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France's Éric Zemmour Has Already Transformed America's Far Right

The far-right pundit may not become the next president of France, but his ideas have influenced American nationalists for a decade.

BY MARTIN GELIN DECEMBER 16, 2021





JEANNE ACCORSINI/SIPA VIA AP IMAGES

French far-right media pundit and 2022 presidential candidate Éric Zemmour delivers a speech at a campaign rally in Villepinte, near Paris, December 5, 2021.



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French far-right pundit Éric Zemmour recently launched his presidential campaign with a rally that descended into brutal violence between his supporters and anti-racist protesters. Zemmour has become the star of French nationalism by courting controversy. In his books and TV commentaries, he has defended the Vichy regime, supported the death penalty, advocated for strict limits on immigration, and suggested that only “French” first names should be legal.

Unsurprisingly, Zemmour has been called a “French Tucker Carlson” by U.S. media. The two do have a lot in common. They are both influential nationalist pundits and fierce culture warriors. But it might be more accurate to see Tucker Carlson as an American Zemmour.



Long before Zemmour announced his run for president this fall, he was an influential voice among U.S. nationalists. His books and essays have been discussed on far-right websites, such as Counter-Currents, VDARE, and American Renaissance, over the past decade. His ideas have changed both the rhetoric and substance of nationalism in the U.S.

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In 2014, Zemmour published a book called *Le Suicide français*, which sold half a million copies in France in its first year, replacing Nobel Prize-winner Patrick Modiano on the domestic best-seller list. The book was not translated into English, but still received glowing reviews on several far-right websites in the U.S. Among the early adopters of Zemmourism in America were John Derbyshire (the disgraced journalist who was fired from the *National Review* in 2012 after publishing an article questioning the intelligence of Black people) and Paul Gottfried (a paleoconservative who coined the term “alternative right” for white nationalists in America). In articles for the far-right website VDARE, Gottfried and Derbyshire introduced Zemmour to America. Since then, Zemmour’s ideas have made a familiar journey from the fringe to the mainstream of American conservatism.

The title of Zemmour’s book refers to an alleged national suicide caused by progressive shifts in French culture and politics since 1968, particularly increased



immigration and the cultural impact of feminism and gay rights. Along with far-right author Renaud Camus, Zemmour has popularized the phrase “Great Replacement” to drum up fears about immigration. For Zemmour, it describes what he considers a concerted attempt by Muslim immigrants to act as invaders bent on the conquest of France. It is no coincidence that Zemmour launched his own party called Reconquête (“reconquest”).

The “Great Replacement” theory was famously appropriated by the far-right activists of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, and partly inspired the 2019 terrorist attacks on mosques in New Zealand. It’s also heard regularly on Tucker Carlson’s Fox News show, reaching millions nightly.

Zemmour’s consistent criticism of global capitalism has also been influential among American conservatives. He often talks about the need for corporations to be “patriots, not globalists,” and rails against the perceived progressive values of corporate boardrooms. These ideas have been a prominent feature of the French far right since the 1980s, when the so-called Nouvelle Droite and philosopher Alain de Benoist articulated an attack on what they perceived to be twin horrors of globalization: immigration and global capitalism.

In America, these ideas were initially popular with fringe paleoconservatives like Patrick Buchanan and Paul Gottfried, but now they are commonly heard among the ascendant “anti-globalist” wing of the Republican Party, led by Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO), who recently published the book *The Tyranny of Big Tech*. From their point of view, big business is cynically and superficially linked with left-wing activism, based not on genuine conviction, but greed and self-interest. They believe that corporations have joined anti-racist and



pro-immigrant campaigns because they want access to cheap labor, and that they share feminist and pro-LGBTQ messages because they hope to attract more consumers.

Zemmour's cocktail of neo-reactionary ideas also consists of a radical attempt to rewrite history. He stridently defends the French Vichy government for protecting Jews during World War II, despite the fact that authoritarian, anti-Semitic Vichy rulers collaborated with the Nazis and shipped thousands of French Jews to Nazi death camps. The idea that any inconvenient truths should be banished from the official history of the nation has clearly permeated the thinking of American conservatives as well—see the frenzy over “critical race theory.”

The gradual rise of Zemmourism in America is symptomatic of the transatlantic currents of far-right ideas today, as digital platforms have lowered the threshold for the exchange of ideas across continents, leading to the rise of a nationalist international.

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At the recent National Conservatism Conference in Orlando, Florida, one of the recurring themes was praise for Viktor Orbán's authoritarian nationalist government in Hungary. Rod Dreher, senior editor of *The American Conservative*, gave one of the keynote speeches, “What Conservatives Must Learn From Orbán's Hungary,” where he praised Orbán's attacks on liberal civil society, and bragged about convincing Tucker Carlson to travel



to Budapest for a Fox News show on Orban's anti-immigration policies.

Tellingly, Rod Dreher has had a revealing change of heart in his support of Zemmour. In 2019, Dreher posted a speech of Zemmour's, translated by a reader of *The American Conservative* who wanted to be anonymous because of the belief that Zemmour is "extremely controversial." Cautiously, Dreher introduced the speech by saying: "I am publishing the speech below not because I endorse it, but as an important political document for American readers to understand what's happening in France now."

Two years later, Dreher gave Zemmour full support; despite the fact that Zemmour has not tempered his extremism at all, Dreher now considers him a nationalist hero. When Zemmour launched his campaign in early December, Dreher wrote a glowing review, calling it "one of the greatest political speeches I have ever heard." Not only did Dreher offer another translation of the speech, he also composed his own American remix of Zemmour's manifesto, pleading that some Republican official take him up on the offer of using the same rhetoric in an American context.

Dreher is becoming a kind of ambassador of European-style authoritarian nationalism in the U.S. "We need to quit being satisfied with owning the libs and save our country. We need to unapologetically embrace the use of state power," Dreher said in his speech in Orlando. In their vision, a strong state is the only institution powerful enough to reverse immigration and decades of progressive cultural shifts. Gone are the days when the leading conservatives, such as Grover Norquist, advocated for a government so small "we can drown it in a bathtub."



At Zemmour's launch rally outside of Paris in early December, Paul-Marie Coûteaux, a former member of the European Parliament who supported Marine Le Pen in the 2017 election, introduced the candidate by saying that Zemmour should be made the next "king of France." In these authoritarian fantasies, the government is the only counterweight to the liberal institutions in civil society. From Tucker Carlson to Josh Hawley, this is now the ascendant belief on the American nationalist right.

Since the launch of Zemmour's campaign, his support has fallen slightly. After hitting almost 20 percent in polls earlier this year, he now hovers around 13 percent. Zemmour may not be the future president of France. But the ideological cocktail he's running on—"Great Replacement" fears, historical revisionism, screeds against woke capitalism—is possibly the future of nationalist conservatisms on both sides of the Atlantic.

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