



The Rise of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe Indicators and Repercussions

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The rise of the far-right in Europe has become a general trend in recent years, with increased support for far-right parties in certain European countries, adopting radical populist ideologies. This was particularly evident in the results of various national elections in European countries such as Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Hungary, and others, which has aroused concerns about the consequences of far-right ideology spreading throughout Europe, the threat they pose to European democratic communities, and the development of far-right activity targeting foreigners and Muslims in particular.

Far-Right Contexts

The far-right movement in Europe focuses on various issues, with xenophobia being one of its primary targets. It staunchly promotes national values and emphasizes a strong attachment to a particular political, cultural, and linguistic identity, often displaying inclinations towards religious extremism. The far-right is commonly referred to as a movement or an ideology, and it is occasionally viewed as a political bloc seeking to unite extremist movements or ideologies.

The term 'far-right' refers to white European nationalists who believe in white supremacy, with ultranationalist tendencies as well as religious intolerance and anti-immigration sentiments, especially towards Muslims. It also refers to anti-immigrant parties due to the common stance taken by right-wing parties towards immigrants, whom they see as a threat to the European ethnic and national identity and a major reason for the rise in unemployment and crime in European communities.

There is frequently a tendency to conflate the far-right with right-wing parties, which can lead to confusion. They only seem nominally connected since the far-right movement is a rebranding of hate and of white supremacy. However, right-wing parties

are political parties with capitalist ideologies and a traditional political agenda, unlike left-wing parties that adopt socialist economic ideologies.

Right-wing parties also include traditional right-wing parties that aim to preserve traditions and norms within society. They are also politically realistic to some extent. The far-right seeks coercive intervention and uses violence to preserve traditions and norms, in addition to its ultranationalist tendencies as well as religious intolerance and anti-immigration sentiments.

Thus, there is no agreement on an accurate, comprehensive definition of the 'far-right'. However, there is consensus on some aspects and common features, primarily the rising xenophobia and rejection of minorities, defending national identity and traditions, calling for immigration reduction, rejection of all forms of regional integration, even European integration, allegedly to protect national sovereignty, and calling for the dissolution of the European Union and exiting the Eurozone.

Prominent European Groups

The following are some prominent far-right groups and organizations in Europe:

In Britain: The Order of Nine Angles (O9A) that disseminates its ideologies online; National Action; Atomwaffen Division; Patriotic Alternative (PA) that calls for the expulsion of non-white people from the UK; Britain First that became the largest far-right organization in the UK although it was founded in 2011; and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which was the largest opposition party calling for the UK's exit from the European Union (EU).

In France: The Operational Forces Action (AFO) group before it was dismantled in 2018; Les Barjols group that was dismantled the same year upon accusations of plotting to assassinate the French President Emmanuel Macron. There are other groups, such as Génération Identitaire; Bastion Social; Combat 18; and the Organisation Armée Secrète.

In Germany: Querdenken (lateral thinker) movement; Pegida movement; Sturmbrigade 44; Northern Eagle group that was banned in June 2020; Reichsbürger movement; Weisse Wölfe Terrorcrew (WWT); and Altermedia Deutschland.

In Belgium: The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA); Vlaams Belang party; Schild en Vrienden (Shield and Friends) movement; and white collars.

Factors Behind the Rise

A variety of factors contributed to the rise of the far-right in Europe in the past years, mainly ideological, cultural, economic, political, and others. Immigration has been a main issue that has had a huge influence on the rise of far-right parties in Europe. All far-right forces agree that immigration is the main cause of European problems and that European identity is at risk and must be protected from this menacing foreign invasion .

Accordingly, far-right parties exploited the immigration issue in marketing the far-right to legitimize their racist anti-immigration discourse and enforce the process of mobilization and polarization of a wide array of Europeans to support right-wing parties in parliamentary elections .

The economic factor is the main reason behind the emergence of the far-right at times of turmoil. Estimates have shown that far-right parties in 20 democratic countries have been the prime benefactor of turmoil that follows crises. The votes of Pro-far-right parties amounted to more than 30% of total votes. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis resulted in a rising new far-right wave in Europe. The failed economic policies led to a growing resentment of a wide scale of citizens at the behest of far-right movements. The situation aggravated due to the social changes that squeezed the industrial working class, which is the main supporter of left-wing parties .

The rise of the far-right is also associated with the unprecedented rising unemployment in European countries in the last decade. Europe had about 20 million unemployed people. To the far-right, immigrants are the reason why there is unemployment since they get paid less than their European peers, besides the cost incurred by host countries in terms of public facilities, education, and health. Even though unemployment rates in EU countries have dropped in 2022 to 6.6% of the total population, i.e., 12.93 million, the European far-right is yet on the rise .

The ascent of far-right movements in Europe has coincided with a concerning increase in Islamophobia. This trend involves the manifestation of hatred towards Muslims and the unjust association of Islam with terrorism. The prevalence of terrorist attacks in recent years in countries such as France, the UK, Belgium, and others has further exacerbated these sentiments. Such a rise prompted some European governments and parties to turn a blind eye to the ideologies of far-right parties to maintain the voting bloc. In October 2020, the French President Macron pointed out that Muslims in France

can create their own parallel community and that Islam is facing a crisis all over the world .

The far-right also relies on social media to promote its ideologies and polarize supporters. The far-right discourse targets young people to join it, taking advantage of their anger and frustration with regard to the policies of their governments and how they handle economic crises. It also pushes moderate individuals to espouse the far-right discourse to maintain its electoral political gains.

Signs of Rise

The rise of the far-right in European politics has been a major political phenomenon over the past decade. Support for extremist nationalist parties in Europe has been growing following the Brexit referendum in 2016 and after former President Donald Trump had won the US presidential elections in 2017 .

The main indicators of the rising far-right in Europe in the past years include :

1 .Expansion of the Pro-Far-Right Voting Bloc: Far-right parties have had some success over the past decade in the presidential and parliamentary elections in some European countries, such as Austria, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, France, Hungary, and Britain. These parties include: Law and Justice party in Poland, Danish People's Party (DPP) in Denmark, Fidesz and Jobbik political parties in Hungary, Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) in Austria, the Social Democratic Party in Sweden, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, the Golden Dawn party in Greece, and the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

2 .The Political Rise of the Far-Right: Right-wing parties are currently progressing at a low rate in European politics. However, this is perturbing in the long run due to the significant influence gained by far-right extremist parties and the electoral gains achieved by their leaders in presidential elections, where they have reached the second position in several European countries such as France and Austria. Some nationalist right-wing parties have also achieved a significant voting percentage in certain European parliaments, reaching historical levels of over 20% of the total votes in Austria, Sweden, and Denmark .

In the French presidential elections in April 2022, the far-right under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, president of the National Assembly of France, won 41.45% of votes

compared to 34% in 2017. The party's parliamentary seats doubled to 89 seats in June 2022, which was unprecedented in the past three decades .

In Italy, Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Brothers of Italy (Fdi) far-right political party, won the Italian parliamentary elections of September 25, 2022. She then became the first woman to hold the position of Prime Minister since 1945 after her party had won 237 of 400 parliamentary seats .

Viktor Orbán was re-elected as Prime Minister of Hungary for an unprecedented fourth consecutive term following the victory of his party, Fidesz, in the April 2022 elections. Fidesz secured an impressive 53% of the total votes, resulting in them securing 135 out of 199 parliamentary seats.

During the 2022 Swedish elections, the political party Sweden Democrats emerged victorious by garnering the highest number of votes, amounting to 20.95%. This translated to them securing 72 out of 349 seats, surpassing all other parties within the right-wing coalition.

3 .The Far-right Infiltrating the European Parliament: The European Parliament elections of 2019 witnessed a remarkable surge in far-right parties, which won 105 seats, amounting to almost the third .

4 .The Spread of Hate Speech in Europe: The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued a report stating that EU countries have been witnessing a rising wave of hate speech on social media. Around 850 hate incidents were recorded in Spain in 2021 with estimates suggesting they could in fact be 6,000, with over 1,000 websites promoting xenophobia and intolerance .

On May 13, 2022, German intelligence services revealed hard evidence convicting the far-right in more than 300 incidents in German apparatuses. Estimates suggest the involvement of the far-right in over 65,000 politically-driven crimes in Germany .

Far-Right Future

The increasing prominence of far-right movements has emerged as a significant global trend, particularly in Europe. What is particularly worrying is that the far-right is no longer confined to small parties with populist ideologies, but has expanded its reach. This development is expected to have a profound impact on European politics and society. In response, traditional political forces in certain European countries may

resort to drastic measures in order to counteract the influence of the far-right and preserve their voting base. Consequently, this could potentially influence the formulation and implementation of key European policies.

With the increasing surge of hate speech, concerns regarding minorities are anticipated to escalate in Europe, posing a threat to the continent's future. The steady growth of far-right factions and their efforts to forge political alliances to advance their extremist agendas and policies, with the objective of gaining complete control over European politics, exacerbate these worries. Consequently, European governments are compelled to navigate a politically viable path to mitigate polarization within their respective nations.