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Right-Wing Politics in Europe

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Introduction: From the Margins to the Mainstream

In my first book, *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe*, I argued that radical right parties were more likely to be successful when voters felt they had a chance to win seats in parliament. But often mainstream parties coordinated to ensure that far-right candidates would be unable to win seats. Voters are more likely to vote for candidates and parties that will have an opportunity to govern. Voters may also be encouraged to vote strategically for a candidate that goes against their preferences, seen most clearly when left voters in France ensured that the conservative Jacque Chirac was elected president over Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002.

One of the more disturbing trends I have seen since I began studying the radical right in the mid-1990s has been that ideas that were seen as "radical" back then have become mainstream. As Cas Mudde has noted,

> in the last two decades, socio-cultural issues have come to dominate the political agenda. In most European countries, as well as in Australia and the US, the political debate is dominated by socio-cultural issues and so-called "identity politics," including a more or less explicit defense of white supremacy in the face of the increasing politicization of ethnic and religious minorities. Consequently, socio-cultural issues are no longer niche as mainstream parties now also prioritize them over socio-economic issues, at least in their electoral campaigns. (Mudde 2019, 89)

This shift has multiple explanations, but it is clear that since my book was published in 2005, what was once considered radical has become mainstream, particularly in terms of anti-immigrant sentiment and Islamophobia.

In the 1980s and 1990s there existed an elite consensus to fight the far right at the ballot box by maintaining a cordon sanitaire that kept right politicians from cooperating with far-right candidates while encouraging left voters to support mainstream candidates. This consensus collapsed as conservative governments came into power across Europe after 9/11 and terrorism shifted the focus around immigration from labor policy to security issues (Givens, Freeman, and Leal 2009). The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)

became part of the Austrian government in 2000 partly because they were seen as the only alternative to a grand coalition government. Being part of government seemed to moderate at least the leaders of the party at the time, but it has shifted back to a more strident anti-immigrant tone in recent years. This lack of moderation has continued as more far-right parties have been formed and had electoral success.

The participation of the Austrian Freedom Party, the Danish People's Party, and various other far-right parties in coalition governments in the early 2000s opened the door to greater success for these parties. Support for far-right parties in Europe surged in the 2014 European parliament election, foreshadowing the successful Brexit vote in the UK in the summer of 2016. That support would increase in 2019, with the far-right National Rally party (Rassemblement National) of Marine Le Pen narrowly beating President Emmanuel Macron's party coalition with 23 percent of the vote. The Rassemblement, which maintains most of the positions of its former incarnation, the Front National (FN), has become a regular fixture in the European Parliament and the French Assembly.

What does it mean to be a right-wing party in the 2020s? Party politics in Europe have seen a tremendous rightward shift since I began doing research on political parties in the mid-1990s. We have seen a decline in support for left-wing social democratic and communist parties, particularly in France. It is important to keep in mind the broader context of change as we have seen an evolution of the radical right from being on the fringes of party politics to the mainstream.

Nearly every election in Europe since the early 2000s has seen a radical right party increase its support, join a government, or even take over a government. Across the region, perhaps most notably in Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, and Sweden, radical right parties have clearly become part of mainstream politics. Geert Wilders is a far-right politician who has developed a following by opposing immigration to the Netherlands and has been put on trial for inciting hatred against Muslims. Wilders has called for banning immigration from Muslim countries. Wilders's party received a substantial share of the vote in the spring 2017 election, but not enough to win a majority in parliament over the conservative party. In September 2022, the Sweden Democrats became the second largest party in the *Riksdag* with 73 seats, while in Italy, the coalition headed by the Brothers of Italy and the "postfascist" populist Giorgia Meloni won 125 seats in the Italian Parliament, enough to form a government.

Although Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) party, founded in 2013, dropped from 12.6 percent to 10.3 percent of the vote in the 2022 election, its entrance into the Bundestag as the main opposition in 2017 sent shockwaves across Europe. In Italy at least two of Meloni's far-right coalition partners saw a decline in their percentage of the vote in the September 2022 election, but as noted by Paul Kirby of the BBC, "Their big advantage, however, was that where they were able to put up one unified candidate in a constituency, their opponents in the left and centre could not agree a common position and stood separately" (Kirby 2022).

How did we get here? It is interesting to note that my academic career has spanned an era that has seen a dramatic increase in support for the radical right. April 1986 was

an important time in both my personal and professional history. I was an undergraduate student heading off to my first trip abroad—the Stanford in Tours program would be my first time visiting France. I could not have known that the events in French politics that month would have an impact on my research trajectory when I would become a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, seven years later. Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National would break into headlines across Europe as it scored an impressive showing in a French Assembly election. A switch to proportional representation led to the party winning thirty-five seats, equal to the Communist Party. Although the Front National would not be this successful after the electoral system reverted to the regular two-vote, first-past-the-post system, it was a harbinger of things to come. The election was the beginning of the rise of right-wing politics that would ultimately see the tactics and discourses of the radical right become part of the mainstream.

It does not seem that long ago that far-right or radical right parties were not taken seriously, but their role has gone from being the perpetual opposition to serious contenders for political power. This essay is based mainly on my own research and observations of European politics over the last thirty-five years. I have written on the radical right, immigration policy, and antidiscrimination policy, all during a time that these issues were crucial components of politics at the European Union (EU) level and in national elections across Europe. What I have seen during this time seems like an inexorable shift from an acceptance of "multiculturalism" to a rise in xenophobic politics and parties, which have become a growing component of mainstream politics.

Norms around issues of race and the politics of immigration have clearly shifted since I began studying the radical right in the mid-1990s. In 1999, when Jörg Haider's Freedom Party came in second place in the Austrian legislative election, the other fourteen EU countries at the time considered his positions on immigration and the EU to be beyond the pale. Although other EU members could not change the outcome of the vote, they took measures to indicate their stand on these issues, including passing the Racial Equality Directive (RED) in 2000, as a show of support for antidiscrimination policy (Givens and Evans Case 2014). At the time, I was surprised that this type of legislation would be passed given the resistance in many EU countries to even use the term "race." Radical right parties in Europe tend to use a populist appeal, arguing that they are for the "common man" and against the elite. They often lean authoritarian in their call for security to protect against outsiders and in their blind loyalty to the party or its leaders. Another component is the racism and fear of minorities and immigrants that is being used by politicians in Europe to mobilize voters who fear a loss of privilege and, ultimately, political dominance.

I believe that there are three key areas where the study of the radical right has evolved since I began studying it in the late 1990s. The first is our understanding of the impact of economic change versus the perceived cultural threat presented by immigration. I begin by examining the ongoing debate over the influence of economic factors, such as the decline in manufacturing jobs, and over demographic change as a motivator for voting radical right. In the following section, I examine the shift of working-class

voters from left-wing parties to the radical right and the subsequent decline of social democratic parties in Europe. I then discuss the impact of the radical right on policy developments, including more restrictive immigration policies as well as the response to immigrant integration via antidiscrimination policy.

Economics versus Cultural Threat

Demographic change in Europe was fueled by the recruitment of foreign labor after World War II. Labor recruitment into Europe slowed in the 1970s after the oil crisis and global economic downturn, but then immigration began to increase into the 1980s, as courts ruled in favor of immigrant family reunification. Settled communities developed, and immigrants began to create group identities, although it would not be until the late 1990s that Muslim immigrants across Europe began to see themselves as a group beyond their national identities. As European birth rates declined in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many politicians, economists, and social scientists argued that for Europe to maintain its generous welfare system, particularly its pay-as-you-go pensions, Europe would have to open its doors to more young immigrants. This emerging consensus came just as anti-immigrant far-right parties were gaining traction in countries like Austria and Denmark (Givens 2005). Despite the need for immigrant labor, the people who began to see more immigrants in their neighborhoods and cities were not so sure that these new neighbors were desirable.

Since I began following the development of the radical right in the mid-1980s, a consensus has developed that these parties have created their own niche in the political landscape, focusing on immigration and the perceived threat to social and cultural norms that are represented by immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, and Muslims. Although the economic impact of immigration is not trivial, it has not been shown to be as strong a factor in support for the radical right as xenophobia (Arzheimer 2018). As Arzheimer notes, "Starting with Billiet and Witte's (1995) study of Vlaams Blok support in the 1991 general election in Belgium, a host of single-country and comparative studies have demonstrated time and again that anti-immigrant sentiment is the single most important driver of the radical right vote" (147).

In his chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right,* Tamir Bar-On demonstrates that "a general consensus exists in the literature that ethnic nationalism is the master concept for the radical right" (2018, 20). In my own work on the radical right, I argued that a comparison of the party positions of radical right parties on immigration, the EU, and the economy indicates that "most of the positions of the radical right are derived from nationalism," as seen in slogans such as "Austria First" (FPÖ), "France for the French" (FN), or "Our program is Germany" (the Republikaner party in 1990) (Givens 2005, 35). Another component of this ethnic nationalism is the emphasis on religion. "Note that ethnic nationalism implicitly posits a politically dominant religious group," Bar-On writes, "while minority religions are conceived as threats to the nation. Muslims or Jews are viewed as 'enemies' of the 'true nation'

because they undermine nation-state homogeneity. Radical right positions on the EU, economy, liberal democracy, minorities, immigration, multiculturalism, and capitalist globalization are informed by the master concept, namely, ethnic nationalism" (2018, 28).

Despite these studies, some researchers argue that economic factors play a role. For example, one study finds that "it is the risk of automation among those who are just economically coping, but likely to be fearful of falling and losing what they have, which may motivate the vote for radical right parties" (Im et al. 2019, 6). However, as support for these parties grows, it is perhaps better to take a "yes, and" approach. This ongoing debate over the role of economics versus cultural threat as a motivation for voting for radical right parties is perhaps masking a more complex story. As Ausserladscheider points out,

> On the supply-side of political strategy, cultural and economic factors are closely intertwined rendering the methodological separation into disparate variables impossible. Simultaneously, this impossibility is reflexive of political and economic realities; socio-economic status comes with cultural subjectivities and cultural values such as nationalism inform economic policy articulations. How these subjectivities are informed, reconstructed, and reproduced by political discourse is essential to understand current political developments. (2018, 10)

An analysis that can incorporate the interaction of economic and cultural threats may be a more fruitful approach to understanding the success of many of these parties, and the reasons for shifts in the discourses of right parties more generally.

When I was researching the factors leading to support of the radical right in the late 1990s one of the issues being highlighted at the time was the shift away from manufacturing in Western economies, which was leading to the loss of jobs for men while women were gaining more jobs in services. I clearly remember a cover for the *Economist* magazine in the late 1990s that called the coming decade one of a shift toward an economy that would favor work done by women. The argument was that men were the "modernization losers"—this was seen in new technologies that reduced the need for manufacturing workers or in globalization that was sending manufacturing jobs to the Global South. These trends were seen as destabilizing and likely to lead blue-collar workers to vote for the radical right in greater numbers than women, as I will discuss below.

Economic precarity has indeed grown for working-class voters in particular, and there has been a renewed focus on issues like the impact of income inequality with the publication, for example, of Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2017). Since the 1970s, inequality has increased dramatically, and this has had an impact on both voters and parties. In his analysis of the impact of inequality on the vote for the radical right, Han concludes:

> Given the current trend of rising income inequality in Western European countries, RRPs [radical right parties] will increasingly depend on the native poor for votes. This "proletarianization" of the social basis of RRPs (Betz,

> 1994) has been observed since the 1980s. Yet, traditionally, this structural change in the social basis of RRP constituencies has been attributed to the radicalization of RRP ideologies (Givens, 2005). Here, the findings suggest that rising income inequality also contributes to such a structural change in the demographic basis of RRPs, because it strengthens the party support of manual workers and routine nonmanual workers while it weakens that of more educated, nonmanual workers. (Han 2016, 63)

Han's analysis is interesting because it finds clear connections between inequality and increasing support from blue-collar workers, but I would argue that it also has implications for the gendered basis of support for radical right parties.

> When economists consider drivers of inequality, they mainly focus on processes of technical change, globalization, diverging returns to different skills, structures of property rights and inheritance, and the ability of the rich to capture economic policy making and shape it to serve their interests. On the whole, they do not situate economic inequality between people in the context of intersecting inequalities of gender, race/ethnicity, and location that shape the access that different people have to income and wealth. (Elson 2018, 8)

As Elson goes on to explain in her article, "Structures of gender inequality intersect with income inequality, shaping inequality outcomes, with implications for men as well as for women" (9).

There is a tendency to see the supporters of the radical right in binary terms, for example, as male versus female, white versus ethnic or racial minority, low versus high education levels, and so on. I admit that this was my own framework in my 2005 book—my main finding on supporters for the radical right was that they were disproportionately male, un- or underemployed, and with low education levels. This shows up in regression analyses as we try to determine the impact of each of these factors while holding the others constant. I propose that perhaps what we are seeing on the demand side is something I would call "economic intersectionality." Many authors who examine supporters of the right clearly see that the dimensions that impact that support are complicated, and as research continues it will be important to factor in economic and cultural shifts as well as the impact of policy, which I discuss below. Next, I examine the impact of party realignment.

The Decline of the Left: From "Frozen" Party Systems to Realignment

Since the early 2000s, researchers have noted that far-right candidates have seen increasing support from working-class voters. In France this has become known as *gaucho-lepenisme*. As noted by Gougou and Mayer, "The French National Front was one of the first of the new European extreme rights to develop a significant constituency, as

early as 1984, and it is still considered as a model for many others. Its attraction among blue collars and the emergence of a 'gaucho-lepénisme' or Lepenism of the Left, started to be discussed in the 1990s" (Gougou and Mayer 2012, 156). In their study of anti-immigrant sentiment, Bornschier and Kriesi (2012) conclude that within the working class, the perception of a cultural threat posed by immigrants, more than the perception of an economic threat, is relevant to understand why they vote for radical right parties. In a more recent study, Simon Bornschier argues that "the rise of the radical right is intimately related to the transformation of the traditional West European political space as a result of the educational revolution that took off in the 1960s, to the processes of economic and cultural modernization, as well as to the issue of national sovereignty posed by globalization" (2018, 229). In untangling the factors that are leading to support for the radical right as well as mainstream right parties, it is important to understand the contextual societal shifts that are at play, as well as the ways that parties are changing their tactics to attract voters.

European party politics helped to define our understanding of the "frozen" party systems of the 1960s as defined by Lipset and Rokkan, who wrote that "[t]he party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s" (1967, 50). There was a sense of certainty that the left would always be driven by the communists and socialists, and the conservative parties and Christian democratic parties would define the moderate right. The European party landscape has shifted dramatically in the last twenty years. When I began studying the radical right, the party systems had basically been frozen since the late 1960s. Today, many parties that were reliable vote getters, like the Parti Communiste in France, have virtually disappeared. Overall, France's party system was ruptured in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with new parties taking over the mantle of the old. What would lead us to a situation where the radical right would be nearly indistinguishable from the mainstream right and the left would be struggling to survive?

One of the more important components of the shift in votes has been among working-class voters. Traditionally stalwarts for social democratic parties, working-class voters, particularly men, have been attracted to the radical right as they have been impacted by globalization and cultural change as immigrant communities have grown. It is important to note that in many countries these immigrant workers are still needed in many industries. Low birth rates across most of Europe have meant a need for labor, particularly in industries where native workers are difficult to recruit, such as construction and low-skilled manufacturing jobs.

In a 2017 article, I examined how immigration helped to create a context for party realignment (Givens 2017). After World War II, an increasing number of immigrants came to the UK, Germany, and France. At the time, few understood the cultural impact that these immigrants would have, and the ways they would change the face of their new homes. As countries recovered from war, they needed more manpower to rebuild and maintain their economic growth, and so temporary immigration filled a need for

low-skilled workers—but many of these workers from Italy, Greece, and Turkey stayed permanently (Givens, Navarre, and Mohanty 2020).

An important development in the mid- to late 1990s was the success of center-left politicians like US president Bill Clinton, UK prime minister Tony Blair, and German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. These leaders embraced a neoliberal approach to economic policy that supported a more individualistic approach to governance. These policies contributed to economic growth as a whole, but they did little to improve wages or benefits for the working class and widened wealth inequality. If the center-left's economic policies had improved the standard of living of working-class voters, it is likely that they would not have been as open to the messages of the radical right. Instead, wages remained stagnant, and union membership has declined along with manufacturing jobs.

In France, many observers were surprised in the late 1990s that former Communist Party strongholds became fertile ground for the National Front when they won control of four municipalities. However, it is important to keep in mind that populist parties tend to characterize themselves as the parties of "the people" against "the establishment." For those who are against the status quo, the far right offers an alternative, particularly for those who are concerned about the cultural shifts that are occurring in countries where immigration has grown. An example of these shifts is the increase in grocery stores in France run by Muslims that only sell halal foods that are permitted under Islamic law. In the town of Calais, where residents were concerned about a nearby migrant camp, an August 2016 poll found that the former communist stronghold, once led by a popular communist mayor, had seen a 20 percent increase in support for the Rassemblement (McGuinness 2016).

Many authors have noted that the main impact of the rise of the radical right has been on the fortunes of mainstream left-wing parties. For example, Kai Arzheimer finds that, "[a]fter World War II, parties and movements of the extreme right were most closely associated with the petty bourgeoisie. Over the last three decades, however, the propensity of workers to vote for the extreme right has risen significantly. This 'proletarisation' is the result of the interplay between a long-term dealignment process and increasing worries among the European working classes about the immigration of cheap labour" (Arzheimer 2012, 89).

In the same volume as Arzheimer, Gougou and Mayer note, "As in other democracies, the class cleavage has lost its grip, manual workers having turned away from the left and given a growing support to the radical right represented by the Front National. . . . Economically, workers still lean toward the left. But cross-cutting cultural issues (immigration, identity, Islam), rooted in educational differences, have become more important, so that ethnocentric cultural values are prevailing over redistributive economic values" (2012, 167).

Across Europe mainstream left parties have been in retreat over the last twenty years. Far-right populism has been quietly ascendant since the 1990s, but since the 2016 Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump in the US, and the candidacy of

Marine Le Pen for the French presidency, populism has dominated the media spotlight. Some have faulted the left for not focusing on the white working-class voters who have been attracted to these anti-immigrant, anti-globalization parties and candidates. But others have argued that ignoring or deriding diversity is not the answer; countries are multiracial and multiethnic, and parties need to—and ought to—attract a broad spectrum of voters to win elections and govern responsibly.

The accommodation of far-right discourses by center-right parties potentially leaves an opening for mainstream left parties. Pursuing policies like a guaranteed minimum income and regulating corporations to avoid the sharp disparities between workers and high-level managers would deal with some aspects of the growing inequality issue. In addition, strengthening unions would give workers more leverage to negotiate for better wages and benefits. This would mean putting a stop to policies that undermine unions and discourage employees from starting or joining unions. It will take some work for politicians and union leaders to get past the barriers that have led to the decline in union membership, but there is potential support for organizing low-wage workers, even in the US. Commonsense immigration policies, like increasing the number of visas available for needed workers rather than relying on undocumented workers, would go a long way to improving the situation for both immigrant and native low-wage workers. Countries need to reaffirm their commitment to refugees but also acknowledge potential impacts and mitigate them with appropriate support, such as language and job training, to ease the transition into a new society.

Social democratic parties have been losing white working-class voters, who see declining prospects for themselves and their children, to right-wing populists. Populist politicians scapegoat migrants and ethnic minorities as the cause of the decline, rather than the decline in manufacturing and other industries. In contrast, ethnic minority working-class voters have not responded positively to these populist appeals. According to John Judis, "Rightwing populists champion the people against an elite that they accuse of favoring a third group, which can consist, for instance, of immigrants, Islamists, or African American militants. Rightwing populism is triadic: It looks upward, but also down upon an out group" (Judis 2016, 10).

Support for populist politicians is not inherent to having a large immigrant population. The Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde has noted that "[r]ising numbers of immigrants do not automatically translate into increasing extremism in a country; immigration has to be translated into a political issue, which has not happened everywhere" (2012, 31). In general, right-wing politicians cast immigrants as foreign objects within the body politic and blame them for a litany of social ills, including high rates of crime and unemployment. One can argue that the popularity of the radical right, along with an increase in terror attacks, also led many countries to abandon more multicultural approaches to immigrant and ethnic minority communities. However, multiculturalism and immigrant integration can be approached in many ways. Perhaps one of the more important factors in integration is an acknowledgement of discrimination and measures to address access to the workforce, fair housing, and equal

opportunities more generally. Certainly, the activists who pursued the passage of the European Union's Racial Equality Directive in the 1990s felt that this was an important step in the development of equal rights.

From Restricting Immigration to Antidiscrimination Policy

In general, the literature on radical right parties has tended to focus on their electoral successes, but these parties have also had an impact on policy. With the rise of anti-immigrant parties and increases in popular anti-immigrant sentiment, government leaders increased their emphasis on immigration control. Whether that led to decreases in immigration is debated, but certainly the salience of the issues increased (Givens and Luedtke 2004), which led to more restrictive policies. However, the rise of the radical right is not only linked to restrictive immigration control policies but also to measures that were designed to improve the situation for immigrants and ethnic minorities who had already settled in European countries. A clear example of this is the EU's Racial Equality Directive (RED), which required European countries to enact laws that prohibit racial discrimination comparable to what is commonly known in the United States as "civil rights" legislation.

Immigrant integration is seen as a very important issue in Europe. Already in the mid-1960s, Erik Bleich suggests, British political elites sought to "defuse" the race issue, stoked by Conservative MP Enoch Powell among others, "by pursuing Parliamentary consensus over an antidiscrimination law" (2003, 49). Since the early 2000s, most European countries have examined how they have integrated immigrants in the past, and how they might change their policies to avoid some of the problems exhibited in immigrant and minority communities that often lead to disaffection. Immigrants, particularly noncitizens, tend to face higher levels of unemployment than the general population, as well as exclusion from many aspects of society. Discrimination and issues of racism, including the rise of anti-immigrant radical right parties, have become critical issues. The EU's RED was largely driven by calls for greater "social cohesion and solidarity," in addition to being a political response to the far-right Austrian Freedom Party's entry into government in 2000. Racial discrimination is addressed by RED in the areas of social protection, housing, education, and associations, as well as in employment (Givens and Evans Case 2014). More recently, immigrants have formed new organizations in the social and political spheres to advocate for themselves, with the support of government and EU institutions.

Due to the focus on immigration control and a perceived lack of immigrant integration, the implementation of RED has been uneven at best. All EU member states have transposed RED into national law and created the equality bodies that were required by the legislation. However, the impact of the 2008 fiscal crisis and the dominance of conversative governments have led to a lack of support for these bodies. In a 2008 survey by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the agency found that 57 percent of immigrants and ethnic minorities were unaware of the existence

of antidiscrimination legislation and 82 percent of those who were discriminated against did not report it (FRA 2010). Despite the passage of RED, Europe still needs to develop an environment where ethnic minorities are more aware of the resources available to them to deal with discrimination. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests across Europe after the murder of George Floyd in the US were an indicator of the level of frustration that remains in terms of racism and immigrant integration in Europe. Growing immigrant communities will eventually play a greater role in the politics of these countries, but in the near term, it is likely that protests will have limited impact.

Immigration has had a high degree of salience since the fiscal crisis of 2008–2009, and that, combined with a series of terror attacks in Europe, has fueled anti-Islam sentiment. In general, the EU experiences a flow of 1–2 million legal immigrants per year, which is similar to the flows of legal migrants into the US. More recently, war and unrest in Africa and the Middle East have led to a very significant increase of refugee flows. For example, from 2014 to 2015 over a million refugees entered Germany alone. However, the overall number of foreign-born residents in Germany has been consistent at around eleven million people since 2005; France has seven million and the UK has gone from around six million in 2006 to nearly nine million in 2015, many of whom are also refugees.

In Germany, the media reported that 3,500 far-right attacks on refugees and refugee homes were carried out in 2016, leaving hundreds injured. As Mudde has noted, "Both verbal and physical violence have exploded in the wake of the 'refugee crisis,' leading to insults and violence against both 'aliens' and 'natives' who are considered supportive of them" (2019, 20.) In the wake of these attacks, Alternative for Germany (AfD), won 13 percent of the vote in the 2017 German parliamentary elections. The party went from being Euroskeptic, calling for a return to Germany's national currency, the deutsche mark, to an anti-immigrant party, calling for the detention and deportation of immigrants. They have capitalized on growing anxiety that immigrants—especially Muslim immigrants—could fundamentally change German society. The refugee flows from Syria and other parts of the Middle East and Africa have been a challenge for Europe, as have the growing populations of ethnic minorities.

Mainstream right politicians have not been supportive of antidiscrimination policy and have rather tried to use the failure of integration as a way to appeal to anti-immigrant voters. In October 2010, German chancellor Angela Merkel declared that "multiculturalism had failed utterly" in Germany, blaming social unrest on immigrants who were unable to assimilate into German society. Of course, it was not clear what she meant by multiculturalism in this context, given that Germany had few policies one could consider "multicultural." In a seemingly coordinated effort by conservative politicians, both Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron would also declare multiculturalism a failure in 2010. Many in France were confused by Sarkozy's declaration, since France had never really pursued a policy of multiculturalism. These politicians were concerned about the increasing appeal of the radical right and hoped to undermine their support by taking

tough positions on immigrant integration and appealing to voters who were beginning to sour on the broader project of European integration.

The aftermath of terror attacks in 2007 led to new challenges around the idea of multiculturalism in Britain. Also, as one study points out, Britain's history of empire is another hurdle to developing a coherent approach to multiculturalism.

> [H]ere lies the bitter irony of British multiculturalism: all of the civic, assimilative signifiers upon which a multicultural British or for that matter English national identity could potentially draw from the existing historical-cultural matrix of myths and symbols are deeply implicated in the project of empire—a political project that is not only past but conceptually discredited; associated, and not unjustly either, with hierarchy and racism. (Asari, Halikiopoulou, and Mock 2008)

As we now know, the lead-up to Brexit included a push for more immigration control and the claim that voters were no longer motivated by support for multiculturalism. Electoral competition played a key role in a rightward shift across Europe.

As another example, Chancellor Merkel had to take a harder line on immigration and refugees due to the positions taken by her coalition partner, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), and eventually the success of the AfD party in 2017. The September 2022 Italian election sent a strong message on immigration. The new right-wing government under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose political career started in the Italian Social Movement, a direct descendant of Benito Mussolini's Fascist Party, implemented new policies to block humanitarian rescue vessels from docking at Italian ports. As noted in a postelection article in the *Washington Post,* "immigration still strikes a chord with many right-leaning voters in Italy, who feel their country has received scant help from Europe in handling the burden of accommodating and integrating new arrivals. A surge of asylum seekers and refugees in 2015 and 2016 turned migration for several years into a political touchstone and helped spark a nationalist movement across Europe" (Harlan and Pitrelli 2022).

Governments that once condemned the radical right discourses of the Austrian Freedom Party have now seen those discourses move into the mainstream. But it is not only the discourses that matter, it is changing norms that have had a negative impact on the acceptance of people from different cultures and religions. It will be difficult to find support for the kinds of antidiscrimination policy that would help with the process of integration, ensuring that racial and ethnic minorities have access to jobs, housing, and educational opportunities. These approaches will need to find support if there is hope for the equality that is expected in a modern democracy. Calling for more immigration control continues to be a winning electoral strategy, and there seems to be less appetite for focusing on integration, but the need for labor and social cohesion will continue to test the strategies of more pragmatic politicians.

Conclusion

Herbert Kitschelt writes, "Like peasant, Christian, and social democratic parties before them, radical right parties may eventually face the transformation or disappearance of their core electoral constituencies. The strategic maneuvering of skilled partisan leaders with new programmatic appeals and favorable strategic configurations in the system of party competition created by the moves of their competitors may postpone the decline of radical right parties at that point" (Kitschelt 2018, 189). As the radical right has merged into mainstream right-wing politics, we have not yet seen leaders who are willing to push their parties in a less divisive direction.

One could argue that the pandering to intolerance by mainstream right parties is poisoning community relations in exchange for short-term political gains. The conservative politician and former UK prime minister Theresa May thought that the solution to the challenges facing her country was to turn inward, proposing new restrictions on immigration in the Brexit process, while over 3 million EU migrants had only recently won a court case allowing them to stay in the country (Geiger 2023). This has left a toxic legacy that is still being defined under the UK's Conservative governments of the last few years. Meanwhile, in France, President Macron, in advance of the 2022 presidential election, enflamed the culture wars by claiming that higher education in France is succumbing to the American fashion of identity politics (Onishi 2021).

Politics is an ever-evolving landscape, and it is easy to be pessimistic about the prospects for democracy as illiberal politicians continue to make gains, not only in Europe but in the US. One can hope that right-wing politicians will maintain a connection to democracy, and that voters will support parties that clearly are in alignment with democratic norms. Only time will tell if the discourses revert to supporting democratic norms and if those norms will be supported by voters. In the meantime, researchers need to continue their quantitative and qualitative analyses as we try to understand and explain the political, economic, and social impacts that are driving voter behavior and the appeals made by political parties.

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