

ANALYSIS

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THE RADICAL RIGHT IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

ARISTOTLE KALLIS



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ABSTRACT

The family of the radical right is enjoying a prolonged spell of electoral and most importantly political ‘success’ in Europe. Established (though constantly adapting) parties and new movements, from a variety of backgrounds and with different political trajectories and ideological profiles, have gradually come to represent a combined, formidable challenge to the ‘mainstream’ political system and society. Since the turn of the new millennium in particular, heightened existential insecurity and popular anxiety about identity and welfare have created an even more fertile ground for the radical right’s populist message. More alarmingly, however, some of its key themes (in particular anti-immigrant, anti-Islam, anti-establishment, anti-EU critiques) have gradually become ‘mainstreamed’ - that is, accepted by large sections of society and adopted by ‘mainstream’ political discourse, thus blurring conventional boundaries between ‘extremism’ and the ‘mainstream’. This study explores the political itineraries, ideological characteristics, and current strategies of the radical right in Europe, as well as the responses of ‘mainstream’ actors to it. This is an analysis that sees the success of the radical right not only as a critical challenge *to*, but also as a complex problem *of*, ‘mainstream’ politics and society.



This study explores the political itineraries, ideological characteristics, and current strategies of the radical right in Europe, as well as the responses of ‘mainstream’ actors to it.

INTRODUCTION: THE RADICAL/ POPULIST RIGHT AND 'MAINSTREAM' SOCIETY

The party political family of the radical right¹ currently appears to be in poor health. The results of the latest elections for the European Parliament (May 2014) have provided ample confirmation of this trend: the 'Europe of Freedom and Democracy' group grew from 31 to 48 MEPs, while strong parliamentary constituencies of the radical right now appear in the 'Independents' group, under three different banners (Alliance of European National Movements, European Alliance for Freedom, and European National Front), with a cumulative strength of 52 MEPs. Parties of the radical/populist right polled very strongly in almost all European countries and

delivered a political "earthquake", coming first in France and Britain while increasing their share of the vote in Greece, Hungary, Italy, and elsewhere.² All in all, on the night of 25 May 2014, so-called 'mainstream' political forces across the continent had very few reasons to celebrate a victory that may have looked comfortable on paper but came with serious warning signs. By contrast, the populist European right emerged from the polls as a reinvigorated and vocal minority, stronger and more ambitious than ever, bent on re-drawing the entire political space and on setting the agenda in accordance with their radical divisive priorities.³

Elections, however, tell only part of the truth. The results of the 2014 elections for the European Parliament were far from unexpected, even if the extent of the radical/populist right's polling power exceeded most previous estimates. The continent had been bracing for such a blow months prior to the election, with the 'mainstream' parties unable or even unwilling to reverse the mounting Euro-sceptic, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-establishment/elite, and strongly nationalist mood in public opinion. The result itself reflected a deeper, far more long-standing and troubling trend that related only partly to the European Union itself. For years, if not decades, parties of the radical/populist right have been exercising a disproportionate influence on public discourse, focusing more and more heavily on a narrow set of easily communicable issues with significant sentimental power - issues that touch on intractable, yet deeply ingrained anxieties about identity, culture, security, and self-determination. Feeding from heightened insecurities in the wake of 9/11 and the worldwide economic crisis, the populist discourse of

1. The term 'radical right' is used as the preferred generic description of the parties and movements discussed in this report, instead of other similar terms such as 'far right' or 'extreme right' that suggest a dichotomy between 'extremism' and the 'mainstream'. The adjective 'extreme' is occasionally used, but in a more narrow sense, to indicate hostile, fundamental opposition to the operation of the political system that is often violent. On these distinctions see Roger Eatwell, Matthew Goodwin (eds), *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), Introduction.

2. Catherine E. Shoichet and Jim Boulden, "That 'earthquake' in Europe? It's far-right gains in Parliament elections", *CNN*, 26.5.2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/25/world/europe/eu-elections/>

3. Cas Mudde, "The Far Right and the European Elections", *Current History* 113.761 (2014): 98-103

the radical right has largely succeeded in aligning old prejudices (formally de-legitimised but never truly eradicated) and new fears of a new alternative vision of radical political transformation in an anti-establishmentarian, anti-multicultural, and narrowly nationalist direction.

Confronted with a growing challenge from the populist right (challenge at the polls but also crucially in terms of political and societal influence), 'mainstream' political forces have responded with a mix of troubling opportunism, dangerous nonchalance, and striking ineptitude. One of the fundamental pillars of the post-World War Two liberal consensus in Europe was the institution and strict observance of a political exclusion zone - a so-called *cordon sanitaire* - around 'extremist' political forces.⁴ The ghost of interwar fascism and the declared determination to avoid a repetition of the breakdown of democracy and of human rights that paved the way for the catastrophic excesses of the interwar totalitarian regimes exiled the bulk of radical right parties to the fringes of the postwar political system. Such parties were divested of political legitimacy and public visibility, denied access to government and mass media, and faced constant hostile scrutiny of their programmes and actions, often leading to sanctions or even outright bans. This *cordon sanitaire* has now been significantly eroded. Parties of the radical right have begun participating in governing coalitions, as official partners or informal but necessary parliamentary backers. More alarmingly, 'mainstream' parties, media, and public figures have shown an increasing willingness to adopt and 'normalise' themes from the discourse of the populist right.⁵ Setting

ever-lower targets for the number of immigrants per year, instituting harsher detention and expulsion regimes, reducing immigrants' access to social services and benefits, as well as targeting particular groups such as the Roma⁶, have been depressingly evident in the discourses and policies of 'mainstream' governments in the last years. With these initiatives, 'mainstream' parties concede a dangerous degree of legitimacy to the language and ideas of the radical right, even when they formally refuse to cooperate with them. In doing so, they also undermine the distinction between them and the 'extremists', allowing the radical right a de facto disproportionate political agenda-setting advantage.⁷

Therefore, the success of the radical/populist right in Europe today can only partly (and rather misleadingly) be gauged on the level of electoral support for such parties in local, national, and European elections. In fact, even when the electoral strength of any of these parties suffered at a particular election, this was often because 'mainstream' parties adopted significant segments of the radical discourses originally derived from the radical right. In addition, any loss in the electoral support of the radical right has proved temporary, compensated for by the rise of new radical political formations or by proportional gains in subsequent elections. Either way, the European radical right operates in a win-win situation, whether the gain is electoral strength, influence over public debate or both.

The recent rise in the political influence and electoral popularity of the radical right has been largely analysed from the viewpoint of 'extremism', thus drawing a line between these parties and their radical views, on the one hand, and a so-called 'mainstream' society, more or less neatly

4. Jaap Van Donselaar, "Patterns of Response to the Extreme Right in Western Europe", in Peter H. Merkl, Leonard Weinberg (eds), *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 263-81; Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 197

5. For the role of media in the success of the radical right see Antonis Ellinas, *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

6. Nandi Sigona, "'Gypsies out of Italy!': social exclusion and racial discrimination of Roma and Sinti in Italy", in Andrea Mammone, Giuseppe A. Veltri (eds), *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 141-69

7. Michelle Hale Williams, *The Impact of Radical Right-Wing Parties in West European Democracies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), 44-6

separated from it in terms of fundamental beliefs and attitudes, on the other. This is the legacy of the traditional ‘centrist-extremist’ theory, which postulated that ‘extreme’ parties attract so-called outsiders who have very little to do with strong social and political majorities.⁸ The kind of rigid distinction between ‘extremist’ constituencies and the ‘mainstream’, however, is unhelpful and misleading. The parties of the radical right increased their support by attracting members and voters from the pool of ‘mainstream’ society but, in doing so, they have also exposed how this ‘mainstream’ contains under-currents of anxiety, resentment, and prejudice that the radical right can appeal to and radicalise. In short, the rise of the radical right is, to use a phrase coined by Cas Mudde, a phenomenon of “pathological normalcy”, that is, a radicalisation of beliefs and values that have always formed part of, or have recently become more acceptable to, mainstream society.⁹ Therefore, in this respect, it is a problem not only *for* but also *of* the ‘mainstream’.

THE ORIGINS AND TRAJECTORIES OF THE EUROPEAN RADICAL RIGHT

The radical right is by no means a recent phenomenon, either ideologically or politically. In fact, we could speak of at least five periods in its history, stretching back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was at that point that a new kind of radical, ultra-nationalist, indeed

‘revolutionary’ right made its appearance by fusing rightist ideas with organisational and activist precedents supplied by the revolutionary left. At the turn of the twentieth century, a new wave of dissident radical nationalists, especially in Italy and France, attacked conservatism, communism, and liberalism alike, propagating instead a hybrid ‘revolutionary’ ideology founded on the myth of the nation. It was, however, in the immediate post-World War One years, a period of intense political, social, and intellectual crisis, that the radical right emerged as a viable, politically successful alternative force, in the form of *fascism*.¹⁰ Although fascism was born in Italy, its ideological and political paradigm exercised a formative influence on radical constituencies of the ultra-nationalist and anti-liberal right across Europe and beyond. By the 1930s, a wide range of movements and parties in many countries had not only adopted ideas, institutions, and political practices from Fascist Italy and - by then - Nazi Germany, but had also interpreted and adapted them in accordance with their national context and traditions. Even authoritarian dictatorships in the interwar period, albeit usually led by figures of the old right, borrowed selectively radical elements from ‘fascism’ and in many cases participated in some of the worst crimes of World War Two, fighting alongside the two fascist countries.¹¹

The military defeat of this fascism in the battlefields of World War Two also marked its obliteration as a viable political force in post-1945 Europe. For decades afterwards, the radical right entered a period of ideological soul-searching, trying to come to terms with the shattering

8. For example, Seymour Martin Lipset, Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). For a critique see Abbe L. Ferber, “Reconceptualizing the Racist Right”, in Eric Ward (ed), *Conspiracies: Real Grievances, Paranoia, and Mass Movements*, (Seattle: Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment [Peanut Butter Publishing], 1996), 113-26

9. Cas Mudde, “The populist radical Right: A pathological normalcy”, *Eurozine*, 31.8.2010, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-08-31-mudde-en.html>

10. Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993); David D Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006)

11. Antonio Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (eds), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014); Jerzy W Borejsza, Klaus Ziemer (eds), *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn, 2006)

defeat of 1945, the legacy of fascism and the Holocaust, but also seeking ways to relaunch its radical project for a very different world in which ‘extremism’ held very little political and social currency.¹² While nostalgic neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups remained active or appeared in new guises in the postwar decades, the radical right sought novel ideological, cultural, and political platforms that would allow it to compete more effectively in the new political climate. A period of ideological experimentation ensued, during which a wide range of relatively small formations of the radical right operated in many European countries, typically in the fringes of the political system and lacking a coherent ideological agenda with which to launch a viable challenge on the seemingly unassailable postwar liberal-democratic consensus.

From this debilitating fragmentation and political disorientation, the ‘new radical right’ emerged as a more successful political platform, relaunching fundamental themes that had always formed part of the radical right’s ideological DNA (nationalism; opposition to liberal values and communism; attack on immigration; intolerance vis-a-vis minority groups) in a new, less objectionable and more appealing political attire.¹³ Filip Dewinter’s **Flemish Block** in the Flanders region of Belgium, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s **National Front** in France, and Jörg Haider’s **Freedom Party of Austria** became the ideological-political pioneers of a new wave of radical right politics that used populist techniques to popularise divisive themes and break into mainstream public opinion, having articulated a con-

vincing ideological break with the ‘fascist’ past.¹⁴ The success of the experiment became evident in the late 1980s and 1990s, with immigration becoming an increasingly more central aspect of the mainstream political discourse and a steady rise in the electoral support for these and other kindred parties that appeared afterwards (such as the **Northern League** in Italy, the **Republicans** in Germany, and the **Swedish Democrats**).

It was at that point that a new kind of radical, ultra-nationalist, indeed ‘revolutionary’ right made its appearance by fusing rightist ideas with organisational and activist precedents supplied by the revolutionary left.

Finally, in the wake of new post-Cold War insecurities and particularly of 9/11, a new breed of populist movements and parties of the radical right made their appearance in a number of European countries. Among them were the Dutch **Pim Fortuyn List** (from which the current **Party for Freedom**, led by Geert Wilders, emerged in 2005), the **Danish People’s Party**, the **Finns Party**, as well as more recently the **UK Independence Party (UKIP)** and the **English Defence League** in Britain, the **Platform for Catalunya**, the Hungarian **Jobbik**, and **Golden Dawn** in Greece. Meanwhile, a number of already established parties of the radical right underwent a series of ideological transformations and calibrated their communication practices, emerging with a stronger populist, anti-establishment, and anti-immigration/anti-Islam profile.

12. Roger Griffin, “Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the ‘post-fascist’ era”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Volume 5, Issue 2 (2000), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/713682938#tabModule>

13. Alexandra Cole, “Old Right or New Right? The Ideological Positioning of Parties on the Far Right”, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 44, Issue 2 (2005): 203-30; Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

14. Michael Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity”, *Government and Opposition*, Vol 35, Issue 2 (2000): 170–88; Diethelm Prowe, “‘Classic’ Fascism and the New Radical Right in Western Europe: Comparisons and Contrasts”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol 3, No 3 (1994): 289-314

TYOLOGIES OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

The family of parties, movements, groups, and individual activists currently operating within the political space of the radical right in Europe is supremely diverse in terms of modes of action and ideological provenance. In terms of **modes of action**, we could divide these forces into four major groups, noting nevertheless that some parties/movements either span two categories or have graduated through them:

Organised political parties, with formal hierarchies, intricate institutional structures, and consistent public visibility, contesting elections regularly and having an input in the mainstream political debates. This category features the most electorally successful and prominent organisations of the radical right, operating at least on the level of regional/national elections and often with a presence at the European Parliament. It also features parties which, albeit contesting elections and displaying a facade of respectability, maintain links with clandestine violent groups.

Social movements that operate largely or exclusively outside the framework of parliamentary politics and without a formal party structure, forging connections with other networks and maintaining a high degree of public visibility through rallies, marches etc. The most representative example of this kind of movement is the English Defence League.

Groupuscules with looser organisational structures and with a radically anti-system profile, usually engaged in clandestine and often violent action. Such groupuscules have appeared in some European countries and very often display a neo-fascist/-nazi ideological profile, such as **Casa Pound** in Italy and **National Socialist Underground** in Germany.

'Lone wolves' with a violently activist ideological profile, operating outside formal party or movement structures (although maintaining

varying degrees of contact with transnational extremist networks) and frequently engaging in terrorist action. Anders Breivik is the most recent, notorious example of this category.¹⁵

In terms of **ideological provenance**, the members of the family of the European radical right can be categorised along four main criteria, depending on their original circumstances of their appearance and their trajectory over time:

Parties that developed from fringe extremist groups, after a period of ideological and political mutation that rendered them more respectable to mainstream public opinion (e.g. Republicans and **National Democratic Party** in Germany; **Sweden Party**; National Front in France; **British National Party**; Golden Dawn in Greece).

Parties with strong nationalist provenance and profiles, often linked to demands for national self-determination/statehood (e.g. Northern League in Italy; Flemish Block; Platform for Catalunya).

Protest movements, usually derived from single-issue concerns such as immigration (Party for Freedom in The Netherlands; **Swiss People's Party**; **True Finns**; **New Democrats** in Sweden), tax protest (Danish People's Party; **Progress Party** in Norway) or Euroscepticism (UKIP).¹⁶

New radical movements in post-communist countries with an aggressively nationalist and authoritarian ideological profile (e.g. Jobbik in Hungary; **People's Movement for Latvia**; **Greater Romania Party**).

The contemporary landscape of the European radical/populist right is of course far more complicated and difficult to categorise than the

15. Gerry Gable, Paul Jackson, *Lone Wolves: Myth or Reality* (Searchlight, 2011); Matthew Goodwin, *The New Radical Right: Violent and Non-Violent Perspectives* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012), 43-44

16. Anton Pelinka, "Right-wing populism: concept and typology", in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik, Brigitte Mral (eds), *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury), 3-22; Jørgen Goul Andersen, Tor Bjørklund, "Radical right-wing populism in Scandinavia: from tax revolt to neo-liberalism and xenophobia", in: Paul Hainsworth (ed), *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 2000), 193-223

above brief taxonomies suggest. Neo-fascist parties continue to operate on the fringes of the political system, in addition to being partially accommodated in more established parties of the new radical right, such as Jobbik and Golden Dawn.¹⁷ White supremacist, neo-racist, and aggressive counter-Jihadi ideologies are still active in a number of movements of the European far right, sometimes manifesting themselves in violent and openly terrorist activities (most tragically in the Breivik's July 2011 Oslo attacks).¹⁸ Meanwhile, while some parties of the radical right continue their attachment to ultra-nationalist ideological agendas, others have jettisoned ethnic nationalism in favour of a more globally attuned scheme based on the notion of a 'clash of civilisations' that focuses on the alleged threat of Islam for 'European' culture.¹⁹ It is indeed impossible to place all of these wildly different ideological profiles under a single political category beyond suggesting that their shared *raison d'être* lies in a shared attack on multicultural society (with minorities, immigrants, and Islam as the focal points of their opposition) and on the 'mainstream' of established political parties. Differences in ideological profiles and country-specific issues are compounded by a diversification of political strategies, communication techniques, and alliances on both national and international fields. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the

most successful parties of the radical right are those that have rejected any association with interwar fascism and neo-fascist currents, participated in the liberal-democratic system while acting vigorously against extremist elements within their ranks, and adopted a populist platform that has appealed to 'everyday' concerns of the public opinion using sensationalist language and sleek modern presentation techniques.

THE IDEOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

It is similarly difficult to generalise about the ideological profile of such a diverse group of parties, spanning decades and multiple national borders. While neo-fascist groups maintain a strong attachment to the historical characteristics of interwar fascism (para-militarism; ultra-nationalism; violent, extra-parliamentary and street activism; often biological racism and anti-Semitism; strong anti-liberalism), parties of the new radical right that appeared or rebranded themselves in the last three decades have emerged as populist movements within the framework of the democratic system, denying or cutting off ties with any 'fascist' past and building their political *raison d'être* on diverse single issues. In addition, such parties have proved to be volatile in ideological orientation, undergoing significant mutations (of ideological platform, leadership, and political strategy) in subsequent years that allowed them to tweak their populist message and thus compete more effectively in the democratic political marketplace. Although recognised by political analysts as a discrete category of radical politics, the putative 'family' of the radical right is as much divided by ideological oppositions and wildly different strategies as they are united by their shared aggressive critique of the mainstream political system. It is thus no coincidence that

17. Hans-Georg Betz, "Against the current—stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical populist right," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9/3 (2004): 311-27; Matthew Feldman, Paul Jackson (eds), *Doublespeak: The Rhetoric of the Far Right Since 1945* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2014), 9; Daniel Woodley, "Radical Right Discourse contra State-Based Authoritarian Populism: Neoliberalism, Identity and Exclusion After the Crisis", in Ruth Wodak, John Richardson (eds), *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 17-41

18. Feldman & Jackson, op. cit., 19-20; Arun Kundnani, "Blind Spot? Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe", ICCT Research Paper, 2012, <http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Kundnani-Blind-Spot-June-2012.pdf>

19. Hans-Georg Betz, "Mosques, Minarets, Burqas and Other Essential Threats: the populist right's campaign against Islam in Western Europe", in Wodak, KhosraviNik, Mral (eds), *Right-Wing Populism in Europe*, 71-88

their relations are often fraught and their transnational alliances, whenever established, are eminently volatile.

Nevertheless, a number of key ideological and political features shared, at least to a large degree, across most parties and movements of the radical right can be extrapolated, allowing still for different national variations and operationalisations:

Ultra-nationalism: parties of the radical right base their ideology on an ultra-nationalist position with an extreme nativist foundation, from which they attack modern phenomena such as multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and transnational initiatives. Their radical nationalism and nativism may also contain strong ethnocentric and even racist undertones, tapping into the reservoir of unreformed prejudices against particular groups of ‘others’ defined by colour, religion, ethnicity and/or culture.²⁰ It may also legitimise expansionist policies when ultra-nationalism is linked to the belief in the unification of the entire ethnic community must be united under the auspices of the national state.²¹

Charismatic leadership has proved a crucial ideological feature of the history of the radical/extreme right across the twentieth century.

Human inequality: the worldview of the radical right is often based on a strong rejection of the liberal tenet of human equality. This discriminatory outlook may range from extremist

views that derive from a racial view of human history to calls for the exclusion of non-native groups or to a hierarchy of human rights that privilege members of the national group at the expense of everyone else.²²

Ethno-pluralism: even if parties of the radical right accept human equality, they filter this equality through the ‘ethno-pluralist’ perspective that sees different cultural and religious groups as bound by geography and history. According to this perspective, people belong to different (though in theory equal) groups with allegedly permanent cultural characteristics and must live within them. Therefore, in believing in a very narrow sense of national and ‘European’ identity, they reject the co-existence of different cultural/religious groups and maintain that ‘indigenous European culture(s)’ are threatened existentially by increasing levels of immigration as well as ‘liberal’ multiculturalism.²³

Restricted ‘circle of empathy’: while an increasing number of parties of the radical right appear willing to declare their belief in fundamental human rights, they qualify such a belief by either restricting their ‘circle of empathy’ to a narrow in-group or by giving priority to the rights of native groups at the expense of others. This exclusionary lens contributes to these parties’ strong xenophobic tendencies.²⁴

Populism: the discourse of radical right-wing parties is based on simple, highly emotive language that echoes a ‘black-or-white’ view of the world and claims to represent the interests of the ‘common people’ against alleged elite indiffer-

20. Jens Rydgren, *The Populist Challenge. Political Protest and Ethno-National Mobilization in France* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2004)

21. Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 178

22. Meindert Fennema, “Populist Parties of the Right”, in Jens Rydgren (ed), *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-wing Populism in the Western World* (New York: Nova Science, 2005), 4-5

23. Christina Schori Lang, “‘Nationalism ensures peace’: the foreign and security policy of the German populist radical right after (re)unification”, in Christina Schori Lang (ed), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 146-7

24. On the idea of ‘circle of empathy’, see Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011, 2nd ed)

ence and corruption. Even when they propose extreme solutions and break taboos, parties of the radical right claim that they alone represent ‘common sense’ and express the views of silent social majorities, whose views and interests the mainstream political system ignores or fails to understand.²⁵

Leadership and charisma: parties of the radical right tend to be strongly hierarchical and dependent on the personality of their leading figures. Charismatic leadership has proved a crucial ideological feature of the history of the radical/extreme right across the twentieth century. From Mussolini and Hitler to Haider, Fortuyn, Le Pen, and Umberto Bossi (former leader of the Northern League), the trajectory of the radical right has been linked to the charismatic appeal of political leaders and the belief of their followers that they can accelerate radical transformation.²⁶

Critique of features of liberal democracy: although a steadily increasing number of radical right-wing parties have accepted the basic institution of liberal democracy, they continue to act as the most vociferous critics of some of its key features, such as the principle of state neutrality, the embrace of pluralism and diversity, the institution of parliament and the drive towards liberal institutionalism.

Authoritarianism: whether in the political, social and/or moral sense of the word, most parties of the radical right subscribe to an authoritarian outlook. This may involve any combina-

tion of the following beliefs: the need for a strong state; a strong attachment to notions of law, order, and security that could justify the erosion of human rights, especially in relation to ‘others’ (see also ‘Restricted circle of empathy’ above); and the aggressive defence of traditional values, which in turn brings them into direct conflict with non-conformist groups.

‘Zero-sum’ perspective: radical right-wing parties have traditionally supported their version of exclusivist ‘identity politics’ with a striking ‘zero-sum’ schema.²⁷ The fundamental assumption for this is that economic and social resources are finite; therefore, rising numbers of immigrants in a given country put considerable pressure on these resources and thus accentuate competition for them that disadvantages members of the majority society. This scheme stipulates that one group’s gain is another group’s (equivalent or quite often disproportionately higher) loss. Parties like the Front National in France have for long campaigned on this basis when they debate key areas of voter concern, such as employment and access to public services, including forms of welfare chauvinism.²⁸ However, the ‘zero sum’ rhetoric has also been used in relation to less tangible resources, such as national (or ‘European’) culture and identity, security, and sovereignty.

THE EUROPEAN RADICAL RIGHT IN THE WAKE OF 9/11 AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Since the turn of the new millennium, the radical right has thrived in this milieu of heightened insecurity and existential anxiety. The terrorist attacks on New York’s Twin Towers on 11 Septem-

25. Florian Hartleb, “After their establishment: right-wing populist parties in Europe”, *European View*, Vol 10, Issue 2 (2011): 267-8. For right-wing populism see Daniele Albertazzi, Duncan McDonnell (eds), *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007)

26. Roger Eatwell, “Charisma and the Revival of the European Extreme Right. In Jens Rydgren (ed), *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism in the Western World* (New York: Nova Science, 2005), 101-20; Jonathan Birdwell, Marley Morris, “Europe’s new populist leaders”, *OpenDemocracy*, 7.11.2011, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/jonathan-birdwell-marley-morris/europes-new-populist-leaders>; Ami Pedahzur, Abraham Brichta, “The Institutionalization of Extreme Right-Wing Charismatic Parties: A Paradox?”, *Party Politics*, Vol 8, No 1 (2001): 31-49

27. Aristotle Kallis, “Far-right ‘contagion’ or a failing ‘mainstream’? How dangerous ideas cross borders and blur boundaries”, *Democracy and Security*, Vol 9, No 3 (2013): 221-246

28. Rydgren, *Populist Challenge*, 146

ber 2001 provided a powerful unifying theme of existential (in)security, around which parties of the radical right could weave and articulate more effectively their other radical critiques of the political system. The ideology and identity of the 9/11 terrorists permitted the radical right to fuse new anxieties with pre-existing concerns about multiculturalism and long-standing prejudices against Muslims. Islam - as a religion and set of values, as a defining characteristic of numerous communities established in Europe, and as the identity of many new immigrants in the continent - functioned as the single 'other', subsuming all sorts of existential, cultural, and social (in)securities, new and long-standing. The subsequent Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) only strengthened these fears among the European public and increased the appeal of the anti-Islam discourse of the parties of the radical right. Selective, sensationalist coverage of terrorist incidents has heightened a public perception of insecurity and has drawn attention to the issue of defending national security as a matter of utmost priority regardless of any associated transgressions in the domain of human rights and freedoms. In these circumstances, the far-right's attack on Islam as both a religion and set of associated cultural values was presented as a legitimate form of collective (national and 'civilisational') self-defence.²⁹ The spectre of radicalisation of Muslims living in Europe also lent ammunition to the radical right's ethno-pluralist arguments, leading to stronger accusations that communities with Muslim background were either unable or unwilling to 'integrate' into an alleged national or 'European' way of life.³⁰

29. Ariane Chebel D'Appolonia, Simon Reich, "The securitization of immigration: multiple countries, multiple dimensions," in D'Appolonia & Reich (eds), *Immigration, Integration and Security. America and Europe in Comparative Perspective* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008) 1-22

30. Humayun Ansari, Farid Hafez (eds), *From the Far Right to the Mainstream: Islamophobia in Party Politics and the Media* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2012)

The divisive message of the radical right has also benefited significantly from the recent worldwide financial crisis with its debilitating economic and social side-effects. The crash infused pre-existing anxieties about material resources (employment, wages, welfare, public services) with a new sense of urgency that played into the hands of the radical right's 'zero sum' argument. It is thus not surprising that immigration became the symbolic centre of gravity for the radical right, absorbing all its trademarks concerns about security, identity, and wellbeing.³¹ On the one hand, the radical right's discourse on immigration touched on the freedom of labour movement within the EU, thus fuelling an already strengthening current of Euroscepticism in most European countries, this time in relation to job and wage insecurity.³² In particular, workers from the most recent member states of the EU (countries of the former communist block and more acutely Romanians and Bulgarians³³) became targets of the radical right as immigrants, economic competitors, and symbols of what was allegedly wrong with the EU as a whole. On the other hand, immigration became the point where post-9/11 insecurity, Islamophobia, and residual racism intersected with a broader re-assertion of nativism, fuelled or radicalised by the financial crisis. Alarmist 'zero sum' arguments about identity, security, 'values', and 'ways of life' were now reproduced on the socio-economic level. Particularly in relation to immigrant communities with a Muslim background, the radical right wrapped its ethno-pluralist, Islamophobic discourses of alleged cultural incompatibility

31. Cas Mudde, *The Relation between Immigration and Nativism in Europe and North America* (Migration Policy Institute, 2012), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Immigration-Nativism.pdf>

32. Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Varieties of Euroscepticism: the case of the European extreme right", *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, Vol 5, No 1 (2009), <http://www.jcer.net/index.php/jcer/article/download/106/131>

33. *Report: Bulgarians & Romanians in the British National Press - 1 December 2012 - 1 December 2013* (The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 2014)

with a more topical and acute socio-economic mantle that responded to mounting popular anxieties about economic and social security in the wake of the crash. The timing could not have been more felicitous for the radical right, with mainstream policies of deep, prolonged austerity implemented since 2008 (severe cuts in social spending, rising unemployment and falling wages) hardening popular attitudes in relation to the so-called ‘absorption capacity’ of the host societies and the spectre of economic competition between ‘native’ and ‘immigrant’ groups.

More recently, radical right-wing parties have re-articulated the ‘zero sum’ schema in even more sensationalist and stark ways, in support of a further discourse that we can call the ‘*tipping point*’. This has involved projecting a menacing diagnosis into the future in order to magnify its claimed adverse consequences. By consciously compressing the distance between present and (a vague) future, this strategy has sought to justify radical action in the present tense (a change of political paradigm in an aggressively discriminatory and exclusionary direction) in order to avoid the extreme scenario presented for the future if the identified ‘problem’ remained unchecked. The intervening time between now and the imprecise future is consciously abbreviated to the point that audiences may decide that their current decisions have the power to bring about or avert a cataclysmic and irreversible event. The far-right has been conjuring up the imagery of a veritable catastrophic ‘tipping point’, engendering a pervasive mood of ‘moral panic’. In this most dramatic context, the distance between present and cataclysmic future has collapsed because the ominous scenario is claimed to have already started to unfold and -, it is claimed, irreversibly so unless the diagnosis is acted upon with immediate effect, without conventional caveats or restrictions. The image of an apocalyptic all-out struggle has been articulated more and more successfully by the parties of the radical

right, whether in relation to immigration (discourses of ‘breaking point’, ‘dilution’ of identity, and ‘replacement of population’ by non-natives) or Islam (the various narratives woven around the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis³⁴) or more often both (for example, the extreme dystopian discourses of ‘Eurabia’ and ‘Londonistan’).³⁵

The ideology and identity of the 9/11 terrorists permitted the radical right to fuse new anxieties with pre-existing concerns about multiculturalism and long-standing prejudices against Muslims.

‘MAINSTREAMING’ OF RADICAL DISCOURSES AND THE ‘MAINSTREAM’

The new radical right has scored its most impressive successes when it seized the moment, calibrating its message and political strategy to make the most of available political opportunities and of the increasingly volatile public mood.³⁶ The milieu of heightened existential and identity insecurity since the turn of the new millennium, combined with the radicalising effect of the fi-

34. Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations* (Cambridge, Malden MA: Polity Press, 2010), 88-94

35. Ray Taras, “Xenophobic parties and the making of exclusionary etatized nationalism: cases from Western and Eastern Europe”, in André Lecours, Luis Moreno (eds), *Nationalism and Democracy: Dichotomies, Complementarities, Oppositions* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2010), 128-48; Richard Bonney, *False Prophets: The ‘Clash of Civilizations’ and the Global War on Terror* (Witney: Peter Lang, 2008), esp. 211-32

36. Robert W. Jackman, Karin Volpert, “Conditions Favouring Parties of the Extreme Right in Western Europe”, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol 26, No 4 (1996): 501-21

nancial crisis on anxieties about prosperity and welfare, provided a fertile political ground and a more receptive audience for its radical message. The 2014 elections for the European Parliament confirmed what has been an ongoing upward electoral trend for many of the continent's established and relatively new movements of the radical right. Voting patterns of course tend to change across different types of elections, with the parties of the radical right faring noticeably better in local/regional and European elections than they do in the case of national polls. While, on average, parties of the radical right have rarely achieved a number of votes that could be classified as an electoral 'breakthrough', the overall trend in the last two decades has been consistently upward in this respect [Table].³⁷ In addition, new parties and movements have appeared in many European countries in recent years, making the 'new' radical-populist right a genuinely trans-national political force.³⁸

What is even more alarming in this context is the high level of popular support for ideas and measures that are blatantly at odds with (otherwise still accepted) 'mainstream' values rooted in the discourse of universal human rights.

Beyond election results, however, parties of the radical right have been successful in translating their poll ratings into (disproportionately higher) political and socio-cultural influence on

mainstream society. In countries such as Austria, The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Italy, and Switzerland, the radical right has emerged as a potential power broker, supporting or participating in government coalitions only on the basis of dangerous concessions from establishment parties. This kind of political influence is very difficult to gauge, for it goes well beyond the field of party-political bargaining and compromise. The initial political concessions made by mainstream parties in order to lure, appease, and neutralise their far-right government or parliamentary partners may result in the gradual 'mainstreaming' - if not of the parties themselves then at least of particular aspects of their more radical ideas, programmes, discourses, and outlooks in ways that transcend (and potentially outlive) any particular cooperation agreement.

This 'mainstreaming' of ideas propagated by the radical right may also take place even if such parties remain politically marginalised and stigmatised by a still operative political cordon sanitaire (as has been the case in France and Sweden, for example). In this case, 'mainstreaming' involves the (partial or full) endorsement by either political agents of the so-called political 'mainstream' or by broader sectors of society of 'extreme' (in some cases, even taboo) ideas and attitudes without necessarily leading to alignment (political cooperation or voter alignment) with the extremist parties that advocate them most vociferously. This scenario is the most difficult to gauge, as it may involve either a gradual 'agenda-setting' or more permanent shifts in the 'framing' of the political debate.³⁹ It is also often accompanied by indirect ideological-political concessions by mainstream actors that are not formalised through party agreements or quantified through

37. Roger Eatwell, "The Rebirth of the Extreme Right in Western Europe", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 53 (2000): 407-25; E. L. Carter, *The extreme right in Western Europe: success or failure?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2005)

38. Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, Brian Jenkins (eds), *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: From Local to Transnational* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012)

39. V. Price, D. Tewksbury, "New values and public opinion: a theoretical account of media priming and framing", in G. Barnett and F. Boster, (eds), *Progress in the Communication Sciences* (Nordwood NJ: Ablex, 1997), 173-81

voter re-alignment.⁴⁰ In all three scenarios, the influence of populist ideas and discourses is strikingly disproportionate to the actual levels of the respective parties' electoral support. Whether as a pragmatic concession by mainstream parties in order to achieve short-term government stability or as a strategy of catering to a growing electoral demand and a safeguard against voter alignment with radical parties, the result is infinitely more worrying than any influence measured purely in electoral results.

What is even more alarming in this context is the high level of popular support for ideas and measures that are blatantly at odds with (otherwise still accepted) 'mainstream' values rooted in the discourse of universal human rights. Various recent opinion polls have documented the hardening of public attitudes in relation to immigration and various minority groups (especially Muslims and Roma), showing a much higher level of support for at least aspects of the extremist discourse of radical right-wing parties than expressed in purely electoral terms. In Switzerland, strong public backing for extreme discriminatory measures has been amply demonstrated through voting in a series of referenda. The November 2009 referendum vote produced a dramatic majority (57.5%) in favour of a ban on minaret construction for new mosques that left little doubt about the level of popular support for the initiative.⁴¹ The Swiss People's Party (SVP) interpreted the outcome as an open-ended mandate to introduce further restrictive measures in the future, with regard to both the visibility of Islam in Switzerland and immigration as a whole. Barely a year after the minaret ban vote, the SVP forced and won yet another referendum with a comfortable majority, this time allowing the au-

tomatic deportation of immigrants convicted of a criminal activity.⁴²

This and other incidents illustrate an uncomfortable truth about the appeal - actual and potential - of the radical right in contemporary Europe. Rather than viewing it as a fundamental and puzzling departure from 'mainstream' values, one should be tempted to explain the electoral and above all political (agenda-setting) 'success' of the radical right as a result of the radicalisation of pre-existing views and attitudes within 'mainstream society' itself. In short, there is a considerable, if often covert, social demand for many of the ideas articulated by the radical right, sustained by still considerable strands of nativism-nationalism, xenophobia, and insecurity in European societies. The recent case of the Dresden marches 'against the Islamisation of Europe', organised by a new grass-root group called PEGIDA, has demonstrated how such latent attitudes are more widespread than is often assumed, and how they can become radicalised and brought to the fore of the political debate.⁴³ Indeed, what is surprising is not that parties of the radical right have been increasingly successful, but that this success has not been more pronounced, given the degree of mainstream social support for some of their views.⁴⁴ In this respect, international terrorism, increasing migrant flows, and the economic crisis are important factors in any explanation of the growing popularity of the radical right but primarily in the sense that they have helped radicalise, legitimise, and articulate what was already an integral part of mainstream cognition.

In addition, and far more alarmingly, this interpretation suggests that the radical right has

40. Eatwell, "Rebirth of the extreme right", 416-18

41. Damir Skenderovic, "Challenging the exceptionalist view: favourable conditions for radical right-wing populism in Switzerland", in Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, Brian Jenkins (eds), *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: From Local to Transnational* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 209-24

42. "Swiss Right Wins Vote on Deportation of Criminals", *New York Times*, 28.11.2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/29/world/europe/29iht-swiss.html>

43. Adam Withnall, "Dresden march: Germans warned not to heed 'Nazis in pinstripes' as 10,000 turn out for 'anti-Islam' protest", *The Independent*, 16.12.2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/dresden-march-germans-warned-not-to-heed-nazis-in-pinstripes-as-10000-turn-out-for-antiislam-protest-9928176.html>

44. Mudde, "Pathological normalcy", op. cit.

potentially much more space to grow, again both electorally and in terms of agenda-setting influence on mainstream political debates and social attitudes. The recent spike in popular support for the FN in France and the UKIP in Britain highlights a growing acceptance by public opinion of ideas or solutions that were only recently regarded as extreme.⁴⁵ It is not an anomaly extraneous to the alleged mainstream of western democracy and human rights but a radical alternative proposition ‘from within’ that continues to be sustained by commonplace irrational beliefs, fears, and prejudices still rooted in the so-called mainstream.

MAINSTREAM RESPONSES

If the recent ‘success’ of the radical right is underpinned by ongoing strong public demand that has been more effectively catered to by the supply of ideas, programmes, and modes of mobilisation by populist movements/parties, it is also worth exploring how the ‘mainstream’ political parties have dealt with the challenge posed by the growing influence of the radical right. Although responses vary considerably from country to country, party to party, as well as over time, we can distinguish three main strategies, again bearing in mind they can be pursued concurrently by the same political actors:

Confirmation of the political cordon sanitaire around the parties of the radical right, sometimes supported by a strengthening of the legal instruments that de-legitimise or even criminalise their discourse and actions. The marginalisation of the radical right from government remains the prevalent strategy of mainstream parties in a

wide range of European countries, most notably in France and Sweden. The post-World War Two German model of keeping a watchful eye on any instance of political ‘extremism’ and scrutinising cases through a firm legal/constitutional lens remains the most complete institutional example.⁴⁶ However, recent legislative developments in the fields of hate speech and incitement to violence have also supplied more flexible legal tools that have targeted the activities of parties and organisations linked to the radical right.

Loosening of the cordon sanitaire, thereby allowing co-opted parties of the radical right access to political power, usually in the expectation that such a role will result in either a weakening of their radical outlook or a drop in their electoral support in the future. The Freedom Party of Austria, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Danish People’s Party, the True Finns, the Northern League in Italy, the Norwegian Progress Party, and other kindred radical parties have been brought into parliamentary or government coalitions for varying periods of time. This has provided them with a strong platform to influence governmental policy in the key fields of immigration, citizenship, and attitudes to the EU.

A hybrid strategy of continuing political marginalisation of parties of the radical right combined with a willingness to appropriate or emulate aspects of their radical discourse and adopt a more moderate version of some of their policy prescriptions, again usually in the expectation that such a strategy will deprive the radical right from its raison d’être and harm it in electoral terms. This has been an ongoing theme in the political strategy of mainstream parties. In the 2007 French presidential elections, the then candidate of the centre-right, Nicolas Sarkozy, campaigned on a strong anti-immigration ticket that borrowed populist idioms and policy initiatives from the

45. Dan Hodges, “2014: the year racism went mainstream”, *The Telegraph*, 5.12.2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/11275507/2014-the-year-racism-went-mainstream.html>

46. William M Downs, *Political Extremism in Democracies: Combating Intolerance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 39-41

National Front while at the same time continuing to be vehemently critical of the party's operation.⁴⁷ More recently, the rise in the electoral support for UKIP in Britain has seemingly forced the two mainstream parties (Conservative and Labour) into a spiral of stronger anti-immigration and in some cases Eurosceptic policy statements.

Each of these strategies poses its own different challenges. The long-term effectiveness of the 'cordon sanitaire' strategy has been seriously questioned in recent decades.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the criminalisation of the ideas and/or political institutions of the radical right in no way guarantees the realignment of its voters with mainstream parties. In fact, as the recent criminal proceedings against the Golden Dawn in Greece have so far demonstrated, it may strengthen their appeal with sections of the electorate that react to what they perceive as an attempt to restrict freedom of opinion and a forceful imposition of 'liberal' hegemony.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, co-opting parties of the radical right and/or relying on them for governmental support do not seem to exercise a moderating influence on these parties' ideological orientation or political praxis. Whatever benefits this strategy may bring (such as, for example, a decrease in the electoral strength of radical parties, as happened for example in the reduced performance of the Danish People's Party in the national elections of 2011⁵⁰), they tend to be in the short term and are usually offset by the danger of shifting the mainstream political debate to posi-

tions and policies that are uncomfortably close to those of the radical right.

However, it is the third strategy that appears to be the most common and dangerous in the long term. On a number of contemporary key issues - immigration, Muslim radicalisation, citizenship, globalisation, multiculturalism - 'mainstream' discourse across the majority of European countries has lurched noticeably to the right in recent years. In Hungary, the centre-right government of Fidesz (a party belonging to the European Popular Party alongside the bulk of mainstream centre-right European parties) has maintained a uniquely dominant electoral posi-

The recent spike in popular support for the FN in France and the UKIP in Britain highlights a growing acceptance by public opinion of ideas or solutions that were only recently regarded as extreme.

tion through a mixture of increasingly authoritarian constitutional-political initiatives and a shift to the right on a number of social issues, echoing the radical discourse of Jobbik on immigration, Euroscepticism, and minority protection.⁵¹ In a crisis-ridden Greece, mainstream parties of both centre-right and centre-left responded to the rise of the radical right by adopting harsh persecution and detention measures against immigrants that many would consider as violations of international human rights obligations.⁵² More generally, mainstream politicians often seem disturb-

47. Aurelien Mondon, *The Mainstreaming of the Extreme Right in France and Australia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013)

48. William M. Downs, "How Effective is the Cordon Sanitaire? Lessons from Efforts to Contain the Far Right in Belgium, France, Denmark and Norway", *Journal für Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung*, Vol 4, No 1 (2002): 32-51

49. Harry van Versendaal, "The rise and rise of Golden Dawn", *Kathimerini*, 3.6.2014, http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_wsate3_1_03/06/2014_540256

50. "Denmark's elections: A left turn for Denmark", *Economist*, 16.11.2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/news-book/2011/09/denmarks-election-0>

51. Keno Verseck, "Blurring Boundaries: Hungarian Leader Adopts Policies of Far-Right", *Der Spiegel*, 30.1.2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/ruling-hungarian-fidesz-party-adopts-policies-of-far-right-jobbik-party-a-880590.html>

52. Aristotle Kallis, "Far-right 'contagion' or a failing 'mainstream'? : how dangerous ideas cross borders and blur boundaries", *Democracy and Security*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2013): 221-246

ingly eager to declare multiculturalism as a failed experiment and campaign on a ticket of lowering immigration quotas for their countries.

The temptation to respond to the electoral and political success of the radical right by entering into a populist bidding war with them on ‘everyday’ matters such as immigration, security, identity, and national sovereignty is all too obvious at a time when popular trust in the political establishment is at an all-time low - and falling rapidly.⁵³ Whether such strategies even help in terms of re-engaging disaffected voters, bringing them back into the fray of mainstream politics and averting their electoral alignment with the radical right, is highly questionable. Although the objective behind the mainstream parties’ embrace of the language and some of the ideas of the radical right may well be to weaken their

In theory, European societies are better-equipped than ever to deal with radical and extremist phenomena in their defence of democracy, pluralism, and human rights.

appeal and ensure the public that their relevant concerns are taken seriously, the result is a more decisive discursive shift towards the political space occupied by right-wing populists. This is a political terrain on which mainstream parties are ill-equipped to compete against the masters of populism, risking in the process a longer-term transformation of the political agenda towards increasingly more extreme positions that they may not be able to effectively control.

53. Matthew Goodwin, *The New Radical Right: Violent and Non-Violent Perspectives* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012), 26-32

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The range of phenomena that research has associated with the populist/radical/extreme right is bewilderingly varied, within and across countries. The degree of ‘success’ of the movements and parties of this radical constituency continues to differ from one national society and political system to another. Consequently, so do the challenges facing policy-makers and civil society across Europe. An initiative that has delivered tangible benefits in terms of de-radicalisation or shifting of popular attitudes in one country may be unsuitable for another and thus may become counter-productive. While the outcomes may be broadly similar across most countries of the continent (disaffection with the political system; heightened existential, material, and status insecurity, coupled with a ‘zero sum’ mentality; strengthening nativist sentiment manifesting itself primarily in anti-immigrant attitudes; Islamophobia; critique of multiculturalism etc), the anxieties that nurture the social demand for radical ideas and the supply-side of the radical right (nature and strategy of parties; ideological priorities; dominant discourses etc) do vary significantly from one country to the other. It is therefore essential that policy-makers benefit from trans-national exchanges of know-how and good practice but continue to take steps towards analysing the particular domestic circumstances in which they operate and the challenges that they face in each case. Comprehensive research and data collection must be an ongoing concern, as both attitudes and challenges shift over time.

In theory, European societies are better-equipped than ever to deal with radical and extremist phenomena in their defence of democracy, pluralism, and human rights. The legal apparatus against discrimination and extremism has been enriched, targeting more and more unforgivingly not just action but also language. The problem re-

mains, however, that the parties and movements of the radical right too have changed and diversified dramatically - blurring traditional boundaries between 'extremism' and 'mainstream', learning from each other, using new technologies to their advantage, forging new transnational channels of interaction, and seizing every political opportunity.⁵⁴ As a result, the range of challenges that they pose has expanded accordingly.

Various combinations of preventative initiatives have already been tried in a constantly widening range of countries in order to address both the demand and the supply factors behind the recent successes of the radical right:

Downstream measures: addressing the actual consequences of the radical right's success and activities has involved a range of measures from outright legal banning of radical right groups to denial of state funding or access to media, often in response to findings from mid-stream channels (see below).

Mid-stream measures: mitigating the adverse effects of right-wing radicalism has taken various forms, including monitoring of hate speeches and crimes, increased protection/support for those individuals and communities that have already been targeted by organisations of the radical right, media exposure of the radical right as a threat to public peace, as well as a range of measures aimed at reducing tensions at particular flash points (local demonstrations, periods of tension).

Upstream measures: pre-emptive action to address potential forms of harm before it actually occurs has been the most expansive and at the same time challenging field of preventative intervention. Measures have included changes to educational curricula in the direction of promoting integration, mutual understanding, and tolerance while also targeting different forms of prejudice; strengthening the democratic cul-

ture by providing more channels for participation and interaction; initiatives aiming to reduce the vulnerability of particular groups (especially youth or targeting areas and groups with special socio-economic profiles) to the message of the radical right; working together with grassroots organisations to build community resilience and increase participation; and requisite training for key practitioners (e.g. police, teachers, prison officers) that aims to equip them with more effective prevention and crisis-management skills.

There are good reasons why a concerted and sustained campaign aimed at preventing or mitigating the threat posed by the radical right needs to employ measures from all three categories discussed above. While downstream measures address overwhelmingly the supply side of the problem and are predominantly short-term reactions, mid- and especially downstream initiatives provide invaluable help in the direction of managing demand more effectively in the long term. It is important to stress that downstream measures, especially those amounting to repression, may be counter-productive on their own, in some cases indirectly benefiting the organisations of the radical right or radicalising social demand for aspects of its political programme.⁵⁵ By contrast, upstream measures pursued consistently and supported adequately by state authorities and in partnership with civil society offer the potential to effect deeper attitudinal shifts in the longer term and to shift public discourse away from positions that feed the support for the radical right.

Whatever the measures deployed to combat right-wing radicalism, there is a fundamental point of departure: 'mainstream' political parties must neither ignore nor appease the radical right. The most spectacular recent successes of the radical right in Europe have come from parties and

54. Hans-Georg Betz, "The growing threat of the radical right", in Merkl & Weinberg (eds), *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, 71-91

55. Vidhya Ramalingam, *Policy Briefing - Far-Right Extremism: Trends and Methods of Response and Prevention* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012), http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Policy_Briefing_-_Far_Right_Extremism_FINAL.pdf

movements that have effectively blurred the distinction between ‘mainstream’ and ‘extremism’. Parties like the National Front (especially under the leadership of Marine Le Pen) in France, the UKIP in Britain, the Swedish Democrats, the Norwegian Progress Party, and the Dutch Party for Freedom have largely deconstructed the stereotypical image of what a party of the ‘extreme’ right may look like. In so doing, they have largely succeeded in de-stigmatising themselves in the eyes of large sections of public opinion, targeting with their political message a small number of key populist concerns, legitimising more radical ways of speaking and thinking about the future, and thus exposing further the difficulties that ‘mainstream’, ‘elite’ parties have had in adapting to the changing political landscape. Growing voter disaffection with established parties and with the overall operation of the political system has both strengthened the appeal of right-wing populists and become far more pronounced as a result of it. Without addressing effectively and proactively this particular aspect of supply, *their* supply, mainstream political parties will most likely continue to suffer electorally and see their chances of setting or controlling the political agenda diminish further.

The failure of mainstream parties to respond in a timely and effective manner to public concerns about immigration, multiculturalism, European integration, and the functioning of the political system as a whole remains at the heart of the discussion about the radical right’s success. Avoiding such topics in the vague expectation that improvements in the economy would remove or at least contain the demand for radical alternative policies has proved a catastrophic misjudgement. The roots of this illusion lay in a conventional belief that right-wing radicalism is appealing primarily to the so-called ‘losers’ of modernisation and that economic growth, higher employment, and greater material prosperity would suffice to cut off the political oxygen

from the radical right.⁵⁶ While this interpretation may not be entirely erroneous, it has proved to be dangerously insufficient in recent years, with the parties of the radical/populist right succeeding in appealing to, and recruiting from, far broader segments of the electorate with diverse socio-economic profiles. In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between more traditional parties of the far right (such as the British National Party) and new or recently reformed populist ones.

On the other hand, the temptation for mainstream parties to embrace the issues that lie at the heart of the increasing popularity of the radical right carries significant health warnings. If, as has been generally the case, this attempt comes too late and/or appears as a knee-jerk reaction to the spectre of electoral loss, then it may prove- and indeed has proven on many occasions - catastrophically counter-productive in the longer term. The original failure of most mainstream parties in Europe to set the tone of the public discussion in relation to key issues such as immigration, Islamophobia, national identity, Euroscepticism, and multiculturalism has left them in a decidedly disadvantaged position in terms of controlling and shifting the political agenda afterwards, especially when a party of a radical right has already owned it to its advantage. Still, deciding to compete on the same political terrain and against the same benchmarks that have been defined by the discourses of the radical right (immigration quotas, absorption capacity, national sovereignty, cultural identity etc) is infinitely more dangerous.

This is why, in the current circumstances of a profound shift to more populist issues and public discourses, *midstream measures* deployed responsibly by mainstream institutions (parties,

56. Herbert P Kitschelt. “Movement Parties”, in Richard S. Katz and William Crotty (eds), *Handbook of Party Politics* (London: Sage, 2006), 278-90; Frank Decker, *Der Neue Rechtspopulismus* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2004)

state authorities, media) to regain control of the political agenda and the tone of the public debate are desperately needed. Mainstream parties must navigate the dangerous waters of right-wing populism with a political strategy that looks beyond short-term electoral gains and invests in medium- and long-term paradigm shifts in both their own supply and in social demand. Neither ignoring the challenge nor outbidding their radical challengers, neither failing to engage effectively with the issues raised by radical right-wing parties nor making irresponsible and dangerous concessions in the misplaced hope of either appeasing or weakening them, neither abandoning the voters of populist parties nor paying any price to regain their confidence, mainstream parties must instead seek to regain over time control over the political debate by exercising - responsibly and effectively - their position as proactive agenda-setters. One can talk sensibly and responsibly about immigration and the danger of so-called Islamic radicalism to address public concerns (however exaggerated) while actively and convincingly debunking myths propagated by the radical right. One can point to challenges lying ahead without endorsing the 'zero sum' or 'tipping point' rhetoric of right-wing populism. One can point out what still needs to be done in the direction of fostering a genuine multicultural society without rejecting the principle or hastening to announce its alleged failure. One can talk about the need to manage migrations sensibly while devising solutions that respect human rights and avoiding the use of benchmarks for harsh action and spectacular results fetishised by the radical right.

CONCLUSIONS

For more than a century, European societies have lived with diverse phenomena of right-wing extremism/radicalism/populism; and they will continue to do so. What is far more important is to

accept the challenge and ensure that their responses are effective - consistent, timely, sustainable, honest, effective, anchored on a firm agenda of promoting human rights and geared towards the long-term reduction of harm. Parties and movements of the radical right continue to change, adapting their communication strategies and tweaking their ideological message to better align themselves with, radicalise, and channel, popular topical concerns. It is essential that mainstream understanding of what the radical right is, how it operates, and what its primary objectives are continues to deepen and become enriched through new research and sophisticated knowledge.

History of course does not repeat itself. The conditions of the 1930s are not reproducible in today's world. A revival of 'fascism' is highly unlikely, and even more unlikely to succeed. A catastrophic collapse of democracy is almost inconceivable. Still, past failures contain lessons with on-going relevance and validity. It was the calamitous implosion of mainstream politics and society that led to the success of interwar fascism.⁵⁷ It was 'mainstream' social demand that supplied fascist parties with votes, political influence, and staying power. Above all, however, it was the failure of mainstream political and social actors to engage, address, and respond to the rise of right-wing extremism in interwar Europe that put in place the necessary conditions for the victory of fascism - with its calamitous consequences of totalitarianism, war, and mass violence.

If there is a cautionary tale from the 1930s, it is that extremism is at its most potent when it benefits from a close *alignment between radical supply and radicalised popular demand*. It would be an illusion to aim for eliminating one or the other: there will always be radical parties that

57. Juan Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Aristotle Kallis, "The 'fascist-effect': on the dynamics of political hybridisation in interwar Europe", in Costa Pinto & Kallis (eds), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship*, 13-40

challenge mainstream society, as there will always be beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices within significant sectors of public opinion that render them potentially vulnerable to radical or even extremist alternative attitudes. Instead, policy measures and initiatives, over the short, medium, and long term, should aim cumulatively at breaking the vicious reinforcing circle between (existing and latent) public anxieties and populist fear-mongering that constantly strengthens and radicalises them. There is little to gain and much potential harm in promoting downstream heavy-handed repression or harm reduction without at the same time engaging with associated public concerns and trying to shift the overall context of the debate on these issues. There is even less to gain and even more potential harm in promoting laudable upstream measures without sending out a consistent, categorical message that the diagnoses of the radical right, its behaviour and programmes and even language (the ‘we’ versus ‘them’ discourse⁵⁸), are misleading, unacceptable, and dangerous.

The current success of the radical right in Europe is a phenomenon with a multitude of political, socio-economic, and cultural tributaries. Many of these are intrinsically connected to ‘mainstream’ politics and society - they tap into it, feed from it, breach boundaries and blur distinctions between ‘extremism’ and ‘mainstream’. Since World War Two, more than ever *the radical right has become a problem, and an integral part, of ‘mainstream’ society*. More than ever since the 1930s *the ‘mainstream’ political system is in danger of becoming a critical part of the problem rather than its critical defence and remedy*. In addition to preventative measures, mainstream parties must strive to rebuild their damaged relationship with an increasingly disaffected public. Once this is addressed effectively, all other measures aimed at preventing the success of the radical right and at

de-radicalising social attitudes in relation to key topical issues such as immigration, Islam, identity, and so on will be far more effective in their intended outcomes. In the meantime, the least mainstream political actors can do is to refrain from knee-jerk reactive measures and from irresponsibly outbidding the radical right in the pursuit of short-term electoral gain or damage-limitation.

58. Kundnani, op. cit., Conclusions

The family of the radical right is enjoying a prolonged spell of electoral and most importantly political 'success' in Europe. Established (though constantly adapting) parties and new movements, from a variety of backgrounds and with different political trajectories and ideological profiles, have gradually come to represent a combined, formidable challenge to the 'mainstream' political system and society. Since the turn of the new millennium in particular, heightened existential insecurity and popular anxiety about identity and welfare have created an even more fertile ground for the radical right's populist message. More alarmingly, however, some of its key themes (in particular anti-immigrant, anti-Islam, anti-establishment, anti-EU critiques) have gradually become 'mainstreamed' - that is, accepted by large sections of society and adopted by 'mainstream' political discourse, thus blurring conventional boundaries between 'extremism' and the 'mainstream'. This study explores the political itineraries, ideological characteristics, and current strategies of the radical right in Europe, as well as the responses of 'mainstream' actors to it. This is an analysis that sees the success of the radical right not only as a critical challenge to, but also as a complex problem of, 'mainstream' politics and society.



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