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Q3(a)

Of late, centrist and centre-left political parties have been facing setbacks while centre-right parties have been in ascendancy the world over. Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · Politics of Representation and Participation

Politics of Representation and Participation: Political parties, pressure groups and social movements in advanced industrial and developing societies.

Core demand of the question

- **Document the comparative pattern:** centre-left/centrist setbacks and centre-right/right ascent
- **Explain drivers:** migration, inflation, culture, post-COVID, inequality, media
- Note important exceptions so the claim is not a cartoon
- Link to democratic backsliding without reducing every right win to fascism

Revision summary

Many democracies since the late 2010s show centre-left and centrist losses and centre-right or radical-right gains.

Drivers include migration, post-COVID inflation, culture war, housing and the split of the old working-class vote.

Inglehart's counter-revolution and **Piketty's** Brahmin-left sketch help; they do not travel unchanged to India or Latin America.

UK Labour 2024 and other cases are exceptions; not every right victory is fascism.

- **The wave still shapes IR:** tariffs, NATO, WHO and China policy.

Introduction

- **Since the late 2010s, a comparative pattern has been hard to miss: centrist and centre-left** parties have lost vote share or office in many industrial and some developing democracies, while **centre-right and radical-right** lists have risen. The pattern is not a law of history. It is a cluster of elections that asks for political-economy and cultural explanation together.

Body

The map

Italy's **Giorgia Meloni**, the French right's strength around **Marine Le Pen** even when the Élysée is held by a centrist, Germany's **AfD** surge in the east, the Netherlands' anti-migration turns, **Javier Milei** in Argentina, and **Donald Trump's** return to the White House in 2025 are the headline cases. Social democrats who once owned the industrial working class now split that class with nativist lists. Third Way centrism after Clinton-Blair looks exhausted: it is blamed both for austerity and for cultural liberalism.

Drivers

Migration and identity became first-order after 2015 in Europe and remain so. **Inflation** after COVID and the Ukraine war punished incumbents, many of them centre-left or technocratic. Housing and energy costs hurt median voters more than GDP charts. **Culture-war** issues - gender, religion, universities - let the right speak a moral language the professional left often concedes. Social media rewards anger. **Democratic backsliding** literature warns that some right victories then attack referees; not all do on day one.

Political science should not flatten this into "the masses failed the Enlightenment." **Ronald Inglehart's** silent revolution produced a silent counter-revolution. **Thomas Piketty's** Brahmin-left versus merchant-right split in Western electorates is a useful sketch: educated professionals stayed left-liberal; many non-graduates moved right. In the Global South the same words map poorly: India's BJP is a civilisational right with welfare delivery; Latin America's pendulum still swings (Chile, Brazil, Mexico) rather than locking.

Exceptions and caution

The **United Kingdom's** 2024 Labour landslide, periodic Nordic social-democratic holds, and urban-liberal majorities in several U.S. states are exceptions. Centre-left can still win when it owns competence on wages and public services and does not treat voters as a seminar. Centre-right ascent is also not identical to fascism: Christian democrats, Gaullists and India's broad right are unlike interwar blackshirts. The danger is coalition gravity - mainstream right adopting radical-right frames on migration and press freedom.

For IR, the trend matters because it produces **tariff nationalism**, NATO burden-shifting, WHO scepticism and a harder line on China - the Trump shock to the EU in Q4(c). Comparative politics and international politics here are one story.

Flow diagram

Drivers -> Migration identity
Drivers -> Inflation housing
Drivers -> Culture and media
Drivers -> Left-professional split
Left-professional split -> Centre-right ascent

Conclusion

Centre-left setbacks and centre-right ascent are a real, incomplete wave driven by migration, prices, culture and distrust of elites. Exceptions exist. The task is to explain the wave without baptising every conservative win as the end of democracy, and without ignoring the referees some of those wins then threaten.

Facts & figures

Inglehart

Post-material values produced a cultural left and a material-authoritarian backlash among less secure voters.

Trump 2025

Return to the White House crystallised tariff nationalism and institutional scepticism as a governing programme, not only a campaign mood.

UK 2024

Labour's landslide is a major exception to the 'left always loses now' slogan.

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