


DISCUSSION PAPER



Decoding the Surge of Europe's Far-Right Movements

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Introduction

The European Parliament elections last month prominently highlighted the ongoing phenomenon of weakening centrist politics and the rise of far-right parties in Europe.

Although they did not secure an absolute majority in the European Parliament, far-right parties emerged as front-runners in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovakia. They increased their vote shares significantly in other countries as well. They gained significant seats in the European Parliament and significant leverage in shaping European Union policies.

The primary factor behind this rise is the growing popularity of far-right politicians and the increasing vote shares far-right parties are gaining from the centre. European society increasingly

favours nativist policies and populist pledges over approaches founded on solidarity and compromise.

The continent-wide economic turbulence and uncertainties experienced over the past few years, along with the European Union's stringent policies on climate, environmental, and agricultural issues, the immigration crisis have deepened the rift between 'the interests of the Union' and 'the individual interests of member states.' This division has created a fertile ground for far-right politicians to incorporate their populist rhetoric, adorned with nationalist discourse, into their pre-election campaigns, thereby imposing them on European societies. Likewise, the normalisation of populist ideas has increased the rise of the far-right by allowing them to attract votes from the centre electorate.



(Nikos Oikonomou - Anadolu Agency)

Prominent Factors Fuelling the Rise of the Far-Right

The Economic Downturns

The rise of far-right movements across Europe is closely linked to the continent's economic challenges and the policies implemented by Brussels in response. Economic downturns, exacerbated by global financial crises and internal economic disparities among member states, have fuelled discontent among European populations.

For a long time, neo-liberal policies, which have been promoted as the cornerstone and guarantee of prosperity in Europe, have increasingly reduced the purchasing power of the working and middle classes and exacerbated income inequality. (Gencturk, 2024)

The stringent economic measures imposed by the European Union, aimed at stabilising economies and managing fiscal deficits, often provoke a backlash from national governments and locals. While intended to strengthen economic unity and resilience within the Union, these measures are also perceived as imposing hardship on individual countries, leading to increased scepticism towards European integration.

The austerity measures adopted by the EU to address debt crises, including cuts in public spending, tax increases, and reductions in social expenditures, have stirred significant discontent across European society. Criticism has mainly arisen due to the concentration of these policies on specific countries, highlighting perceptions that the economic burden across the continent is not distributed fairly. This disparity has deepened economic difficulties in some countries while shielding others, amplifying perceptions of injustice. It has led to an increased emphasis on 'economic independence' in the nativist discourse of right-wing politicians in countries with relatively more minor economic strength. Furthermore, the EU's free trade agreements have diminished the competitive edge of local labour in specific sectors and raised local unemployment rates, contributing to heightened public interest in pledges for a 'national economy'.

Moreover, the lack of adequate response from the left to this socio-economic unrest has made the far

right increasingly attractive to a growing population segment. Far-right parties have seized the opportunity to portray themselves as defenders of national sovereignty against what is perceived as economic dictates led by Brussels. They leverage populist rhetoric, often emphasising national identity, cultural heritage, and protectionist economic policies as alternatives to EU directives. In countries like Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Poland, economic grievances have intersected with nationalist narratives, culminating in electoral victories and policy shifts towards more nationalist and Eurosceptic agendas.

From Green Policies to 'Greenlash' Downfall

The EU's Green Policies, primarily the Green Deal designed to foster sustainability, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and tackle climate change, have also prompted far-right politicians to produce nationalist rhetoric resonating with Europeans. Actions taken under these policies, including climate action, biodiversity conservation, circular economy, green finance, and eco-friendly agriculture, have faced a nationalist backlash that surpasses initial expectations and evolved into a 'greenlash'.

During this spring's election campaign, far-right parties escalated citizens' reactions against Brussels' Green Policies beyond mere pocketbook issues, shaping these reactions into a central theme of an anti-EU campaign. (Hurrelmann, 2024) In this context, right-wing politicians characterise measures taken against climate change and other environmental issues as an ideological, unnecessary, and costly attack on Europeans' way of life. (Hurrelmann, 2024)

They have particularly piggybacked on the noisy outrage of farmers, which stemmed from the EU's agricultural policies, in the lead-up to the EP elections. (Vinocur & Brzezinski, 2024) Before the elections, farmers were among the most vocal critics. The regulations introduced under the Green Policies have increased farmers' production costs. The mandatory investments required to transition to more environmentally friendly agricultural practices and techniques have



(Nikos Oikonomou - Anadolu Agency)

imposed additional economic burdens on many farmers. Moreover, the ban on certain commonly used pesticides and fertilisers under these policies has led to a decline in productivity, thereby reducing farmers' incomes. In addition, the EU's environmentally friendly agricultural policies disadvantaged farmers competing with non-EU countries.

While farmers in other countries continue to produce at lower costs, EU farmers must comply with higher standards. This situation weakens the competitiveness of local products and causes farmers to lose market share. Furthermore, the policies of positive discrimination towards Ukraine, which result in governments favouring cheaper imports from there while ignoring the interests of local producers, have further fuelled farmers' outrage.

Surveys showed that during the election campaign, the courtship between populist parties and farmers, who constitute a voting bloc of around 9 million, was increasingly growing. In other words, the far right has now taken this over from the left, which once directed farmers' anger by targeting free trade agreements and multinational corporations and opposing Brussels' agricultural policies. For instance, in Spain, one of the EU countries most impacted by climate change, the far-right Vox party stands against policies associated with the Green Deal. They describe these policies as "climate fanaticism at the expense of European farmers

and ranchers," aiming to garner support from farmer voters, much like the left has done in the past. (Vinocur & Brzezinski, 2024)

Capitalising on Immigration Fears

The EU's migration policies have been a significant catalyst in Europe's rise to the far right. The immigrant crisis in 2015, in particular, made the EU's policies on border security and migrant integration a target of criticism. While Brussels aimed to open its doors to people fleeing war and persecution within the framework of humanitarian values and international obligations, these policies have led to severe political and social tensions in some member states.

A significant portion of the European population encountered refugees from culturally distinct countries, not just in urban areas but also in rural regions where exposure to non-European foreigners has traditionally been limited. Furthermore, the failure to distribute the increasing migration burden fairly among states has led to a more profound experience of social and economic difficulties in countries accepting migrants, consequently causing growing anger towards the Union's migration policies.

Earlier this spring, the European Parliament voted to overhaul its immigration policy to more evenly

distribute responsibility among member states for managing the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers. The details of the reform included provisions allowing payments to third countries to prevent asylum seekers from reaching Europe and even preliminary plans for mass deportations that would contravene international law. (Dancygier & Laitin, 2024) Although some saw such anti-immigrant measures as steps to undermine the appeal of populist right-wing parties by adopting their rhetoric, the effect has been, contrary to expectations, in favour of the far-right parties. (Dancygier & Laitin, 2024)

Far-right parties with anti-immigration agendas have leveraged the situation to their advantage, reaching broad audiences with their anti-immigrant rhetoric. They have argued that immigrants pose an economic burden, threaten local jobs in the labour market, and create cultural incompatibility, advocating for a nationalist and protectionist approach. They mainly appeal to fears and anti-immigrant sentiments in the native population. Thus, in major EU countries such as Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, far-right parties have seen the migrant crisis as an opportunity, developing strong opposition to migration policies and increasing their political power.

Europe's Identity Crisis

The resurgence of far-right movements in Europe is intricately linked to an ongoing identity crisis across the continent. This crisis stems from a profound ambiguity about what it means to be 'European' in an era marked by significant geopolitical, social, and economic changes.

The traditional concept of European identity, which has been shaped by a complex tapestry of historical, cultural, and philosophical elements, is being challenged by the realities of modern globalisation and the resultant shifts in socio-political dynamics. This questioning has been exploited and manipulated by far-right ideologies, turning the existing identity chaos in Europe into an identity conflict, thus creating a conducive environment for the growth of far-right parties.

The concept of 'European' encompasses geographic, historical, and cultural factors that contribute to shaping a European identity based on shared historical ties, ideas, and values to varying degrees. However, because this inclusive identity does not erase national

identities, it has only created a somewhat artificial unity. Long-standing underground tensions have recently surfaced amidst overlapping crises, transforming the long-standing issue of 'identity chaos' into an 'identity conflict'.

For instance, France's Emmanuel Macron foresaw this some time ago and dedicated his presidential campaign to presenting his country as the epitome of a 'concretised European identity'. Accordingly, the 'European identity project' was the most suitable endeavour to transcend the continent's bloody imperialist past and history of massacres. (Leonard, 2022) Macron believed that the EU should create a common identity based on civil principles like international law, liberal democracy, and human rights to move away from the realm where might makes right. In theory, Macron's plan was solid. However, Europe and Europeans drifting away from these civil values rendered Macron's plan ineffective. For instance, rather than rallying together in a unified response against ongoing massacres in places like Syria and Gaza, European capitals sought to derive political gain from these atrocities, leading to a loss of sincerity in European identity concerning values such as human rights and adherence to international law, causing these values to collapse across the continent.

Similarly, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has contributed to the disintegration of a supranational European identity, highlighting how national interests have taken precedence over the benefits of the Union. This crisis has exposed the EU's power issues, stemming not only from military inadequacies but also from each capital city prioritising national interests over continental ones.

As a result, the imposition of a supranational identity and Union interests has been challenged by the provocative argument, championed by far-right parties and politicians, that these concepts are now obsolete. Thus, far-right parties have convinced society that these integration and higher identity-building efforts erode national states' cultures, resources, and values—thus leading them into unknown chaos.

Moreover, the European Union has failed to produce effective solutions and new narratives in response to the propaganda of far-right parties. Conscious of its identity issue, the European Union has chosen to remain silent in discourse, indirectly allowing populism and extremism to fill these vacant discursive spaces. (Chopin, 2018)

Ultimately, this identity void has provided fertile ground for far-right parties, capitalising on fears of cultural dilution and economic insecurity. These parties offer a simplistic yet compelling narrative of returning to a sovereign, homogeneous national identity as a panacea for the challenges brought by immigration, economic competition, and cultural diversity. By framing the EU and its complexities as threats to individual national identities, far-right groups have effectively tapped into deep-seated anxieties about Europe's identity crisis, gaining substantial political traction.

Coordination of Far-Right Parties in Europe

Far-Right Parties would not have arisen in Europe if they did not coordinate. The past two decades have seen the growing internationalisation of the far right regarding mobilisation, shared narratives, targets, strategies, organisational networks and financing. This coordination became mediated when Steve Bannon, the ideologue behind the rise of Donald Trump, pursued an ambitious project to unify Europe's far-right parties, launched amidst grandeur at Brown's Hotel in Mayfair in 2018.

Bannon aimed to unite Europe's far-right parties and elevate their campaign strategies ahead of the European Parliament elections in May 2019. The meeting included notable far-right figures from Europe, such as representatives from France, Sweden, and Belgium. This effort sought to unify populist forces before the elections. Bannon's plan promised enhanced campaign tactics and cohesion among parties often divided by national borders and ideologies. (Lewis, 2018)

Despite this ambitious vision, the initiative encountered significant challenges due to reservations and criticism expressed during the meeting by the involved parties. (Lewis, 2018) Nevertheless, the gathering reignited the concept of a unified populist front in Europe, an idea previously contemplated but not actively pursued due to various concerns. While the meeting did not produce immediate tangible results, it sowed the seeds for future coordination and collaboration. Indeed, since 2018, these efforts have gained momentum, leading to numerous meetings and summits organised by right-wing leaders, reflecting a growing trend towards greater cooperation among Europe's far-right parties.

One significant and impactful event was the 'Great Patriotic Convention,' organised by Spain's far-right Vox party in Madrid. This convention became a significant show of force for Europe's populist right on the eve of the 2024 European Parliament elections. Key figures from the continent's populist right, such as France's Marine Le Pen, Italy's Giorgia Meloni, Hungary's Victor Orbán, and the leader of Portugal's far-right Chega party, were present. Notably, prominent right-wing figures from outside Europe, including Argentina's Javier Milei and Chilean far-right leader Jose Antonio Kast, also attended. During this event, Brussels and its policies were directly targeted, offering conservatives and far-right populists a platform to rally against common adversaries like the welfare state, "wokeness," and the agendas of Brussels-based bureaucrats.

In conclusion, the increasing cohesion among far-right groups and their quest to form a populist front in Europe has strengthened these groups' appeal and political influence. Far-right alliances have shown their capacity to reshape Europe's political landscape by mobilising voters across national borders. These collaborations motivated the electorate towards a unified force, and through strategic coordination and shared agendas, they have invigorated their campaigns, making them forces to be reckoned with in elections.



(Burak Akbulut - Anadolu Agency)

From Propaganda to Power: Media's Role in Far-Right Ascendance

The collaboration between media companies and far-right groups has played a role in mainstreaming populist ideologies, facilitating their spread within society. A notable instance is the rise of major corporate media platforms aligning with or explicitly supporting extreme right-wing perspectives. A key example is Fox News, which is known for its considerable influence on Republican voters in the United States. Vincent Bolloré exemplifies this trend in France.

Vincent Bolloré had long been seeking a suitable platform to implement his 'union des droites' plan, which aimed to mainstream the far-right in France by bringing it closer to the right and slowly dismantling the differences between them. (Dodman, 2024) For this reason, Bolloré and like-minded media moguls (e.g., Patrick Drahi) have opened the doors of their broadcasting and digital platforms to the far-right National Rally (RN) leaders like Marine Le Pen, Jordan Bardella, Sébastien Chenu as well as anti-immigration bigots like Eric Zemmour.

Support from French media moguls for the National Rally (RN) is driven by both personal political inclinations and strategic business calculations. The RN's policies present numerous advantages that align with the interests of these business elites, offering a

regulatory and economic climate that is beneficial to them. This stands in stark contrast to leftist parties, which advocate for increased taxation on the wealthier to support the more disadvantaged segments of society.

Bolloré's media network played a significant role in disseminating support for the National Rally (RN) through a well-orchestrated propaganda effort. During the electoral campaign, commentators within Bolloré's media outlets actively participated in promoting anti-left narratives. They aimed to discredit the New People's Front, the main rival of the far right, by labelling it as an "anti-French ideology" and "the party of foreigners," thereby trying to turn the public against it. (Dodman, 2024)

This strategic alliance between the media and the far-right yielded concrete results. Due to the intense anti-left propaganda and media campaigns, a significant portion of the moderate conservative base was convinced to unite around the National Rally for the 'well-being of the country' and to support its candidates. Consequently, the far right's strategy of leveraging the media's powerful influence on society achieved its goal, playing a critical role in increasing support for far-right parties. The alliance and the mobilisation of large population segments through media efforts allowed far-right ideologies to become more visible and impactful in mainstream politics.



(Nathan Posner - Anadolu Agency)

Country-specific Analysis

Revival of Chauvinist Traditions: The Rise of the Far-Right in Germany

The ascent of far-right across Europe has profoundly impacted Germany, a country with a historical motif of right-wing ideology. This trend has seen right-wing sentiments evolve from traditional to modern forms, becoming increasingly prevalent in national political discourse. This shift is underscored by a marked increase in violence, hate crimes, and protests against foreigners, predominantly targeting Muslim immigrants, highlighting the gravity of contemporary right-wing rhetoric. (Shatilov, 2017)

Since 2013, and more specifically since the beginning of the European refugee crisis, right-wing parties have surged onto the scene with renewed force and vigour. In this context, the AfD (Alternative for Germany) has emerged as the country's most prominent and consolidated representative of far-right ideology. Founded in 2013 as an anti-Euro party in response to the Eurozone crisis and Angela Merkel's handling of it, the AfD quickly evolved from a movement primarily focused on economic and financial issues to a powerful political force aiming to secure seats in Germany's state parliaments and the national government. (Shatilov, 2017) The enduring tradition of the country's traditional right-wing representative, the NPD, also contributed to the rapid rise of the AfD's popularity.

In Germany, right-wing ideology is primarily motivated by two sentiments: anti-immigrant sentiment and economic concerns. Compared to other European countries, Germany has a relatively high immigrant population. As of March 2023, approximately 23% of Germany's residents are immigrants or have at least one parent who is or was an immigrant. Additionally, Germany is the largest host country for refugees in Europe. (VanDusky, 2024)

The significant presence of immigrants and refugees in Germany has fuelled anti-immigrant sentiments among specific segments of the population. This has provided fertile ground for far-right parties to exploit these feelings, positioning themselves as national identity and security defenders. AfD has capitalised on these sentiments, using solid anti-immigrant rhetoric to gain support. They argue that the influx of immigrants

and refugees threatens German culture, economic stability, and security. This narrative resonates with voters who feel left behind by globalisation and are concerned about the rapid demographic changes in their communities.

Moreover, incidents of crime involving immigrants and sensationalist media coverage have further amplified fears and prejudices, playing directly into the hands of far-right movements. The AfD has adeptly used social media and public demonstrations to spread its anti-immigrant message, drawing in many disaffected voters. Therefore, anti-immigrant sentiment has become a powerful tool for far-right parties, allowing them to galvanise support by tapping into fears about cultural and economic impacts, ultimately reshaping the political landscape in Germany.

Another factor contributing to the rise of the far right in Germany, fuelled by anti-EU sentiments, is Berlin's high financial and political standing within the Union. Financial circles and international credit rating agencies consider Germany the most robust economy in the European Union. Consequently, some German voters perceive the EU as a burden on Germany, believing that the unstable economies of other member states weigh heavily on their country. Being the most potent economy and having a significant position within the EU imposes additional responsibilities and unnecessary duties on Germany.

This sentiment was particularly evident during the Greek government debt crisis in 2009 when Berlin assumed the role of a saviour. Many criticised the effort spent on other countries, arguing that these resources should instead be directed towards Germany's development. According to these criticisms, Germany should utilise its economic and political power for its national interests rather than for the Union's and other countries' benefit.

Far-right parties have exploited this viewpoint, using anti-EU nationalist rhetoric to increase their popularity. They argue that Germany's resources should be focused on national priorities rather than being spent on stabilising the economies of other EU member states. This narrative has resonated with voters disillusioned with the EU and has significantly contributed to the far-right's rise in Germany.

Rise of the Far-Right in France Unites the Left Momentarily

The impact of the populist winds blowing across Europe has also taken hold in France, as evidenced by the far-right National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen, seizing the lead in the European Parliament elections. However, the sole indicator of the far right's increased influence in the country is not limited to the EU Parliament elections. The first round of the legislative elections in the country has powerfully underscored this, with these elections being considered a more potent indicator than the EU Parliament elections, which are deemed of secondary importance.

Influenced by factors similar to those in other countries, Marine Le Pen's National Rally party secured 33% of the vote in the first round of the legislative elections, finishing ahead of the far-left New Popular Front, which received 28%. On the other hand, President Emmanuel Macron's centrist coalition placed third with a disappointing 22% of the vote.

The advancement of the far right in France largely stems from the National Rally's efforts to organise right-wing factions and mainstream their extreme ideologies. (Downing, 2024) The populist policies pursued by Marine Le Pen and her prominent ally Jordan Bardella, seen as rising stars of the far right, have aligned French politics with the rest of the continent, enabling significant successes for extreme right-wing ideology. (Downing, 2024) It is also argued that President Macron's policies have indirectly contributed to the development of far-right ideologies in the country. In this context, Macron has been accused of normalising far-right rhetoric over the past few years, facilitating its legitimisation and acceptance on a broader scale. (Cherkaoui, 2024)

However successful the French far-right may have been in the European Parliament elections. In the first round of legislative elections, the newly formed leftist alliance, the New Popular Front (NPF), emerged as a game-changer in the second round of legislative elections, positioning itself as the sole saviour against the country falling into the hands of far-right power.

The new coalition of the French left emerged victorious in the critical elections held on Sunday, securing the highest number of seats. The results showed that the New Popular Front leftist coalition gained over 180 seats, while Macron's centrist alliance obtained more

than 160 seats. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally and its allies settled in third place.

The variability of the country's political dynamics and the impact of last-minute strategic alliances led to disappointment for the far right. (Cherkaoui, 2024) Leftist parties set aside their differences in response to the growing threat from the right, taking direct strategic actions. They strategically withdrew candidates in many regions to unite around strong contenders, making it more challenging for the National Rally to succeed in many electoral districts. It is worth noting that Macron's covert flirtation with the left alliance before the second round and Macronists' discreet support for leftist candidates against the far-right also contributed to the left alliance taking the lead. (Cherkaoui, 2024)

However, it should be noted that while the leftist alliance finished first in the elections, they did not secure enough seats in parliament to achieve a majority. While the formation of a new coalition might prevent the far right from gaining substantial power, governing will not be straightforward for the alliance. Just months before their agreement, significant divisions had fragmented the Greens, Socialists, Communists, and "La France Insoumise" (France Unbowed), led by the radical left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, due to personal and ideological conflicts.

Although the coalition has settled on a unified platform, lingering concerns about leadership and the group's capacity to govern effectively beyond the immediate challenge posed by the National Rally (RN) persist. Additionally, the situation is complicated by President Macron, who has vowed to remain in office, leading to a potential cohabitation with the left-wing alliance. Macron is also attempting to fracture the New Popular Front (NPF), by appealing to the Socialists and Greens and marginalizing Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Meanwhile, although the far right appears to have finished second in the elections, Marine Le Pen's National Rally significantly increased its seat count to over 140, up from 89 seats in the 2022 elections. Le Pen is lurking in the background, waiting for the contradictions plaguing the left to demolish the final barrier obstructing the far right. She is expected to run for the French presidency for the fourth time in 2027. According to her, the elections have set the stage for "the victory of tomorrow." "The reality is that our victory is only deferred," she added.

Mainstreaming of Extremism: The Far-Right in the Netherlands

Another country where the rise of the far right is most evident is the Netherlands. Right-wing political actors have emerged prominently in both its own and European Parliament elections, which is not very surprising. Geert Wilders, an anti-Islam firebrand and the far-right Dutch People's Party for Freedom (PVV) leader secured first place in last November's parliamentary elections with 23% of the vote. His party achieved an impressive 37 out of 150 parliamentary seats, garnering nearly a quarter of the votes.

The PVV exemplifies nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, making it a classic example of a far-right party. Its manifesto is heavily laden with anti-immigrant rhetoric, calling for strict border controls to prevent what it terms a 'tsunami of asylum seekers'. It advocates for the banning of all Islamic schools, Qurans, and mosques. Consistent with its authoritarian stance, the PVV supports 'law and order' policies, demanding increased resources for law enforcement. Additionally, the party is distinctly populist: Wilders positions himself as the champion of 'ordinary people' against a morally corrupt 'left-liberal elite'. (de Jonge & van Kessel, 2023)

Although the PVV adopts far-right positions, not all its voters align with these views. Its support base is heterogeneous. The fundamental reason why a broad segment of society can embrace such an extreme political formation is that the PVV's radical ideas have been 'mainstreamed' to appeal to a broader audience in the country.

The party's success is essentially a result of the 'demand' and 'supply' dynamics it has effectively created within Dutch society. On the one hand, there must be a fertile environment, meaning a sufficient number of voters receptive to far-right ideas (demand). On the other hand, there must be a credible political figure capable of converting this latent demand into actual votes (supply).

The demands shaping far-right ideologies in the country are fundamentally centred around public opposition to immigration and multiculturalism. For some time now, Dutch voters have been characterised by a blend of populist, anti-elite attitudes and anti-immigration stances. Socio-economic issues and related demands have also been at the forefront of the agenda leading to the Dutch elections, influencing the PVV's promises and rhetoric. (de Jonge & van Kessel, 2023)



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The PVV considered these demands by linking, for example, the housing crisis to the perceived prioritisation of asylum seekers. Wilders employed what is termed 'welfare chauvinism,' appealing to voters who desire economic protection from the state but hold more conservative cultural views. Many voters in the Netherlands combine 'left' socio-economic views with 'right' cultural positions, which has facilitated Wilders' success. (de Jonge & van Kessel, 2023)

The fact that many of these voters cast their ballots for far-right representatives indicates that the left struggles to reach and address the demands of this segment of the electorate. However, attributing the election successes of the far-right to a massive voter shift from left to right would be inaccurate. In reality, voter attitudes and positions are pretty stable, and mainstream parties have laid the groundwork for the far-right's rise for years. What ultimately propelled the PVV to prominence was its ability to attract centrist voters beyond its core ideology. In other words, populist demands pulling the centre to the right have shaped the PVV's policies and facilitated the rise of the far-right.

Over the past decades, far-right groups have exploited new socio-cultural divisions through issues such as immigration, multiculturalism, and security, while centre-right political figures have opted to capitalise on these themes rather than denounce them. This strategic choice stems from their apprehension about electoral competition and the goal of regaining or attracting support. (de Jonge & van Kessel, 2023)

It has frequently been observed that mainstream parties adopting far-right themes often boost support for populist right-wing parties. (de Jonge & van Kessel, 2023) This trend was evident in the Dutch elections, where the PVV attracted many voters from the conservative-liberal VVD. Moreover, Wilders' adoption of a more moderate tone and his willingness to compromise during the campaign convinced some voters to choose the radical right over the centre-right.

Ultimately, by skilfully mainstreaming extremist ideas and aligning them with the preferences of politically flexible voters, Wilders and his party have recently achieved notable success, drawing support away from the centre.



(Ibrahim Ezzat - Anadolu Agency)

Far Right Gains Power to Influence Europe's Decisions

This is not the first time that Europe has seen a surge in far-right popularity, but the current wave is perilous because it now has the power to shape European politics. The campaign process and the resulting political landscape of the European Parliament elections highlight the fundamental threat posed by the far-right to European society and politics. This threat lies not in the far-right gaining direct power but in normalising their ideas and rhetoric, which become mainstream political discourse and policies. (Delanty, 2024) Expectations are that the current mainstream coalition, which is steering Europe's political course, will face significant challenges over the next five years. In particular, critical projects like the Green Deal are anticipated to be reshaped according to nationalist rhetoric. (Marsi, 2024) In this context, Brussels' agricultural policies, involvement in the ongoing war in Ukraine, and issues of migration and asylum will be increasingly influenced by far-right demands.

The increasing prevalence and normalisation of populist rhetoric have also led to potential confusion among European voters, particularly among the youth, about which groups would be labelled as 'extreme' and 'radical'. This situation will create political uncertainty and facilitate the concealment and targeting of extreme views within society.

Both the European Parliament elections and national elections have revealed the fragility of the administrations in some prominent EU countries. (Birinci, 2024) In particular, the legislative elections in France have confirmed the rise of the far-right, undermining Emmanuel Macron's position as the self-



(Nikos Oikonomou - Anadolu Agency)

proclaimed guarantor of democracy against this surge. In fact, Macron himself has been compelled to support political parties he had previously criticised harshly in order to counter the rise of the far-right in the country.

Furthermore, the rise of the right in Europe is not just a local concern but a global one. The strategies of right-wing parties in Europe and the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections in November are likely to influence each other. (Birinci, 2024) A potential victory for Donald Trump would provide a new source of legitimacy for the extreme right, potentially strengthening the trend towards right-wing politics in Europe. (Delanty, 2024)

Conclusion

In summary, the far-right in Europe has reaped the fruits of well-orchestrated propaganda and political engineering efforts, evidenced by their significant electoral gains in both national and European Parliament elections. While far-right parties may not yet secure enough seats to directly govern in Brussels and

many capitals, the increasing acceptance of their ideas by mainstream parties and signals of centrist policies shifting in their direction indicates that the political and social impact of the far-right will continue to deepen across the continent. These effects will now be crucial in shaping European and global politics.

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