

THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

Why Are Big Political Parties Around the Globe Blowing Up?

IF YOU HAVEN'T already noticed, let me be the first on your block to point it out: The big mainstream political parties across the industrialized world are all blowing up at once. It's quite extraordinary.

The U.S. Republican Party has blown up in all but name; going overnight from an internationalist, free-trade, deficit-hawk party to a protectionist, anti-immigrant, deficit-dove party — all to accommodate the instincts of Donald Trump and his base.

Italy's last election ended with its mainstream center-left getting crushed, bringing to power instead a coalition of far-left, far-right populists, whose focus ranges from guaranteeing minimum income for Italy's 11 percent unemployed to rebuffing immigrants and the European Union.

Britain's Labour Party has gone from center-left to quasi-Marxist. And the Brexit-loving Tories, having pushed Britain to exit the E.U. without any plan, are now divided and paralyzed over how to implement the economic suicide they've promised voters.

The U.S. Democrats are fractured between a Bernie Sanders quasi-socialist wing and a center-left wing, but are glued together for now — thank goodness — by the overriding need to defeat Trump. German Chancellor Angela Merkel took four months to form a barely coherent governing coalition, after her ruling party got hammered in the last election — and that fragile coalition may soon implode over immigration tensions. And French President Emmanuel Macron leads a centrist party that did not exist three years ago.

What's going on? My short answer: climate change — but not just the one you think. We're actually going through *three* climate changes at once, and together they are reshaping the ecosystems of work, learning, geopolitics, ethics and community in ways that parties built on our old left-right binary choices can no longer easily contain.

How so? We're going through a change in the climate of the climate: We're going from later to now. When I was growing up in Minnesota, *later* was when I could clean that lake, save that forest or rescue that endangered owl. Today *later* is officially over. Later will now be too late, so whatever you're going to save, save it now. That's a climate change.

We're going through a change in the climate of globalization: We're going from an *interconnected* world to an *interdependent* world. In an interdependent world your friends can kill you faster than your enemies. If banks in Greece or Italy — both NATO allies — go under tonight, your retirement fund will feel it. And in an interdependent world, your rivals falling becomes more dangerous than your rivals rising. If China takes six more islands in the South China Sea tonight, you won't lose sleep; if China loses 6 percent growth tonight, you could lose your job.

Lastly, we're going through a change in the climate of technology. Machines are acquiring most of the unique attributes of humans — particularly the ability to learn, analyze, reason, maneuver and drive on their own.

These climate changes are reshaping

the ecosystem of work — wiping out huge numbers of middle-skilled jobs — and this is reshaping the ecosystem of learning, making lifelong learning the new baseline for advancement.

These three climate changes are also reshaping geopolitics. They are like a hurricane that is blowing apart weak nations that were O.K. in the Cold War — when superpowers would shower them with foreign aid and arms, when China could not compete with them for low-skilled work and when climate change, deforestation and population explosions had not wiped out vast amounts of their small-scale agriculture.

Today, though, without those props, the most fragile nations are fracturing, like El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras south of us and in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East south of Europe. There is not enough order, sustainable land or industry to hold people on their farms or big cities. And this is creating the most relevant geopolitical divide in the world today: the divide between the World of Order and the World of Disorder. In Europe the boundary is the Mediterranean, and in the Americas it's the Rio Grande.

And the number of people — now armed with cellphone pictures and directions from human traffickers — trying to get out

Traditional politics hasn't kept up with all the change going on.

of the World of Disorder into the World of Order is at all-time highs, producing nationalist/populist backlashes in America and Europe.

This is all new and accelerating. But the big Western parties that dominated politics since World War II tended to be built around a set of rather stable left-right binary choices: the interests of capital versus labor; big government, high regulation versus small government, low regulation; a more closed national outlook hostile to free trade and immigration versus a more open internationalist outlook open to free trade and immigration; social norms to be embraced and social norms to be banned, like gay marriage and abortion; and economic growth versus environmental protection.

Ruling and opposition parties tended to be combinations of these big binary choices. But nowadays they just can't contain and balance many of the new choices that parties, citizens, companies and communities have to make to thrive amid all these climate changes.

One can see three different broad approaches playing out in response to these very new, complex political choices. One is leaders who want to build walls, against change and immigrants, who galvanize support by generating tribal solidarity.

A second you can see in Macron or in Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign website. They offer a smorgasbord of technocratic-pragmatic solutions — many of which make a lot of sense but lack any emotional grip on voters.

The third approach is the one that you can see emerging organically in certain towns and communities across America. It is highly pragmatic in its approach to problem-solving but fosters solidarity not by conjuring old party loyalties or a new tribalism. It generates its idealism and solidarity instead through the trust and bonds of friendship that come from doing big hard things together in the community.

I call these community-led projects *complex adaptive coalitions* — where business, labor, educators, philanthropists, social entrepreneurs and mayors are all working together to build more adaptive local citizens and companies, and setting aside traditional party affiliations to do so.

These efforts are the most hopeful things happening in America today.

In next week's column I'll take you to one of places the approach is working best: Lancaster, Pa. □