

# The global lurch to the Right

By Alan Austin

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Image by Dan Jensen

***Did elections over the last year show a swinging pattern to the right or left? And what of elections in 2020? Alan Austin believes they offer hope for a better world.***

THE UNITED KINGDOM'S [election](#) returned the Conservatives under Boris Johnson last month. This was hailed by some as more evidence that developed countries are shifting away from reformist social democratic parties.

Commentator Jane Caro [observed](#):

*Many of the world's voters seem to have fallen in love with macho leaders recently, mostly, I suspect, because we live in jittery and – given the fires that just go on and on and on in Australia – occasionally terrifying times. We hope that the big, loud, confident-seeming blokes can protect us, drain the swamp, maintain the borders, get Brexit done, keep foreigners out, bring back ... traditional values.*

Caro identified Johnson in the UK, Trump in the U.S., [Duterte](#) in the Philippines, [Modi](#) in India, [Erdoğan](#) in Turkey, [Bolsonaro](#) in Brazil and Morrison in Australia as the 'right-wing bullies useless in a crisis'.

<https://t.co/PW6j7Bfo3j>. Great article and beat quote "They strut and smirk, bellow and mock, bait and ridicule." That's all Trumps do.

— yankgooner (@kjkscrr) [January 17, 2020](#)

While this is part of the reality, is there other information to consider? Evidence for a continuing lurch to the right can certainly be found in recent developments. But so can evidence for the opposite drift.

## Support for reformist parties and policies

Winners in [Spain's election](#) last April were the centre and left parties which earlier this month, after extensive horse-trading, settled on a coalition with Socialist leader Pedro Sánchez as prime minister.

Bizarre scenes in [Austria](#) last September when the national elections gave the centre-right People's Party the most seats but not an outright majority. Faced with the choice of governing with the far-right, centre-left or Greens, party leader Sebastian Kurz chose the Greens.

[Italy](#) veered away from conservative rule with a coalition in September involving the centre-left Democratic Party, the leftist Free and Equal, the anti-establishment Five Star Movement and the centrist Italia Viva. Italy has now [decided](#) that climate science will be a compulsory unit in all schools.

November elections in [Hong Kong](#) resulted in stunning victories for pro-democracy parties with 17 of the 18 districts changing from pro- to anti-Beijing parties. This is not a conventional left v right contest, as Beijing is seen as a socialist power. But it does represent a victory for democracy over authoritarianism.

[Taiwan](#) yielded a similar result earlier this month when sitting president Tsai Ing-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party was re-elected for a second term by defeating her pro-Beijing opponent Han Kuo-yu with an emphatic 57.1 per cent of the vote.

World's media derision for Scott Morrison over bushfire crisis  
[@IndependentAus](https://t.co/WotmazrkxE)

— Lord Rivers of Beer & Revenge (@MarekRivers) [January 9, 2020](#)

U.S. congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shocked some party colleagues in the U.S. – but inspired countless others – with her [decision](#) last week to withhold the \$250,000 levy imposed by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee on all candidates.

AOC accused the committee of blacklisting progressives running against incumbents:

*'It doesn't matter to them if those incumbents support Trump, vote*

*for a regime of deportation, ask the Supreme Court to allow bans on abortion, or stand with the NRA.'*

AOC has formed a new fundraising committee called Courage to Change to support progressive candidates in November's U.S. elections.

She really is incredible. It won't shock me if she ends up being the best politician of my lifetime  
<https://t.co/pH7eUxKIS1>

— Life in the Left Lane Podcast (@LeftLanePod) [January 13, 2020](#)

Other women in politics continue to inspire people in their own countries and beyond. These include Sweden's [Greta Thunberg](#), [Jacinda Ardern](#) in New Zealand, Germany's [Angela Merkel](#) and Finland's progressive coalition [government](#). The latter comprises five reformist parties, all led by women, four of them younger than 35.

### **Failure of right-wing parties and policies**

In most countries led by assertive right-wing white men, all is not well.

Australia's Scott Morrison is suffering an extraordinary backlash following his [decision](#) to holiday in while his country was ablaze. The

Coalition parties are now scrambling to defend 18 years in office out of the last 24 in which nothing substantial has been done to support global efforts on climate change. Australia has the distinction of being the only nation in the world which once had a price on carbon but has [rescinded](#) it.

Donald Trump's state manipulation of the free operation of the market economy in 2018 with his punitive tariffs – arguably an act of pure socialist intervention – failed spectacularly. It caused [losses](#) of billions in export earnings, increased [bankruptcies](#), thousands of [suicides](#), the blow-out of the budget deficit and deepening debt.

The backlash against Trump in the U.S. is evidenced by his [impeachment](#) in the Congress, majority [support](#) for his removal according to most opinion polls and [resignations](#) of pro-Trump senators and House members ahead of near-certain defeats next November.

Boris Johnson in the UK is yet to succeed with [Brexit](#). Even if he does, there is no indication Brits will be better off than before.

### **What the experts say**

[Charles Richardson](#) is a leading analyst on world

politics whose [blog](#) looks at all major national elections and many regional contests.

IA asked him whether 2019 election outcomes overall indicate satisfaction with the status quo, or urgent pressure for change.

*Satisfaction I'd say is too strong; most elections have shown at least some degree of discontent. But generally not urgent pressure for change. Interestingly, discontent has been displayed in the streets, but that mostly hasn't translated to electoral outcomes, at least not at the national level. There has certainly been a pattern of big city elections going against authoritarian governments – Hong Kong, Budapest, Moscow and Istanbul.*

Did 2019 change the global balance between democracy and authoritarianism?

Richardson again:

*I don't think 2019 has been a good year for democracy, but nor was it nearly as bad as it might have been. There were no major gains for the far right (or the far left, for that matter) in developed democracies,*

and their opponents recovered some ground in Italy, Switzerland and Israel.

## Places to watch in 2020

National [elections](#) will be held this year in Hong Kong, Singapore, Jordan, Iran, New Zealand, Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, the USA and several smaller states in Africa and elsewhere. So plenty of theatres of potentially intriguing political contest.

Do these raise hopes for the future?

Yes, says Charles Richardson:

*'Anti-democratic forces remain firmly in control in much of the world. Recovering from the losses of the last few years is going to be a long haul. But as Angela Merkel would say, "Wir schaffen das" [We will get there]. But it's not going to be easy.'*

Excellent piece by former Age editor-in-chief Randal Macdonald: Australia's Right-wing stranglehold over public interest journalism  
<https://t.co/8YTZOzWgG7>

[@IndependentAus](#)

— Michelle Pini (@vmp9) [October 11, 2019](#)

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