

Wilhelm Heitmeyer

Authoritarian Temptations and Right-Wing Threat Alliance

The Crisis of Capitalist Societies in an
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Preface

This book is based on a comprehensive two-decade-long research effort to examine the pervasive threats to open society and liberal democracy on a global scale, which persist even within the contemporary Western world.

Numerous publications have appeared on this topic since the 1980s, and the frequency of such works published by Suhrkamp Verlag (Frankfurt and Berlin) has risen significantly since 2000.

They include the ten annual volumes of *Deutsche Zustände* (“German Circumstances”) dedicated to the issue of “Group-Focused Enmity.” These volumes are the result of a decade-long study conducted from 2002 to 2012 to examine the prevailing attitudes within the population.

This book builds on two works published and re-edited by Suhrkamp-Verlag: *Autoritäre Versuchungen* (“Authoritarian Temptations”) and *Rechte Bedrohungsallianzen* (“Right-Wing Threat Alliances”).

The research was carried out at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research of Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University (Germany), an institute I founded in 1996 and directed until 2013. I would like to express my gratitude to many colleagues who made significant contributions to my various research projects, with special thanks extended to Manuela Freiheit and Peter Sitzer for their valuable work in our collaborative project “*Rechte Bedrohungsallianzen*”, especially the chapters 15 till 18 in this book.

My thanks to Ulrike Rogat for the technical realization of the manuscript and especially to Gita Rajan for the editing work.

Bielefeld, Germany
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Wilhelm Heitmeyer

Introduction

Over the past two decades, societies in both the Global North and the Global South have witnessed a growing authoritarian trend. This trend is clearly observable in the attitudes of the general population, movements, political parties, and regimes whose anti-democratic agenda has gained political and cultural influence worldwide. Certainly a global phenomenon, the rise of authoritarian temptations can also be noted in Western Europe.

There is a wealth of empirical evidence proving that political authoritarianism, fueled by attitudes prevailing in the population, social movements, political parties, and regimes, has been on the rise in the past two decades (Coppedge et al., 2020; Foa & Mounk, 2016; Bertelsmann Foundation, 2022; Schäfer & Zürn, 2021; International IDEA, 2021; Diamond, 2015; Diamond et al., 2016; Freedom House Index, 2022). Between 2003 and 2017, the population living under autocratic regimes increased from 2.3 billion to 3.3 billion, with over half of the 137 countries in the world now falling into the category of autocracies.

The global trend of “democratic regression”, signaling a decline in the quality of democracy, has continued to gain momentum unabated (Schäfer & Zürn, 2021; Luce, 2017; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2022; Frankenberg & Heitmeyer, 2022). We can also observe a concerning trend in Europe, characterized by an international spectrum of widespread right-wing extremist violence (Heitmeyer, 2003).

This book, focusing on the German case, examines the causes, developments, and escalation processes of authoritarian tendencies. Its concept is rooted in a sociological framework to explore the evolution of capitalism over the past three decades and its implications for open society and liberal democracy, particularly in the context of the rising trends of right-wing populism and extremism.

Broadly speaking, there are two main topics that are intricately connected.

The first topic: Processes pertaining to causes and distribution of authoritarian temptations.

This topic emphasizes the importance of analyzing contemporary capitalism in times of crisis, mainly to understand its role in engendering societal disintegration and loss of control within certain segments of the population. Additionally, it highlights the issue of political representation in the development of democracy.

Especially this part covers the wide range of attitudes in the population, which are drawn from a comprehensive longitudinal study known as the “Group-focused Enmity”. This study has shown that mechanisms of devaluation and discrimination against various groups are foundational to the growing appeal of right-wing populism. Particularly in the German context, this is exemplified by the recent successes of the German party, “Alternative for Germany” (AfD). Throughout several chapters in this book, the AfD is characterized as embodying *Authoritarian National Radicalism*, the salience of which this section aims to elucidate, thereby shedding light on factors contributing to their success in elections and public debates as well.

The second topic: Processes and steps of escalation in right-wing alliances.

This topic draws attention to forms of differentiation and dynamism introduced into the right-wing spectrum, critical factors in the formation of successful right-wing threat alliances. At the core lies the concept of “concentric escalation continuum”, comprising five interrelated stages interconnected by “bridges of legitimations.” In the German context, this core concept highlights that attitudes within the population coalescing around “group-focused enmity” legitimize the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, in that they align with the party’s broader objectives to disrupt societal institutions and push for radicalized political positions in parliamentary and public discussions. Likewise, they also extend legitimacy to the subsequent phases of escalation in the continuum, involving a more extreme, anti-system milieu to advocate destructive goals and violent actions through a form of right-wing extremism that is movement-based. This milieu maintains links with the fourth element, namely, the covert network for planning and supporting right-wing terrorism. The final stage, encompassing actions carried out by small groups or individual perpetrators, is termed right-wing terrorism. This process of violent escalation, and the fact that it unfolds progressively, represents an increasing threat to open society and liberal democracy, particularly during times of crisis and unsecured future.

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About the Author

Wilhelm Heitmeyer Born in 1945, Wilhelm Heitmeyer is a German sociologist. He is founder and former director (1996–2013) of the *Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence* at *Bielefeld University (Germany)*. He was head of various research groups concerned with right-wing extremism, violence, and ethnic-cultural conflicts. He developed the theory of social disintegration to explain several problems like violence and terrorism. Another central research topic was the concept of “Group-Focused Enmity” to explore attitudes prevalent in the German population, such as prejudice, devaluation, and discrimination, that are directed against several minority groups in a longitudinal study that lasted from 2002 to 2012.

Additionally, he works as editor of several book series. He was editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* from 2008 to 2014. Together with John Hagan, he was co-editor of the *International Handbook of Violence Research* in 2003.

Chapter 1

A Step Towards Societal Analysis: Examining the Authoritarian National Radicalism as a Threat to Open Society and Liberal Democracy



Various political actors are actively pursuing authoritarian changes, which carry profound implications for open society and liberal democracy. These actors promote a political agenda with authoritarian temptations that appeal to millions of citizens, who, in turn, exhibit their own authoritarian longings. To realize the authoritarian project, two essential components are required: firstly, the involvement of authoritarian actors within political parties, social movements, and intellectual milieus, and secondly, the adoption or presence of authoritarian attitudes among substantial portions of the population. While a surge in nationalism has been evident in other European countries, at the latest by the late nineties, with the electoral success of FPÖ, the second-largest political force in the 1999 Austrian National Council elections, or that of the French Front National (Rassemblement National since 2018), *Authoritarian National Radicalism* has made a relatively recent entrance into the German political landscape (see Chap. 9).

This study is predicated on the notion that the success of right-wing movements and parties is owed in part to specific developments within the economic framework of globalized capitalism, democratic politics, and societal structures. Consequently, this analysis seeks to examine how the interplay of authoritarian capitalism, processes of social disintegration, and political democracy depletions catalyze the rise of authoritarian aspirations. This study aims to conceptually elucidate the connections between three key elements: (1) structural developments, (2) the mechanisms of subjective processing within the population, and (3) their connection with the emergence of authoritarian political offers.

This book examines the “German conditions” contributing to the rise and growth of *Authoritarian National Radicalism* in Germany in two steps: The *first* step entails summarizing previous findings related to the challenges to open society and liberal democracy, originally outlined and analyzed in an older publication dating back to 2000, which serves as an anchor text for the present volume (see Chap. 2). In a *second* step, the study uses empirical data to delve into the trajectories, processes, and

consequences of the economic, social, and political crises that unfolded from 2000 to 2017 as well as various social science theories to interpret that data.

To establish a temporal framework, the book begins with an examination of the history of modern societies. This historical perspective sheds light on the existence of authoritarian ideologies, organizational offerings, and individual readiness for adherence to authoritarian principles.

After 1945, social movements championed various forms of liberalization and reforms in Western societies, often engaging in conflicts to push for these changes. These transformations were so profound that they fostered exceptionally optimistic visions of the future. Many believed that the prospects of violence, wars, and violations of human dignity would soon become relics of the past. Moreover, with the fall of communist regimes, even the concept of the “end of history” was put forth, suggesting the ultimate victory of liberal democracy accompanied by relevant constitutional frameworks, civil liberties, and safeguards for minority rights (cf. Fukuyama in 1992). Although these enthusiastic declarations of victory did not mean all the aspirations of liberal democracy had been fulfilled, they certainly pointed to a substantial trend towards liberalization. However, as early as 1997, the influential sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf astutely observed that globalization and its social implications could present the next challenge for a politics founded on freedom. Back then, he prophesied that societies stood at the “threshold of the authoritarian century” (Dahrendorf, 1997a, p. 14 f.), basing his assessment primarily on his analysis of the relationship between (1) economic globalization, (2) social cohesion and (3) democracy. What deeply troubled Dahrendorf was the imminent threat to social cohesion: “Globalization means that competition is capitalized, and solidarity is written in lowercase” (ibid.). Elaborating on this idea a few paragraphs later, he declared:

It is difficult to say at what point inequalities, especially of income, destroy solidarity in a society. But it is certain that no society can afford to exclude a considerable number of people without punishment. In modern citizen societies, such exclusion means the practiced denial of basic social values. This means that such a society can no longer convincingly demand that its members adhere to the rules of law and order. The impairment of law and order is therefore a consequence of the fact that the majority displaces and forgets a minority (ibid.).

From this, Dahrendorf concluded that “globalization and its social consequences would rather promote authoritarian than democratic constitutions. [...] *A century of authoritarianism is by no means the most unlikely forecast for the twenty-first century*” (ibid.; emphasis added).

Indeed, shortly thereafter, no later than the turn of the twenty-first century and the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, a substantial shift began, reasserting religion’s presence on the world stage in a remarkable fashion: “The bitter irony is that the globalization risks outlined at the time all became real in the following years [...], but politically one was still not prepared for it” (Geiselberger, 2017, p. 11).

The process is ongoing, and there is a legitimate concern that authoritarianism will continue to spread, particularly in light of the swift economic globalization that is reshaping societies. This globalization has a dual effect of promoting economic integration while exacerbating social disintegration at the price of economic integration (Rodrik, 1997).

Why does economic deregulation correlate with the rise of authoritarianism in social and political systems? Could the nature of globalized authoritarian capitalism, with its substantial influence over production facilities, wage norms, and labor conditions, potentially serve as a “blueprint” for advancing authoritarian societal trends, surpassing the influence of national political framework, to manifest through practices characterized by control, disintegration, and exclusion?

These questions are central to examining the resurgence of authoritarian temptations, both globally and within Germany. What makes these temptations so appealing to actors within their respective political and societal spheres of influence? How do “new” or latent authoritarian temptations resurface among populations and integrate into the discursive and material reality? How are these attitudes politically channeled and normalized? The social science framework adopted in this analysis aims to provide a comprehensive and explanatory framework for understanding these authoritarian temptations.

Perceived or real threats can be interpreted as loss of control. This loss of control can manifest at an individual level, where people fear losing control over their own lives, or at a societal level, where a society is either perceived to be or genuinely experiencing loss of control over its social structure. In such circumstances, individuals may be enticed to support political movements, activities, and organizations that seek to alter or even overthrow the existing norms of an open society and liberal democracy, with the aim of establishing an alternative social and political framework. These activities often center around themes such as increased surveillance, uncompromising law enforcement (often framed as “law and order”), and the reinforcement of hierarchical structures. Ultimately, their objective is to construct a closed society within a “formal” democracy oriented around national interests, with the primary goal of *gaining new forms of control*.

The prevalence of authoritarian temptations within certain segments of the population does not guarantee the automatic implementation of corresponding measures or plans.

As previously mentioned, such implementation would necessitate the prevalence or adoption of authoritarian attitudes within the population that interact with corresponding authoritarian political offers put forth by elites, mobilization experts, and collective movements or political parties. Therefore, it would be overly simplistic to attribute the emergence of authoritarian temptations solely to deficiencies inherent within the political system. The fundamental framework of this analysis, therefore, emphasizes *interdependencies* between the economic, political, and social systems, with mutual influences and effects. Figure 1.1 shows the analysis scheme.

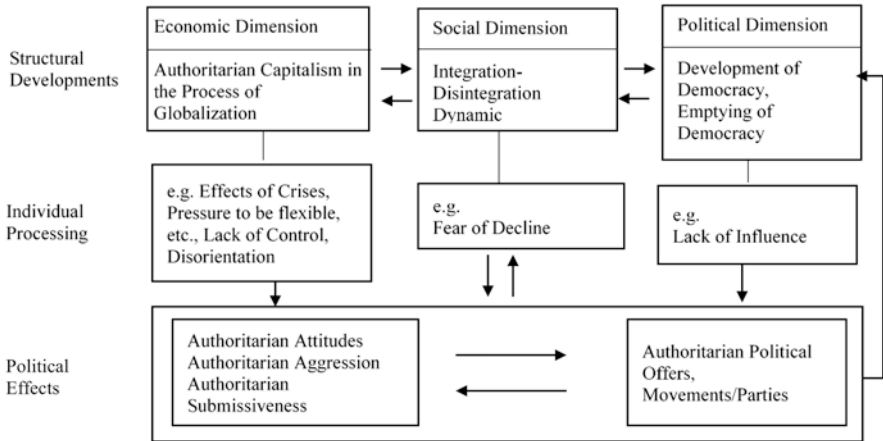


Fig. 1.1 Analysis scheme

As indicated above, the research concept operates on three distinct levels:

- First, it describes structural developments in the economic, social, and political arenas.
- Subsequently, it analyzes how people subjectively process their experiences and perceptions of economic, social, and political developments. For this, in turn, influences their positions and recognition within society, in effect, their integration or disintegration, ultimately shaping the political consequences that follow.
- Additionally, on the supply side are authoritarian temptations put out by authoritarian movements and political parties that steer people towards the adoption of corresponding attitudes and decisions, which, in turn, have consequences for social coexistence and voting patterns.

The mechanisms of processing, determining whether people embrace authoritarian temptations or reject them are, as outlined in this concept, conditioned by societal integration and disintegration dynamics. A more detailed examination of these dynamics is presented in Chap. 6. Following elements and inquiries are central to this analysis:

- Security or insecurity of material reproduction, recognition, status advancement, status security or status decline, and a feeling of control over one's life and livelihood.
- Is one's own voice or the voice of the social, ethnic, or religious group to which individuals feel they belong acknowledged by the ruling parties or ignored?
- Reliability or erosion of social relationships and the recognition of one's own identity or the identity of one's own group to secure emotional affiliation.

The importance of loss of control and deficits in perception and recognition by political actors is of paramount significance in the context outlined. The central

thesis of the 2001 analysis was that the interplay between authoritarian capitalism, social disintegration, and democratic depletion would give rise to fervent right-wing populism. The thesis of the present book is that this hypothesis has indeed materialized and can be empirically demonstrated today. Authoritarian capitalism, and subsequently, social disintegration and democratic depletion, has left enduring marks on significant portions of the population and has the potential to transition from individual latency into conspicuous collective movements when corresponding authoritarian platforms become readily available. In summary: *An increasingly authoritarian capitalism exacerbates social disintegration processes in Western societies, exerting destructive pressures on liberal democracies and fueling the expansion of authoritarian movements, parties, and regimes.*

The theoretical framework adopted in this analysis incorporates multiple disciplinary approaches. The relationships and processes under investigation cannot be sufficiently described and explained using a single theoretical perspective. This is because, as mentioned previously, they are interwoven with diverse structural developments and how individuals and groups perceive and respond to them.

To shed light on the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of authoritarian temptations and the demand for authoritarian solutions, it is necessary, firstly, to consult *theoretical* works on *authoritarianism* and reflect on the so-called ambivalence of modernity (see Chap. 3). Subsequently, the focus shifts to the decade spanning 2000–2010, a period marked by financial, economic and debt crises. That involves giving due consideration to *crisis theories* (see Chap. 4) to examine the “paths” leading from the crises, via fears of disintegration or experiences of disintegration, to *group-focused enmity*,¹ a most important concept for this analysis (see Chap. 13) and, finally, to the authoritarian temptations mentioned earlier. In what follows, *theoretical* approaches on *capitalism* (see Chap. 5) will focus on developments since the turn of the millennium and expand upon the discussions initiated in the 2001 anchor text to inform the analysis undertaken in this study.

Special attention is also paid to the *theory of social disintegration*, which addresses the adverse consequences of the developments described above for individuals and groups as well as for coexistence in heterogeneous, multiethnic and religiously diverse societies (see Chap. 6). Combining it with an analysis informed by *anomie theory* (especially in reference to the *Institutional Anomy Theory*) can offer illuminating insights into the pervasive influence of capitalist principles within social relations. Essential to the theoretical framework in this context are *movement theories* and approaches to explaining political bundlings, such as the *theory of social*

¹*Group-focused enmity* (Heitmeyer, 2002a) is a social science concept for researching the devaluation and discrimination of weak groups. According to this, people are targeted for such devaluations and discriminations solely based on their group membership and independent of their individual behavior. The concept integrates numerous syndrome variants: devaluation of foreigners, Jews, Muslims, People of Color and refugees as well as homosexuals, disabled, homeless, long-term unemployed; also (across all these forms of devaluation) sexism. These devaluations and discriminations have as a common core an ideology of inequality. Such *group-focused enmity* has been empirically researched in that ten-year longitudinal study, which was published under the title *German Conditions* in the Edition Suhrkamp.

identity, because authoritarian temptations, in the end, acquire their explosiveness by coalescing or presenting themselves as “bundlings”, such as social movements or political parties.

Given that the crises of the capitalist economic system have brought questions about the possibilities of intervention of democratic and national institutions to the forefront of public interest, it is only logical to also consider this in the light of *democracy-theoretical* approaches (see Chap. 7).

A fundamental objective of this analysis is to demonstrate how sociological and social psychological approaches complement one another to provide a comprehensive understanding of societal developments. This entails accurately depicting and analyzing the interactions and links between multiple explanatory factors and levels: between authoritarian capitalism and inequality, between inequality and social disintegration, between social disintegration and democratic decline, between democratic decline and rabid authoritarian temptations.

What implications do societal, economic, and political changes have for the lives of individuals? How do mediation processes between societal structures and individuals occur and subsequently shape their political attitudes? Are there “new” forms of authoritarianism in the population, a new willingness to embrace authoritarian political offers? If such tendencies are indeed identified, is it possible that authoritarian political offers and authoritarian readiness in the population could mutually “escalate”? Could they poison the societal climate to such an extent that the stability and functioning of liberal democracy face a threat?

These questions must be pursued as processes do not unfold in a “programmatically” or strictly linear manner but are subject to various “factors of refraction”. This is because these processes can be accelerated by individual, economic or political crises, giving rise to temporally condensed problem concentrations. Throughout the analysis, it is vital to consistently emphasize the factors propelling these adverse developments, while also recognizing the existence of counterforces. These counterforces encompass social networks, which, at times, may serve as platforms for *antisocial* bundlings. Additionally, a diverse range of media, economic, intellectual, and political elites who introduce authoritarian elements into politics are pivotal to mediating and amplifying messages, creating an aggressive and polarized political climate in the public sphere.

As mentioned in the introduction, the structure of this analysis is distinct, in that it begins with an anchor text (see Chap. 2), specifically “Authoritarian Capitalism, Democratic Depletion and Right-wing Populism. An Analysis of Development Trends”, which was written in 2000 and published in 2001 in *Dark Sides of Globalization*.²

Taking an anchor text as the starting point serves the purpose of documenting the state of knowledge at the time of its authorship and connecting it to the contemporary landscape. The core message of the anchor text can be summarized as follows:

²Loch, D./Heitmeyer, W. (Eds.): *Dark Sides of Globalization. Right-wing radicalism, right-wing populism and separatist regionalism in western democracies*, Frankfurt on the Main 2001, pp. 497–534.

In recent years, globalized capitalism has increasingly adopted authoritarian characteristics, granting economic entities greater control, while concurrently diminishing the degree of control for nationally and democratically legitimized politics and elected governments. This relatively unchecked pursuit of economic interests has resulted in social disintegration and democratic decline, leading to the alienation and disenfranchisement of many segments of the population. The thesis aimed to establish that rabid right-wing populism would emerge as a significant beneficiary of these developments.

Given the intricate web of economic, political, and social connections, often influenced by unforeseeable events such as financial crises, terrorist attacks, labor market fluctuations, etc., making predictions about the future is fraught with risk. However, scientific responsibility necessitates taking such risks to actively engage with societal and political trends and to identify opportunities for interventions. Today, more than 20 years since the publication of the anchor text, numerous questions have arisen that are closely tied to the earlier forecasts:

- How has the relationship between economic globalization and liberal democracy evolved since the turn of the century, especially under the pressure of financial crises?
- Which social disintegration processes have intensified for certain social groups in light of economic, social, and political *uncertainties*, how do these processes correlate with political alienations from liberal democracy?
- What consequences do democracy depletion and intensified security and control policies (for example, for refugee movements) have on the openness and liberalism of our society?
- What are the prospects of success for right-wing authoritarian political offers and the population's receptivity to them against the backdrop of authoritarian developments in Europe?

The current analysis is not merely an extension of the findings from 2001. It provides essential corrections and underscores new influencing factors, including the internet, the anticipated impact of digitalization on employment, the repercussions of refugee movements, and the profound implications of developments in the United States.

To pursue these questions, the analysis draws from various publications and research projects in which the author assumed various roles. Notably, the longitudinal study on what is known as *group-focused enmity* (Heitmeyer 2002–2012) has yielded a wealth of data and material for analysis through its representative annual population surveys. The present study leverages these datasets to reveal long-term trends, and in some cases, to reevaluate existing materials in the current social and political context. The approach employed in this analysis on prevailing societal attitudes aligns with numerous recent noteworthy political science publications and journalistic reports offering in-depth coverage on the ideology of the New Right, party structure, and the rise of the Alternative for Germany party (AfD).

Chapter 2

Anchor Text from 2001: “Authoritarian Capitalism, Democracy Depletion and Right-Wing Populism. An Analysis of Development Trends”



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2.1 Economic Globalization and Democratic Development: A Risky Relationship?

It is now widely acknowledged that the progress of modern national societies and the strength of their democratic structures cannot be studied in isolation from a globalized economy. However, this consensus often lacks depth, especially when addressing the effects of economic processes on internal social and political developments.

This text explores the extent to which a new phase of global *expansion* and reach of the capitalist system coincides with a *regression* of liberal democratic processes, potentially paving the way for newer forms of authoritarian temptations. This focus is justified by the historical precedent, considering that the violent ideologies of the twentieth century had their roots in the upheavals of the nineteenth century. In this regard, Dahrendorf’s perspective on the development must also be understood through his work titled, “On the threshold of the authoritarian Century” (1997a). Such a viewpoint may be surprising at first, given that democracy has emerged as the predominant form of governance. In 1974, only about 30% of existing states could be categorized as democratic, whereas today, that number has surpassed 60%. Nonetheless, concerns persist on the question of how the quality of democracy in Western societies will evolve under the pressures of economic processes.

A thorough and layered analysis will be necessary to delve deeply into the intricate interplay of external factors that are shaped by economic and cultural globalization processes, in conjunction with *internal* societal developments. It is crucial to recognize that transnational economic processes "break" at national societal conditions, traditions, power relations, etc. It remains largely uncertain how the balance of power between the economy, politics, and cultural life will shift and what potential social and political consequences may arise as a result.

In the context of the present analysis of economic processes and their political implications, particular emphasis will be placed on the role of "mediating" societal developments. However, this relatively unexplored terrain lies in the intricate connections between economic globalization and the dynamics of integration and disintegration, as elucidated by Benhabib (1996, p. 6). Consequently, the question is whether the dynamics of a competitive capitalist economy will lead to heightened concerns about control and societal disintegration processes, thereby potentially amplifying the relevance of new, overt, or covert authoritarian temptations. This perspective engages with competing approaches that also contribute to clarifying the complexities of these relationships.

Giddens (1995) and Beck (1997) were the first to present a prominent theory for Western European countries as a *modernization theory*, emphasizing modernization processes in a modern society, where the prospects for a "reflexive modernity" are rated particularly high. Although these authors acknowledge that the demands made on individuals to anticipate and adapt to social consequences are significant, they downplay the problematic political repercussions. In their analysis, they see the social consequences for the relatively undifferentiated social milieus as an expansion of political freedoms, thus instilling high hopes in civil society or in the concept of a "citizen society" (Beck). They envision that as a pathway to attaining new levels of democratic achievements beyond traditional party politics and entrenched corporatism. In general, the social costs are considered individual burdens. But they are seen as promoting democracy due to the promise of increased personal freedoms, although this optimistic outlook lacks empirical substantiation. Although Giddens introduces more skeptical undertones compared to Beck, authoritarian temptations among elites or segments of the population are given little consideration in his thesis.

A second prominent thesis, popularized by Barber (1995), can be characterized as the *strangulation thesis*, according to which Western-style liberal democracy finds itself ensnared in the stranglehold of global capitalism on the one hand and religious fundamentalism on the other. Both capitalism and religious fundamentalism, despite being mortal enemies due to their incompatible interest logics, independently strive to achieve the same goal of disempowering citizens and undermining democracy. This thesis is fraught with uncertainty for any number of reasons as any globally encompassing thesis must accommodate highly diverse developments. Therefore, in light of the notably distinct trajectories, such as the American or Russian capitalism on one hand and Iranian or Turkish political Islam on the other, it is challenging to identify the existence of a (secret) mutual agreement on common objectives against liberal democracy. However, empirically, there is no clear

indication of a unified “movement” emerging from either the economic or religious sphere, so to speak, “from the outside”. Contradicting this notion, Huntington’s analysis (1996) makes this more apparent. According to him, various civilizations, each with its inherent economic and religious conditions, emerge as distinct counterparts, leading to clashes or, at the very least, the emergence of conflicts along the lines he proposed. Two objections to Barber’s “strangulation thesis” come to the fore. Firstly, his analysis underscores the inevitability of the process, for which there is no evidence yet, and it seems rather improbable, given the diverse developments. Secondly, this strangulation thesis operates on the foundational premise that Western-style liberal democracy is primarily surrounded by *external*, ostensibly hostile powers. This emphasis results in a reduced focus on *internal* situations that pose problems and could potentially lead to authoritarian and anti-democratic legal developments. The thesis presented in this book differentiates itself from the two aforementioned theses in terms of both the focus of the problem and the underlying assumptions about expected developments that merit special attention. In comparison to how Giddens and Beck have structured their argument, the present analysis places greater emphasis on conditions that further authoritarian temptations. In that sense, it departs from Barber’s account of an almost inevitable process, offering a more skeptical analysis. It certainly does not align with the excessively optimistic modernization thesis or the highly pessimistic strangulation thesis.

The thesis being advanced contends that an authoritarian capitalism is on the rise, resulting in diverse forms of loss of control and, thus in the erosion of democracy. This process is driven by state control measures, repressive policies, and rabid right-wing populism and emboldens new authoritarian tendencies.

The central premise of this thesis centers on the idea that various forms of capitalisms, whether of “Rhenish” or “Anglo-American” provenance (cf. Albert, 1992), are currently undergoing a transformation, marked by a shift towards greater authoritarianism. The use of the term “new capitalism” (e.g., Sennett, 1998) is not coincidental. Its newness lies in the promise of a high degree of flexibility and mobility juxtaposed with an authoritarian approach, which is striking in its ability not only to enforce principles with an almost omnipotent authority over individuals and the modern social structure but also to encroach on the fundamental principles of democracy. The concept of “checks and balances” (Tocqueville, 1835/1997), a fundamental cornerstone of a democratic system, aimed at preventing any single interest from wielding unchecked power, has been eroded by the emerging trend of authoritarian power dynamics that tout the supremacy of economic institutions over social institutions. It amplifies the tension between the principles of capitalist economy and the democratic ideal, the former relying on the strong but leveraging inequality, and the latter seeking to secure the foundation of equality (cf. Thurow, 1996, p. 357 f.). As Birnbaum (1997) aptly argues, in situations where market orthodoxy prevails, democracy may be compromised or undermined. Furthermore, a transformation comes into play: “The unrestricted market has an inherent tendency to invade all areas of society and transform a market economy with its limited functions into a market society, whereby its evaluations and patterns of action override alternative evaluations and patterns of action” (Israel, 1997, p. 81). The unwavering

insistence on flexibility, exemplified by its disruption of established social life rhythms and socialization development rhythms, is just as much a part of the new form of authoritarian capitalism as targeted infringements on human integrity: “Something [...] needs to happen in the rest of Europe. If workers never fear losing their jobs, there’s little reason to restrain wages. Some uncertainty, anxiety and fear are essential”, observes Robert J. Samuelson, an American economic journalist (1997, p. 36).

2.2 On the Misconception of Final Liberal Democracy Development

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was no shortage of sweeping evaluations and inquiries predicting the course of economic, political, and social development. These included proclamations positing the *end of history* (Fukuyama, 1992), which envisioned the “universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (ibid.). Embedded within this discourse were also claims suggesting the *end of politics*, which, in the words of British democracy theorist David Held (2000), entails an absolute alignment with certain economic interests and a very narrow understanding of the public good. Furthermore, the concept of the “third way” (cf. Schröder and Blair paper, 1999, p. 18) is justified on the premise that the *end of ideologies* also marked the end of neoliberal market fundamentalism and socialist ideologies.

These “end formulas” emerge against the backdrop of the internal societal and political upheavals, as well as the evolution of economic-technological *globalization*, which had a profound impact on the balance of power between capitalist economy and political democracy.

With multiple points of contention widely debated, the primary point centers on the divergent interpretations of globalization. On the one hand, globalization, especially its economic dimension, is seen as a *real process*—tangible and ongoing—and on the other, it is perceived as a product of *political rhetoric*. One side, featuring prominent German figures like Altvater and Mahnkopf (1996), aligns with the view that globalization stands as the “most potent determinant”, whereas the other, with Hirst and Thompson (1996), subscribes to the “myth” interpretation. This central dispute serves as a framework within which different debates are categorized:

- The technological view focuses on the *rapid pace of innovations* and the resulting pressure to adapt.
- The economic perspective focuses primarily on the degree of deregulation and the *integration of capital markets*.
- The political science view, in turn, focuses on the *crisis of the nation-state*.

Now these perspectives are embedded in the question of what is *new* about globalization. When we take this approach, a *historical* view is close at hand. An

illuminating analysis by Wallerstein (1974), which centers on the relationship between economy and politics and is referenced by Brock (1997), posits that current shifts can only be understood in the context of earlier globalization processes.

In this historical phase, economic globalization, as elucidated by Wallerstein, significantly contributed to the formation of sovereign nation-states, including the development of democratic frameworks and a world economy based on division of labor. In contrast, following Brock, *Globalization I* and *Globalization II* differ significantly. According to him, there is a “reversal in the dependency relationship between the world economy and nation-states” (ibid., p. 17). The heightened interconnectivity of economic actors grants greater decision-making authority to capital in comparison to national economic spheres. Nation states primarily contend with location competition, which is now challenged by the emerging phenomenon of jobless growth. This *new dependency relationship* of (uncontrollable) global economy (see Hobsbawm, 1999, p. 19)¹ and national politics must, in my opinion, also address other controversial topics:

- The technological prerequisites for relocating production and services as well as regulatory alignment are relatively recent developments. The extent to which these opportunities are actually leveraged remains a subject of ongoing debate.
- Whether the international trade interconnections are genuinely new remains a matter of contention. What is indeed new, however, is the speed at which these could be expanded.
- The wage cost gradient between highly industrialized and less industrialized countries is by no means new. What is new, however, are the possibilities of harnessing this gradient through mass production technologies.

In the thesis postulating the reversal in the dependency relationship between the economy and the state (see also Albert, 1992), the capacity for intervention diminishes. Conversely, the power to choose grows. This specific situation emphasizes the fact that, in the context of societies still primarily organized at a national level, the question of whether globalization is a set of “real processes” or can be dismissed as a “myth” often takes a backseat in discussions about political consequences. What emerges as the genuinely innovative and influential aspect, as elucidated by Klaus Dörre, is that the mere existence of a *sufficiently credible threat potential* originating from the capital sector is enough to set in motion extensive societal transformations and impact state politics. When considering the social and political

¹ “In short, the nation-state ends the century, which helped it to its greatest power, under triple pressure. From above, it is threatened by an uncontrollable and globalized world economy as well as supranational entities like the European Union. From below it is being hollowed out by separatist and (practically supported by the EU) regionalist movements as well as the current urge for decentralization. Uncertain, dark and dangerous, it is threatened from outside by the international situation since the Cold War. Within its borders, its power is dwindling and the weakening of the relationship to its citizens, which is expressed, for example, in the falling voter turnout. The USA are probably a borderline case, but the fact that in 1998 only 36% of eligible voters participated in the chamber election, is alarming” (Hobsbawm, 1999, p. 19).

repercussions, it is essential, in my opinion, not to view the globalization process on a global scale but rather to focus on distinct realms, much like Friedrichs (1997, p. 4) emphasized: World–Nation–City–Districts–Households. According to him, only this classification can accurately capture the resulting consequences. For example, if global networks of economic operations are seen as a central characteristic of globalization, it would necessitate a political deregulation of *national markets* to facilitate greater capital mobility. Following his argument, this shift would result in *deindustrialization*, primarily affecting cities, especially those in old industrial areas (ibid. p. 5). As a result, socially and ethnically segregated residential areas have proliferated, reshaping the distribution of poverty in a trend expected to endure in Germany. While this specific example could be explored in greater detail, it primarily underscores, in my opinion, the crucial necessity of expanding the analysis across various levels and within different spatial contexts to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the consequences. Distinctions should account for globalized markets, export markets, and domestic markets, as they produce divergent effects, not necessarily in line with the descriptions provided. The issue becomes particularly problematic when, for instance, the globalized markets have not only impacted the ongoing exchange dynamics within the labor market but also produced contractions and shrinkages, resulting in job withdrawals and so forth.

Therefore, it is equally crucial to explore processes of societal integration and disintegration. It can be argued that increased global economic integration is accompanied by a decrease in intra-societal social integration through the labor market, a phenomenon of significance for diverse groups. Various approaches exist for quantifying those segments of the population in Western industrial societies or the world population that risk experiencing partial or complete disintegration via the labor market. Three scenarios are often presented. The concept of the "two-thirds society" is widely recognized, wherein one-third is designated as the core problem, a model largely associated with German society and has triggered discussions influenced by various interests and assessments. Alain Touraine posits a distribution of 30:30:40 ratio in affluent European societies. In this scheme, 30% are in a state of complete disintegration, 30% are precariously endangered, while only 40% enjoy secure conditions (cf. Schneider, 1997, p. 159). Jeremy Rifkin, author of "The End of Work and its Future" (1995), considers the 20:80 variant, which he believes applies globally. According to this perspective, 80% will grapple with substantial challenges (cf. also Martin & Schumann, 1996).

The frequently debated scenarios, which present different levels of perceived social integration problems, raise questions about the relationship between capitalism and democracy, irrespective of empirical evaluations. Hengsbach (1999) refers to this characteristically twentieth-century relationship as mutual or "double taming". Whether there was indeed a mutual taming post-1919 is subject to doubt, as European states engaged in disastrous economic competition, and Germany saw significant opposition to all democratic parties, contributing to a political catastrophe. The efforts following 1949 appear to have been more successful: "The taming of capitalism was achieved through strong trade unions, the social state clause of the Basic Law and new social movements. Democracy has allowed itself to be tamed by

a political network² of state and economic elites” (ibid., p. 53). The discourse on the relationship between capitalism and democracy has evolved since 1989, and its transformation can be traced back to the ascendancy of market-radical doctrines: faith in the self-correcting capabilities of the market, the notion of a lean state, and the primacy of monetary policy, all of which have achieved political dominance. Concurrently, the influence of societal counterforces has diminished. “That at the very moment when the alliance of capitalism and history seemed to be completed, the historical compromise of capitalism and democracy could break in a perhaps irreversible way, did not occur to them [the elites, W. H.]” (Engler, 1997, p. 10).

The prospects for tempering an unbridled form of capitalism within society are diminishing, and expectations are increasingly directed at the transnational bodies (cf. Held et al., 1999; Hengsbach, 1999). However, currently, no empirically substantiated evidence can support the notion that transnational bodies can effectively coordinate their actions instead of developing their own standards.

Furthermore, the increasing degree of *anonymization* associated with the transnational development of both capital markets and political institutions is particularly relevant.

2.3 The End of Mutual Taming?

For these reasons, the notion that capitalism and democracy can serve as counterweights to each other in the future appears increasingly implausible. The traditional regulatory tools that were effective in the post-1949 era have lost their potency. Furthermore, the purportedly new methods have yet to prove their efficacy since market dogmas have prevailed as dominant ideological frameworks. Thus, a renewed critique of capitalism remains the purview of a select group of authors [including, but not limited to Luttwak (1999), Sennett (1998), Kurz (1999), Thurow (1996), Bauman (1999)]. But it has limited political impact and exerts minimal influence on public debates. This limitation also extends to the analysis of *control dynamics* between capitalism and democracy, in other words, the relationship between economic and political institutions and their effects on individual and social living conditions. The concept of *control equilibrium*, akin to the system of ‘checks and balances’ aimed at restraining excessive power and fostering individual freedoms, can provide valuable insights into the state of democracy within a society and the *economic encroachments* across individual, social, and political dimensions in a community. This approach, in a sense, sheds light on guarantees like free and confidential elections, personal freedom of movement, legal certainty and independent press. It is prudent to agree with Engler’s assertion that a narrow view on these matters would amount to an excessively “comfortable notion” of the state of a liberal democracy (1997, p. 585).

²This characterization appears in a new light due to the CDU party donation scandal dating back to the seventies.

The *political and institutional loss of control* is evident in the undermining of national sovereignty. This becomes apparent in several ways, including through what is referred to as a "new geography of power" (Sassen, 1999). The increasing significance of the digital realm in transnational regulations and a significant portion of economic activities is leading to crises related to control and governance. In this context, Sassen (*ibid.*) points to a lack of analytical terminology that effectively captures both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of this loss of control.

The *collective political loss of control* affects those social organizations that, according to Hengsbach, played a substantial role in regulating capitalism and establishing the democratic system in the Federal Republic after 1949. Their loss of control is largely attributed to the fact that mechanisms like "powerful demonstrations" were functional due to mutual interdependencies, such as between capital and labor or through a consensus on the Social Welfare Clause of the Basic Law. The first prerequisite appears to have been eliminated, and loss of control also decreases the degree of organization. The second is being hollowed out from many sides.

The *political loss of control at the individual level* pertains to the distancing of the perceived and actual (transnational) decision-making bodies from the citizens. This loss is exemplified through "anonymization" and "opacity" as the actors largely remain obscure and are only identifiable through institutional acronyms like IMF, among others. Anonymization hampers the democratic decision-making process and political identification (see Beck, 1998, p. 39 f.), facilitating non-democratically legitimized and controlled decision-making to prevail. As a result, it raises the question: "Is democracy in retreat?" (Hoffmann, 1999, p. 8).

The *social loss of control* is evident in the demands for change due to the compulsion to be flexible to survive in professional domains and in the labor market. This form of loss of control also impacts status security, which affects sizable segments of the population in the context of "in-out" unemployment. Such forms of loss of control over one's own circumstances, when there is uncertainty about whether and at what status level a re-entry might succeed, give rise to distinct feelings of insecurity.

The *individual and biographical loss of control* finally become apparent in the sense that "flexible capitalism" (Sennett, 1998) poses a threat to individuals' control over their own lives. This is reflected, for example, in the erosion of personal time, continuity, and recognition. The loss of control is encapsulated in what Sennett terms "drift", to capture the sensation of aimlessly drifting without clear direction.

These instances of *loss of control* are contrasted with the *gains in control* experienced by capitalist business practices, which also thrive on the *reversal* of previously established control practices. These reversals involve situations where, for instance, ethics committees must align themselves with specific scientific fields and their outcomes that are highly economically exploitable, such as aspects of gene technology. This also applies to the reversal of control in decisions, including those related to location. At the same time, the internal control mechanisms within the realm of capital are of particular significance, involving those anonymous and ultimately uncontrollable entities that oversee corporations. These

issues become more pronounced when absence of alternatives and anonymity make them especially vulnerable to authoritarian temptations.

A distinctive *shift* in control arises from the interplay of political ideology, technological advancements, and the capitalist economy in a particularly sensitive domain, where the repercussions remain largely uncharted. At its core, this shift in control is centered on the challenge of governing technological advancement, with a particular emphasis on biotechnological research, which Kevin Kelly aptly terms as “the biological turn in economy, technology, and society”, even marking it as the “end of control” (1997). Whether one fully subscribes to this assessment or not, this domain stands out as a striking example of modernity’s ambivalence because the essence of human existence undergoes a dual transformation. On one hand, it improves the human condition through palpable advancements in health and well-being; on the other hand, this very progress teeters dangerously on the precipice of destruction, owing to the impending cloning of human fetuses, a development that threatens to extinguish the uniqueness of human life and simultaneously opens a Pandora’s box of new possibilities for selective intervention.³

This process of an upcoming selection production is now accompanied by two additional developments in the realm of political ideologies and capital advancements. Politically, the process experiences a significant de-ideologization, and the credit can be largely ascribed to technological and civilizational progress. This effectively disentangles the issue of selection from partisan political disputes and provides relief from its contentious history. Furthermore, a redefinition makes this topic less susceptible to exploitation by classic right-wing extremism, especially in instances where racial categories are invoked. On the economic front, however, this process experiences a significant surge in dynamism driven by developments within the capital market, specifically the “new stock markets”. The well-known fact that technological possibilities translate into tangible outcomes gains significant momentum through the revaluation of capital flows and the emergence of new markets, creating a mutually escalating process. Faced with this relentless “pressure for normalization,” political authorities and ethics committees have limited opportunities to slow down the process. Staging of scientific or public-political disputes, such as the infamous “Sloterdijk debate” (1999), is not inherently proactive; at best, such disputes play *catch up* by legitimizing established facts and presenting them to the capital market. The persistent pressure from capital associated with these listings results in a continuous and intensifying exploitation and utilization of these technologies. Political ideologies, technological advancements, and the dynamics of exploitation are engaged in a new interplay, resulting in a *shift* of control toward anonymous stock markets. This case vividly illustrates how a subject matter becomes obscured within the undemocratic political framework of right-wing

³The European Patent Office (EPO) granted a patent for genetically manipulated human embryos in February 2000. This grant was subsequently referred to as a mistake. The patent recipient, the University of Edinburgh, had signed a contract with the Australian company Stern Cell Sciences, which in turn cooperated with the American company Biotransplant and the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis (see *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 22, 2000, p. 30).