



Migration and the rise of the radical right

Social malaise and the failure of mainstream politics

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policy network paper

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Abstract

In recent years, the popularity of new radical right-wing parties with anti-immigrant platforms has increased across Europe. This paper outlines the complex set of factors that account for this trend and offers a critical evaluation of the way mainstream parties are responding. Far from reflecting a short term trend triggered by the current economic downturn, the rise of the new radical right indicates a deep economic and social malaise affecting western European societies. The paper warns political parties and the wider public not to dismiss the new radical right as fanatical parties operating on the fringe of politics, but rather to embark on careful examination of their political discourse. By combining strong anti-establishment rhetoric with potent demands for democratic reform and identity politics, the radical right is managing to overcome the traditional split between left and right, with potentially serious consequences for the future of our body politic.

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Introduction

In recent years the new radical right's political discourse has struck a chord with voters across Europe and experienced a substantial increase in electoral support, allowing it to enter into coalition governments in Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland, and Denmark.[#] In 1994 Gianfranco Fini's "post-fascist" National Alliance entered a coalition government presided over by Silvio Berlusconi in Italy. In 1998 Jean Marie Le Pen, leader of the Front National, achieved a significant result in the French regional election and four years later obtained enough votes in the first round of the French election to become president of the Republic, had he won the second round.¹ In 2000 Jörg Haider, then leader of the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), joined a coalition government, and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party in the Netherlands, which according to recent polls is likely to become the second biggest party in the country, might achieve a similar position after the elections taking place in June this year.

There is no single definition that captures the variety of new radical right movements that have sprung up over the past decades. The new radical right lacks a homogeneous and unifying ideology, and includes parties with links to inter-war fascism as well as post-industrial extreme right politics. These new parties can be seen as a movement formed by radical right wing groups that operate within the constitutional framework and, unlike previous radical right manifestations, do not wish to replace liberal democracy by fascist or authoritarian regimes. Having said this, the new radical right is explicitly anti-elite and highly critical of the current functioning of democracy. It defends various sorts of ethnic nationalism, it is populist and stands against immigration, in particular Muslim and non-white immigration.

The most popular item in the new radical right's political agenda concerns its opposition to immigrants. Concurrently with the ongoing process of globalisation, many European countries have experienced a sharp rise in the number of immigrants and this has been accompanied by outbreaks of hostility towards foreigners who are perceived as a threat to precarious jobs and livelihoods but also as posing a challenge to national cultures and identities. These developments have promoted the emergence of a unique and unsettling environment for some individuals who are unprepared, unable or unwilling, to adjust to a novel situation; individuals who regard the new radical right as an alternative to mainstream politics.

This paper has three main objectives:

- 1.** To identify the main factors that could explain the rise of the new radical right and anti-immigrant feelings in recent years. Here we find that, contrary to the popular view which regards the surge in support for the radical right as a result of economic hardship, the factors contributing to this phenomenon are much more complex than generally acknowledged.
- 2.** To study the ideology and political discourse of the new radical right. Although significant variations exist across countries, the new radical right presents itself as primarily anti-immigrant and as defenders of the national preference principle. However, it would be wrong to see the anti-immigration stance of these parties as their only attraction in the eyes of the electorate. In fact, the new radical right appeals to an electorate dissatisfied with mainstream political parties and the political system more generally.

[#]. The Danish coalition government consists of the Conservative and Liberal Party, but relies on the nationalist right-wing Danish People's Party's support for a parliamentary majority.

3. To explore the implications of our findings in 1 and 2, above, for the question of how mainstream political parties should respond to the rise of the radical right. If concern about immigration is only one among other reasons why voters are attracted to these parties, this may mean that mainstream political parties have more scope than they think they do to offer alternative readings of immigration to that offered by the new radical right. At the same time, however, there are other lessons that mainstream parties must learn from the rise of the new radical right.

1. Explaining the rise of the new radical right

1.1. Globalisation as the driver of change

General agreement seems to exist about the connection between the rise of the new radical right, and the level of socio-economic change we have witnessed roughly since the end of the cold war. The pace of these changes is accelerated by the process of globalisation which is having a major impact on the lives of individuals who see consumption, production, leisure, media, education, travel and politics affected by increasing interdependence and speed in communications and technological developments. As such, the impact of globalisation is felt in virtually all spheres of social activity and affects people's experience of the economy, culture and values, and politics.

a) Economic insecurity and uncertainty in everyday life

The rise of the new radical right partly reflects the insecurity and instability brought about by rapid social and economic changes and a technological revolution that has resulted in the re-structuring of the world economy.

The end of a bipolar division of the world led by the US and the former USSR and the subsequent collapse of communism has irremediably weakened socialism and trade unions together with the traditional values underpinning them. Feelings of solidarity and equality have weakened and competition and individualism have gained importance. World trade and labour markets are predominantly guided by capitalist principles resulting, among other things, in the displacement of the manufacturing industry away from industrialised western societies, to eastern Europe and developing countries, where production is less expensive, labour regulations less strict, wages lower and workers' rights weaker and sometimes non-existent.

While a successful elite benefits from operating in this global flexible market, a growing number of low and medium-skilled workers are filling the ranks of the unemployed. Among them there is an escalating sense of vulnerability and defeat, often accompanied by an increasing lack of self-esteem. In addition, the perception that immigrants come to their countries to "steal" their jobs as well as the view, substantiated or not, that asylum seekers and refugees receive greater social benefits than nationals, is contributing to a process of increasing resentment towards the state and towards society as a whole. Their own personal insecurity leads them to disregard the generally precarious conditions in which immigrants often tend to find themselves and the frequent unwillingness of nationals to take up so called "immigrant jobs."

Instead, as will be discussed below, the visibility of certain minorities associated with "alien" cultures, traditions and ways of life often fosters fear, a lack of trust, open hostility and, in some cases it results in xenophobia and racism against those regarded as different.

b) Cultural anxiety

Globalisation is contributing to the expansion of certain values, ideologies and products resulting in a pervasive, if uneven, cultural and linguistic homogenisation characterised by US influence. A significant number of nations and ethnic groups share a genuine concern about the possible eventual disappearance of their cultures and languages and experience anxiety about the worldwide expansion of English. For example, the French are extremely preoccupied about the predominance of English worldwide and, in particular, by the progressive displacement of the use of French within EU institutions as well as the introduction of English expressions into the French language.

At the same time, not all individuals are equally affected by the consequences of globalisation and while some tend to take a more negative view of the developments, other individuals have easy access to the means of globalisation, and welcome the sophisticated technological tools that have made it possible. As such, social class and education tend to fuel a growing divide between those competent to move around and benefit from living in the global age and those on the margins. In a sense, the transition from industrial to post-industrial society requires fast adapting individuals capable of surviving within a dislocated society where moral norms, values, ideologies, traditions and knowledge are constantly challenged and revised. In this context, only a few achieve an elite position while a substantial underclass, having few chances of escaping their situation, grows at the bottom. Inequality is rampant not only between different parts of the world but also within particular societies and this generates resentment and fragmentation.

Furthermore, increasing numbers of immigrants belonging to cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities are settling in the west. The substantial influx of refugees and asylum seekers recorded in the last fifteen years or so is contributing to an enhanced perception of diversity in western Europe and north America where, in many instances, indigenous cultures are being challenged, rejected, and confronted by those of the newcomers. Moreover, some sectors of the indigenous population display a growing mistrust and even hostility towards aspects of the newcomers' cultures and values which are perceived as "alien" and posing a threat to national cohesion, national culture and a national "way of life." This is illustrated by Hilde Coffé's study of municipal-level support for the radical right party Vlaams Blok in Belgium. She found that the difference in electoral reactions to the presence of different ethnic groups is traced to perceptions of cultural distance and, on the supply side, to the appeals of Vlaams Blok which typically targets Turkish and Moroccan groups: "This suggests that it is not so much the presence of foreigners, but rather the fear of the Islamic way of living that leads to extreme right voting."²

As will be discussed in greater length later on, such attitudes are generating heated debates about various models of integration, their success and desirability. They also open up the debate about what should be the basis of a cohesive society and whether this requires the sharing of some cultural, linguistic, religious and civic values among all citizens. Ultimately, it poses questions about the conditions for the coexistence of different identities within a single nation, thus directly addressing issues about the limits of tolerance within liberal democracies.

According to some theories, there is a link between the revival of the radical right and the anomie experienced by some citizens in the west. They argue that "traditional social structures, especially those based on class and religion, are breaking down. As a result, individuals lose a sense of belonging and are attracted to ethnic nationalism, which according to psychological research increases a sense of self-esteem. For similar reasons, they may be attracted to family and other traditional values."³ The new radical right has managed to capture feelings of insecurity and uncertainty encouraged by

a world defined by rapid change, and it has addressed them through a political discourse based on underlining the distinction between those who belong and the “others”. This has seen the emergence of some kind of ethnic nationalism, cutting across social class cleavages and emphasising the need to preserve national identity against foreign influences.

Although western societies are profoundly individualistic, and in some respects as a result of globalisation increasingly so, there is a dimension of the individual which can only be satisfied by his or her sense of belonging to a group. This social aspect is generally fulfilled in situations within which individuality is transcended through experiences of feeling in unison with others, this is, by sharing some common interests or objectives which enable individuals to transcend their profound isolation, the angst accompanying awareness of the brevity of life, as well as feelings of ontological insecurity. National identity has proven capable of playing this role and the new radical right has become not only fully aware of the relevance of a shared identity but also offers a strong commitment to jealously protecting it against what it perceives as foreign contamination and downgrading.

c) Political alienation

In the political arena, far-reaching changes at the national, European, and global levels have affected people’s views of the stature and role of politics and politicians alike, and have added to their sense of powerlessness. In the 1990s, the United States saw the ascendance of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, which since spread to Europe and to other parts of the world. To some extent as a reaction to this, numerous societies experienced political radicalisation, often accompanied by strong anti-system movements beyond the control of traditional conservative parties, a development which, in some instances, has crystallised in the constitution and advancement of radical right wing populist parties.⁴

At the national level, lack of trust in politicians and the political system alike has weakened the traditional role of the political party as the representative of the interests and concerns of its supporters. A growing number of people regard the political system as alien to their lives and politicians as being primarily concerned with maintaining their own status and privileges.

A growing number of people regard the political system as alien to their lives

Simultaneously, the process of European integration has been associated with a weakening of the nation-state or, at least, the substantial transformation of its sovereignty. This also contributes to fostering anxiety among some citizens ill prepared and unable to take advantage of the opening up of European frontiers and markets. These people often feel threatened by increasing labour mobility and cultural diversity because, in their view, such changes restrict their own opportunities (enhancing those of others), creating an environment where they do not feel secure. Fierce competition for jobs, the re-structuring of welfare systems and cultural anxiety break the “imagined” homogeneity, solidarity and sense of community associated with the nation. In addition, the pervasive threat of terrorism since 9/11 is also associated with “outsiders”, people who do not “belong” even if they are citizens.

Finally, globalisation and its consequences has favoured the proliferation of all sorts of international and transnational institutions, corporations and associations with varying degrees of power and competences, which in the eyes of many further undermines the traditional role of the nation-state.

As a result, people are confronted with a radically altered political environment. Many experience the new layers of governance and its impact on the nation-state as a progressive erosion of democracy due to lack of transparency, corruption and other problems associated with it. This idea, which is often fuelled by certain parts of the media, has resulted in the alienation of significant sectors of the population, which feel disenchanting and who often opt to remain in the margins of institutional politics. These factors have created a climate favouring the emergence of the new radical right which, as will be argued below, has made anti-establishment and democratic reform a key pillar of its political strategy and discourse.

1.2. Who is voting for the new radical right?

According to Pippa Norris, “the comparison of the social class profile of radical right voters, including indicators of social inequality, suggest that they are disproportionately over-represented both among the petite bourgeoisie – self-employed professionals, own-account technicians and small merchants – and among the skilled and unskilled working class,⁵ with the exception of Hungary, Italy and Israel, where the petite bourgeoisie prevails and is over-represented. Cas Mudde in his most recent work presents similar findings, and argues that the populist radical right receives support from lower middle-class voters and especially from the self-employed.⁶ Norris warns, that we should adopt a sceptical attitude towards theories which establish a linear causal relationship between growing levels of unemployment, or increasing dissatisfaction among low-skilled and low-qualified workers and rising support for the radical right, highlighting that “the socio-economic profile is more complex than popular stereotypes suggest”.⁷

As such, it would be a mistake to consider that the new radical right appeals primarily to those negatively affected by globalisation. On the contrary, new radical right-wing parties have done particularly well in some of the most affluent countries and regions in western Europe, for example in countries such as Austria, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland, and regions such as north eastern Italy and Flanders. In these areas, “unemployment has generally been significantly below OECD average, and ... social welfare systems are among the most generous in the world and thus well-positioned to compensate potential losers from globalisation”.⁸

Moreover, although as mentioned above a large percentage of those supporting new radical right wing parties are to be found among the ranks of the working classes, it is quite striking to note that support for the new radical right also originates from some well-educated middle class people. They are not so much driven by economic motivations, but regard the impact of migration as a deadly threat to national identity. Basically, they are concerned about the “levelling down” of their own cultures as a result of “hybridisation.” The fact that there are substantial differences in the percentage of middle-class educated people supporting the new radical right in countries such as Austria or Denmark, compared to Britain where radical right support remains a primarily working class phenomenon, adds to the complexities involved in sketching the socio-economic profile of the new radical right voter.

A recent study by Jörg Flecker et al. also demonstrates that voters support the radical right for a multitude of reasons. Three trends were identified: (1) supporters demonstrate “intensive feelings of injustice from frustrations of legitimate expectations relating to various aspects of work, employment, social status or standard of living”; (2) there is a sense of fear and anxiety that comes from a sense of powerlessness from “economic decline, precarious employment, or the devaluation of skills and qualifications”; and finally (3) there is a clear trend among those who have experienced “occupational advancement” with a strong sense of attachment to the “company and its goals”.⁹

Norris attributes the radical right's growing support to "the way in which formal institutional rules set the context of, and thereby interact with, both party supply and public demand in any election."¹⁰ She claims that no significant relationship exists at national (aggregate) level between the national share of the vote cast for radical right parties and a wide range of indicators of ethnic diversity, while simultaneously arguing that "at individual level, however, support for cultural protectionism does indeed predict who will vote for the radical right, as expected, with anti-immigrant and anti-refugee attitudes remaining significant variables even after applying a battery of prior social and attitudinal controls".¹¹ However, her analysis fails to spell out clearly that it is not the intensity and scope of the social, economic, and political transformations that prompts specific reactions; instead, it is the manner in which they are perceived and interpreted by individuals, as well as particular societies, that determines public opinion and voting behaviour. The media, once again, has an important role to play here, as does the approach and narrative of the mainstream political parties, as I elaborate below.

2. The ideology and political discourse of the new radical right

2.1. What is new about the "new radical right"?

Mainstream political parties tend to dismiss the new radical right as "fascist" parties which, by default, have no legitimacy. But, is it accurate to conflate new radical right parties with traditional fascism? If we examine the fascist regimes of the 1922-45 period we find a movement, to be precise an anti-movement in Linz's view, defined as anti-liberalism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, partially anti-capitalism and anti-bourgeois, anti-clerical or at least non-clerical.¹² All these anti-positions, combined with exacerbating nationalist sentiments, led in many cases to pan-nationalist ideas, which in the past posed a challenge to existing states and accounted for much of the aggressive expansionist foreign policy of some fascist regimes.

In contrast, the new radical right accepts the rules of parliamentary democracy in spite of being strongly anti-establishment and, in some cases, endorsing anti-Semitism (although rarely in an open manner). Against the corporatist and state-controlled economies defined by a strongly hierarchical political leadership, the radical right favours a small government. Following the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the USSR, anti-communism is no longer a key concern and a major justification for its existence.

The new radical right accepts market capitalism and, arguably, one of its main ideological weaknesses concerns the

lack of an alternative economic programme to that of mainstream political parties. It has replaced the fascist traditional antipathy towards the bourgeoisie by antipathy – to put it mildly – towards immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, in particular if they are non-western and non-white. Although the new radical right continues to be mainly non-clerical, a number of pro-clerical elements can be found within some radical right populist parties such as the Austrian FPÖ.

In trying to emphasise its closeness to the people and its rejection of the status quo, the new radical right prefers to define itself as a transnational movement, of which we find representatives in western Europe, the US and Australia, which reaches far beyond the scope of mainstream political parties. It could be argued that, in spite of adopting a clearly anti-globalisation stand, the new radical right

Is it accurate to conflate new radical right parties with traditional facism?

employs the means and technological advances at the core of globalisation in order to promote its image not only within but also across national boundaries. In the following section, I take a closer look at these various components of the new radical right's discourse.

2.2. The main pillars of the new radical right's discourse

Although considerable variation exists across countries, there are a number of common themes that can be found in the political programmes of virtually all new radical right parties. These include a strong resistance to the existing (political) establishment and a commitment to democratic reform, a dominant anti-immigrant narrative, and, flowing from this, a strong emphasis on protecting western values and the national preference principle. Many parties of the new radical right also have pronounced views on the issue of integration and the co-existence of different identities and ethnicities within a single nation.

a) Anti-establishment and democratic reform

The new radical right seeks to rob elites of moral and political legitimacy and denounces the corruption affecting western style democratic systems.¹³ A sharp anti-elite rhetoric that claims to replace dominant values with the "common sense of the people" occupies a key place within the new radical right's discourse, which often adopts a populist style.

In spite of its extremely critical view of the functioning of liberal democratic systems, the new radical right does not advocate their replacement by some kind of fascist style political system. On the contrary, the new radical right, at least theoretically, stands in favour of a radical regeneration of democracy. In this respect it is sometimes referred to as a promoter of "hyper democracy". Programmatically, the new radical right's doctrine "involves a claim for genuinely popular participation and representation by means of radical reform of the established political institutions and the whole political process."¹⁴ In line with this, it defends the use of referendums and open lists in elections. As Margaret Canovan stresses, the new radical right seeks to undermine and discredit issues and projects associated with the political establishment, for example immigration policies, multiculturalism, affirmative action and political correctness.¹⁵

b) Anti-immigration

In the last fifteen years or so, prejudice, fear and resentment towards immigrants and refugees have been growing within western societies. The large influx of refugees from eastern Europe and Africa into European countries in the 1990s gave rise to talk of an "invasion of the poor" and expressions such as the "storming of Europe". Over time, a number of economic, social, political and cultural arguments have been developed to justify a negative attitude towards immigrants. These range from the downward pressure that migrants push on wages and rising unemployment among the native population, to their comparatively high birth rates with potential detrimental implications for the existing welfare system, demographic developments, and national identity.

The most important item in the new radical right's political agenda concerns its antipathy against immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.¹⁶ Anti-immigrant sentiment and, in some instances, open hostility towards immigrants describe radical right-wing parties which do not stand against all migration but solely against those immigrants who are deemed to pose a cultural threat to western values and national identity and culture. At present, and following the wave of Islamophobia generated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, Muslims are singled out as posing

the most serious threat to western civilization and are often portrayed as the most “alien” and difficult to assimilate. As such, the radical right regards the growing number of Muslims settling in Europe as a severe danger to western culture and values. As Jörg Haider, founder of the Austrian Freedom Party,¹⁷ argued: “the social organisation of Islam stands in opposition to western values.”¹⁸

Some new radical right parties, such as Italy’s Lega Nord, criticise the fusion between the public and the private sphere, and between religion and politics, which lie at the core of Islam. They see such an amalgamation as a menace to European democracy, political culture and principles, as well as Catholic values¹⁹ and, both the Lega Nord and the Austrian Freedom Party regard Christianity as a core component of European identity:

The world order formed by Christianity and the ancient world is the most important intellectual foundation of Europe. The prime intellectual movements from humanism to the Enlightenment are based on them. The cultural character of Christian values and traditions even embraces members of non-Christian religions and peoples without any confession.²⁰

A considerable section of the population prepared to grant electoral support to the new radical right, are motivated by the view that mainstream parties have been unable to face up to and deal with an issue as poignant as immigration in a manner considered “fair”, “just” or even “patriotic”.

Beyond the national domain, one of the major challenges facing the European Union today is establishing a common legislation for regulating the flows of migrant workers from outside the EU. The EU’s inability to regulate these flows puts into question the moral and economic principles which are at the heart of the EU project and brings national differences and interests to the fore. A further and extremely important issue related to the accommodation of immigrants into western societies concerns the conditions for acquiring citizenship. So far, European citizenship is solely granted to those who are already citizens of an EU member state; however, in the future it is possible to envisage the establishment of some kind of European citizenship – detached from membership of a specific nation-state – allowing for the free circulation of some individuals entitled to restricted economic, political and social rights probably linked to their status as “free floating labourers” within the EU.

The radical right regards the growing number of Muslims settling in Europe as a severe danger to western culture and values

Many people would consider this a worrying prospect, and fear the strengthening and growing size of communities of migrant origin settling in western Europe has the capacity to progressively transform traditional majority-minority relationships as migrants organise themselves politically, culturally and economically.

In European countries, mainstream political parties are eager to obtain electoral support from ethnic communities of immigrant origin entitled to vote, in particular where such communities are of sizeable dimensions. This is a factor which is also regarded with suspicion and resented by the new radical right, which expresses scepticism at the idea that immigrants and refugees could make any valuable contribution to their society. The new radical right is anxious about the potential ability of citizens of immigrant origin (in particular non-western and non-white) to influence the political agenda while challenging national identity. The Front National for example argues in favour of stopping all immigration to France, re-founding the French nationality, applying the national preference principle and protecting national identity.²¹

Although, as stated above, the rise of the new radical right cannot be explained by looking exclusively at economic factors, it seems safe to say that the global economic downturn has accentuated the economic as well as the political and cultural concerns that drive people toward the new radical right. In times of crisis minorities receive a harsher treatment. They are blamed for the misfortunes affecting the whole society. They are considered guilty because of their supposed “inefficiency”, “laziness”, and “lack of culture”, “susceptibility to crime”, “arrogance” or “economic success”. Various forms of discrimination and racism gain recruits in hard times, when particular groups feel under threat. But economic turbulence is not the only feature which may favour racism; rather, ideological factors, such as the perception of a cultural menace capable of endangering national identity, are responsible for raising alarm among the “dominant” group. The new radical right has captured people’s concerns about these issues, and references to the importance of maintaining Western values and prioritizing national citizens make up an important part of their political discourse.

c) Western values and the national preference principle

In Europe, the new radical right advocates the preservation of western values, a principle that is often turned into a call for “national preferences”; that is, citizens should enjoy priority access to social welfare and to the protection of their own culture and language, compared to foreigners. Citizenship should determine a sharp boundary between those who belong and those who do not, and the latter should be excluded from the social, economic and political rights associated with it. According to this line of argument, new radical right-wing parties portray themselves as defenders of those citizens who, in their view, have become vulnerable and marginalised within their own societies.

This principle is endorsed, among others, by the Front National and the Austrian FPÖ. The Front National points at moral and political problems as the source of what they perceive as France’s decline. They are staunch advocates of the “France pour les Français” (“France for the French”) principle and defend the complete assimilation of immigrants – “Être français, cela s’hérite ou cela se mérite”. In contrast with the FPÖ, which focuses on competitiveness and individual freedom, the FN argues that the preservation of national identity should take precedence over the achievement of economic goals. In line with this idea, they are currently moving away from their initial support of market liberalism to defend the introduction of economic protectionism.²²

The platform Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) created by the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn – assassinated during the 2002 Dutch electoral campaign – also emphasised this particular point. Fortuyn did not fit into the xenophobic parameters created by the Front National in France; his main concern was not the protection of national identity but the establishment of some kind of “welfare chauvinism” granting priority to Dutch nationals. In this sense, his discourse was closer to that of the Scandinavian Progress political parties and to the democratic right advocating radical measures against immigration. His style and discourse – which was very critical of the political classes – struck a cord with some sections of a traditionally tolerant Dutch society genuinely preoccupied by increasing immigration and diversity. The Pim Fortuyn List obtained sufficient electoral support to enter into a coalition government in July 2002, but constant internal disputes, lack of political experience and the loss of its leader proved too difficult for them and the coalition government they had contributed to create only lasted eighty-six days.

The principle of national preference, combined with hostility toward those considered too different in terms of values, culture, and often skin-colour should be viewed as part and parcel of a wider project of white resistance or cultural nativism destined to protect what is described as an endangered

European identity. The precursors of contemporary White Resistance and Cultural Nativism are to be found in some of the reformulations of Nazi and fascist ideas that took place in the 1960s. In 1962 George Lincoln Rockwell (leader of the American Nazi Party or ANP) and John Colin Campbell Jordan (leader of the British National Socialist Movement or BNSM) founded The World Union of National Socialists (WUNS) with the aim of uniting the efforts of neo-Nazi activists in Europe and the USA. In their view, fear of communism and Soviet expansion could work in their favour. Rockwell and Jordan defended the idea of Europe as a spiritual and racial entity encompassing those territories – including Europe and beyond- inhabited by white people. It was Rockwell who invented the term “white power” as a response to the “black power” nationalist movement in the US.²³

The new radical right exhibits a cultural nativism tinted with populist overtones that connects with the dream of a “white Europe”. It is crucial to highlight the transnational character of this populist nativism that reaches beyond nationalism by defending the cultural preservation of the European culture. The novelty of the new radical right stems from its adoption of the emerging identity politics discourse to suit its own interest and it is in this respect that, in spite of its links with the traditional extreme right, it is able to offer a fresh message. The new radical right presents itself as an alternative to traditional political parties and founds its discourse on a critique of democracy, a protest against elites and a concern about the cultural preservation and integrity of national identity understood as part and parcel of European identity. It justifies itself by appealing to the image of a world hostile to western values and culture.

d) Integration and ethnopluralism

At a time when a significant number of western citizens question the view that all foreign cultures are a source of cultural enrichment, a bitter debate about multiculturalism and other models of integration multi-ethnic societies has emerged. Concerns about the preservation of national identity and the nation have led the new radical right to oppose multiculturalism, which, in their view, promotes the destruction of individual cultures.

Arguments against multiculturalism adopt different nuances according to different political parties. For instance, in the case of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the main argument is that mixing cultures results in a “levelling down” process. For this reason they warn against the threat of a foreign invasion from the east and present themselves as defenders of the homeland. In so doing, they do not restrict their support to cultural matters but they are firm defenders of the “national preference principle”, which often portrays nationals as the victims, as those discriminated against within their own country, and as those in need of the support and protection of the FPÖ.

The Lega Nord in Italy abhors the US’ “melting pot” model. In its leader Umberto Bossi’s words: ‘o transform Italy into a “multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country” modelled after the US mean[s] to keep Italy divided. For “excessive cultural differences, especially if expressed by skin colour, are fatal for social peace. When streets and places are full of coloured people” citizens no longer feel at home and lose their identity’.²⁴ The Lega, in contrast with other new radical right wing parties, has been careful to moderate its discourse to avoid accusations of racism and xenophobia.

Two conceptions of the nation are at stake here. First, a traditionally French idea of the nation as formed by a voluntary union of individuals able to create a general will and present itself as sovereign. Here, *ius soli* determines citizenship and national identity is the outcome of the will of the individuals who constitute the sovereign nation at any specific point in time. Second, a German idea of the nation conceived as a Volk, that is, an entity with an organic character that pre-exists and transcends the

life of its members.²⁵ In a nation, conceived as a Volk, people are born and socialised into a specific culture with its own language, customs and traditions capable of fostering a sense of belonging among those sharing a distinctive national identity. It follows that only those who “belong” can attain citizenship.

I argue that none of these ideal types of the nation are found in their pure form within contemporary western societies and that a mixture of the two seems to prevail. Present concerns about how to maintain social cohesion within societies experiencing increased cultural diversity have opened up a debate on the elements which constitute national identity. Against political theories which base social cohesion solely on adherence to certain civic values and principles (Habermas), there is a growing view that this is not sufficient to either promote a shared national identity or to foster a sense of solidarity. Instead, additional weight must be given to other components of national identity capable of generating emotional bonds between people such as consciousness of a shared culture, history, attachment to a territory, myths and symbols.

In western Europe, the new radical right has reacted to this by promoting an organic conception of the nation, which regards “foreign bodies” as a threat to a nation’s life and health. Thus, against the idea of society as the outcome of a social contract or the free will of its members, the new radical right considers that it is ontologically impossible to integrate foreigners if they do not assimilate. According to Bruno Mégret, ex-leader of the Front National: “Democracy cannot take place among a collection of individuals sharing no bonds among themselves, and even less among a juxtaposition of different ethnic groups having incompatible cultural references. To exist and develop [democracy] requires a real people, this is a community of men and women who recognize each other as close by means of a language, culture, faith, blood and history”.²⁶ The FN condemns the practice of granting citizenship to individuals who do not identify as French and insists on coincidence between citizenship and national identity. Therefore, in the Front Nationals’ view, allowing for naturalisation to precede assimilation is a serious mistake since, in adopting such a practice, the French nation is failing to defend its distinctive national identity.²⁷ According to Jean Marie Le Pen, “the most serious danger for France is losing its independence for the sake of Europe and losing its identity for the sake of immigration”.²⁸

After World War II, a shift from biological to cultural racism took place. In adopting this view, the new

radical right sought to distance itself from skinheads and neo-Nazi groups still keen to make open references to biological racism. The Nouvelle Droite’s concept of the “right to cultural difference” constitutes a fundamental ideological and philosophical influence on this new paradigm whose main figures are the French philosopher Alain de Benoist, the French thinktank GRECE (Research Group for the Study of European Civilization) and the Nouvelle Droite.²⁹

The term “ethnopluralism” has been coined by the new right to advocate respect for cultural and ethnic differences while maintaining that the best strategy to protect them is to avoid their mixing with each other. Its use by the new radical right abandons references to racial or ethnic superiority and presupposes a post-racist discourse based on the preservation of national identity and culture. In so doing the new radical right has appropriated and transformed the definition of “difference” traditionally employed by the left to promote multiculturalism and respect for diversity. As Taguieff argues, the new right “claim[s] that true racism is the attempt to impose a unique and general model as the best, which implies the elimination of differences ... Consequently, true anti-racism

The new radical right promotes an organic conception of the nation, which regards “foreign bodies” as a threat to a nation’s life and health

is founded on the absolute respect of differences between ethnically and culturally heterogeneous collectives".³⁰

Ethnopluralism, as defined by the new radical right, stands for the protection of national culture and identity while arguing that the national culture and identities of immigrants should also be preserved. To do this successfully, different cultures and identities should not be mixed because it is in the mixing that culture and identity are weakened, levelled down and eventually destroyed. As Betz writes, "It is on this basis that Le Pen and others have proclaimed their respect for foreign cultures and identities – as long as their carriers remain in their own countries (Le Pen, leader of the French Front National: "I love North Africans, but their place is in the Maghreb". Schönhuber, [founder of the German party Der Republikaner], "I love Turks, but it's in Turkey that I love them most")."³¹

3. Responding to the new political landscape

The proliferation of immigration as a salient issue in the political arena, and the way in which new radical right parties across Europe have fostered and capitalised on this and other developments, poses important challenges for mainstream parties, who have responded to this by adopting an increasingly tough stance on immigration. Notwithstanding this trend, no mainstream party has as yet succeeded in halting public anxiety over immigration or stemming the rising tide of the new radical right. This raises the question of whether these mainstream parties have developed a sufficiently rigorous understanding of the factors that drive voters to support the new radical right.

The new radical right presents itself as the defenders of otherwise marginalised groups; as a radicalising force for democracy and as committed to sustaining social cohesion, new radical right political parties across Europe have managed to obtain significant electoral support. The new radical right defends the idea of a "fortress Europe", which they argue is compatible with the protection of national cultures and identities as well as economic prosperity. It exploits the fears and anxieties of citizens who feel threatened by socio-economic changes and resent a rise in the number of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees entering their countries. For many of these citizens, national identity operates as the last resort, able to sustain an already damaged sense of self-esteem. For them, identification with the nation offers a source of pride, which they do not experience as a result of supporting any of the mainstream parties.

Belonging to the nation means participating in all its achievements and replacing the focus on one's own life - and the (at times unfulfilled)

National identity operates as the last resort, able to sustain an already damaged sense of self-esteem

expectations and insecurities that go with it – by identification with a larger entity – the nation – offering past and present reasons to feel important, valuable, and a member of a distinctive group. In these circumstances, the new radical right skilfully portrays the retreat to a national identity of which citizens can feel proud of, as a right, almost a duty.

All things considered, the new radical right offers strong arguments destined to foster a sense of togetherness among citizens. But the new radical right's offer comes at a price: the exclusion of those considered "too different" and the request for them to "stay away" in order to avoid their own cultural and ethnic contamination. The radical right's defence of "pure" national identities blatantly hides its hostility towards cultural interchange and dialogue.

Instead of explicitly addressing voters' concerns as well as the problems inherent to the "solutions" offered by the new radical right, mainstream political parties tend to automatically dismiss new radical right parties by labelling them as "fascist". So far, they have not even attempted to understand why the radical right has been able to strike a chord with the electorate. By emphasising the "politically incorrect" and "un-presentable" discourse and ideology of the new radical right, mainstream parties have underestimated the extent to which their arguments resonate with the public and have tended to reject the possibility of these parties becoming real contenders for political power. Of course, such assumptions are beginning to change as new radical parties have entered into coalition governments in various European countries, have gained a significant number of seats in the European Parliament, and are making progress at the local level in countries where they previously had no support, such as in the UK.

Contrary to what many new radical right parties argue, mainstream parties have in fact taken steps to reduce public anxiety over increased immigration. Most governments across Europe have responded by restricting migration flows, even if for many European citizens these measures may not have gone far enough. What they have not done sufficiently, however, is inform the public about the measures they are implementing and the outcomes they anticipate as a result. The new radical right's fierce attacks on mainstream parties' passive attitudes and so called "open-door policies", need to be countered much more forcefully by mainstream parties' arguments proving the contrary.

This does not mean that mainstream parties should co-opt the new radical right's discourse. On the contrary, mainstream political parties should focus on offering an alternative narrative based on policies that strike a balance between respect for human rights on the one hand, and a rational approach to immigration based on the acknowledgment that resources are not unlimited on the other. Similarly, mainstream parties should do more to convey the message that, while certain fundamental human rights are universal, there are other rights exclusively available to citizens. Currently, the public in most European countries has insufficient information and understanding of the rights which are available to citizens and non-citizens, and the priority of all governments must be to reverse this lack of familiarity. Reassuring citizens that policies are in place which are fair and will not undermine their rights is a key step toward removing the concerns that drives voters to the new radical right.

Conclusion

This paper has traced the complex set of factors explaining the rise of the new radical right, analysed how voters' concerns are addressed in the political discourses of the new radical right, and discussed the implications of these developments for the responses of the mainstream political parties.

The widespread assumption that economic hardship is the main factor responsible for the current surge in popularity of the new radical right across Europe ignores the fact that it made notable progress at a time of economic prosperity and also overlooks the structural factors explaining its success. The new radical right has managed to overcome the traditional split between left and right by combining strong anti-establishment resentment and potent demands for democratic reform with the use of protest and identity politics as mobilising agents. Such a strategy stands in sharp contrast to the notable difficulties for ideological renewal displayed by most traditional parties. Too many of the latter have proven incapable of embarking upon a process of critical self-assessment. Instead, faced with the advance of new radical right wing parties, most mainstream parties have

tended to ignore their novel features while demonising them and conflating them with old-style fascism.

Rather than analysing the conditions which have brought about the emergence of the new radical right and seriously examining the reasons why their discourse is well received by significant sections of the public, traditional parties seem more eager to delegitimise these parties and to rule them out as “respectable” political options. This excludes, of course, the occasions in which mainstream parties require the support of the new radical right parties to form ruling coalitions as has been the case in Austria, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The outcome of such a process is a lack of political debate since both the new radical right and mainstream political parties appeal to the “fear” of the electorate. The former appeal to “fear” of a corrupted political elite which is perverting democracy, while the latter invoke “fear” based on the association of the radical right with old fascist and Nazi regimes.

The electoral success of the new radical right requires a careful analysis of its discourse, in particular its critique of the functioning of democracy in European societies and the way in which the governments of most liberal democracies tend to deal with immigration. Instead of ignoring the new radical right’s attacks on the supposed “passiveness” and “powerlessness” of mainstream parties when it comes to their dealings with immigration, mainstream parties should prove to voters that they have in fact already taken steps to deal with their concerns and are committed to implementing viable solutions.

The strategic response of mainstream political parties should, therefore, further include three important elements:

1. The democratisation of democracy

Mainstream parties should restore voters’ confidence in politics by improving efficient government, reducing bureaucracy, increasing transparency and enhancing trust between politicians and the citizens they represent.

2. A fair and balanced approach to migration

Mainstream parties should voice the importance of controlling immigration flows, while formulating immigration policies based clearly on respect for human rights and a balance between rights and duties. Social cohesion should be actively fostered through education and media campaigns, particularly in areas where the concentration of immigrants is high.

3. Smart social policies

Particular attention should be devoted to the white working class and lower middle class citizens who often feel threatened and unable to compete with cheap foreign labour. This should involve tightened labour legislation to avoid exploitation of citizens and immigrants alike; and a modern welfare state, capable of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable while ensuring access to professional and university education according to ability, not social class.

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