honest account of their stunning electoral successes. Plenty has been said about the effects of demagoguery and bigotry in driving these Trumpian victories, and the cultural, social, and economic insecurities that fuel populist anxiety. Not so often mentioned is that the secret of success lies also in having opponents who are even less appealing.

In the contest of ugly, the left keeps winning. To repurpose that line from Trump, "Please, please, it's too much winning."

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