

Facing the Structural Forces Behind the Rise of the Global Far Right

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Introduction

For much of the post-war era, the political stability of Western Europe was often regarded with admiration in countries such as Türkiye, where political life is typically marked by greater intensity. Episodes that might otherwise be interpreted as dysfunction—such as extended periods without a functioning government or persistently low voter turnout—were instead valorised as signs of institutional resilience and democratic maturity. Low participation rates, for example, which in more authoritarian settings might suggest disillusionment with politics, were reframed in the Western European context as indicators of public trust in the continuity of governance regardless of electoral cycles.

In recent years, however, this image of Western Europe as a bastion of political equilibrium has been unsettled by the accelerating rise of far-right movements. This development has introduced a new layer of volatility into political systems long perceived as stable, reshaping public debates and exposing structural vulnerabilities in the European democratic model. What was once admired as a sign of calm endurance is now giving way to a more contentious and polarised political landscape, with implications not only for domestic governance but also for the broader trajectory of European integration and liberal democracy. This phenomenon has reverberated in many different corners of the world.

Despite the large publicity it gets as a political trend, the concept of the “far right” itself remains far from clearly defined. As Pirro (2022) notes, the term works well as an umbrella category, but the positions it encompasses vary considerably. Movements that accept democratic principles yet distance themselves from liberal values, as well as explicitly anti-democratic currents, are all included within this label.

Beyond this theoretical ambiguity, in practice, far-right parties can be divided into those in power and those in opposition. Far-right movements frequently employ populist and exclusionary rhetoric to mobilise electoral support. Yet once in power, these parties often demonstrate a notable capacity to adapt to prevailing institutional and policy constraints. Italy’s current government under Giorgia Meloni illustrates this dynamic: while elected on a hardline platform, it has shown pragmatism in aligning with European Union commitments and NATO obligations. A similar recalibration can be observed in France, where Marine Le Pen’s deliberate moderation of her party’s discourse has translated into broader electoral gains, underscoring how the normal-

isation of rhetoric can expand political legitimacy. The so-called “detoxification” process—which even included distancing the party from her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen—illustrates how the path to power often entails a relative move toward the political centre. At the same time, it is difficult to claim that centrist parties remain untouched by the far right’s rise. The political centre itself appears to be drifting rightward. The periodic convergence of Germany’s centre-right CDU with the far-right AfD is one such case (Anadolu, 2025).

It is important to stress that this political dynamism in Europe does not stem from a fundamental challenge to the socio-economic order. The far right does not represent a broad reform agenda aimed at advancing the interests of a particular class or identity group. Instead, it limits itself to populist themes: hostility toward elites, criticism of bureaucracy and the establishment, and anti-immigrant campaigns. These remain primarily pragmatic tools for electoral success rather than coherent reform projects.

The far right’s rapidly shifting rhetoric, its alliances lacking ideological consistency, and its practices often at odds with its discourse all demonstrate this pragmatism. For example, although its campaigns frequently invoke the language of defending workers, Benito’s (2024) report shows that the Identity and Democracy group in the European Parliament, composed of far-right parties, voted against or abstained in 64% of pro-labour legislative proposals.

Despite its lack of ideological coherence or concrete reform proposals, the global rise of the far right has become one of the central issues of contemporary politics. Its ability to influence political dynamics at both national and international levels should not be underestimated. Furthermore, far-right movements learn from one another, spread across borders, and form transnational alliances.

The current context that enables this rise—and allows these movements to reinforce each other—can be understood on three main grounds. First, the world today is more than ever integrated into a shared political-economic regime. Second, communication technologies have advanced and proved highly functional as instruments of manipulation. Third, powerful actors have noticed that they are capable of exploiting current conditions to their own advantage. Together, these three factors keep the far right at the forefront of the global political agenda.

The Global Socio-Political and Economic Grounds of the Far-Right

The recent surge of far-right parties across diverse regions is not merely a regional anomaly but rather a response to structural global dynamics. Two overarching dimensions—economic and cultural—constitute the common ground upon which far-right movements flourish. Understanding these dimensions helps explain both the similarities and divergences observed across national contexts.

The first dimension is rooted in neoliberalism's global reach. Neoliberal restructuring has exposed nations to similar socio-economic predicaments, including rising inequality, precarious labour markets, and the erosion of social safety nets. On the other hand, according to Colin Crouch (2004), under the neoliberal order, democracy is increasingly confined to the act of voting and to a technocratic form of trust that mediates the relationship between governments and their citizens. As governance becomes technocratic and bureaucratic, efficiency overshadows democratic responsiveness, and large segments of society feel excluded from political processes. This sense of alienation, along with the socio-economic problems, has provided fertile ground for far-right actors, who frame their populist discourses as a rebellion against entrenched elites.

The shift of certain segments of traditional working-class voters from the left to the far right exemplifies this process. Once the backbone of social democratic parties, sections of the industrial and post-industrial working classes have turned toward parties such as France's National Rally or Germany's Alternative für Deutschland. Gidron & Hall (2017) have noted that economic dislocation, combined with a perception of being abandoned by the left, has re-oriented these voters toward the far-right, which appears more attentive to their grievances. The far-right thus capitalises on a class-based resentment, translating socio-economic insecurity into political mobilisation.

The second dimension is cultural. Far-right movements have moved beyond the confines of traditional biological racism toward what is called "cultural superiority" narratives. Hostility toward immigrants and protectionist rhetoric now draw upon discourses of defending national culture, values, and identity. In this sense, new forms of nationalism combine with populism to frame migrants and minorities as existential threats to a superior cultural order.

This cultural terrain is not uniform but rather context-dependent. In Western Europe, secular forms of nationalism

have increasingly fused with liberal stances on gender and sexuality, giving rise to what Puar (2007) describes as "homonationalism." Similarly, Sara Farris (2017) identifies "femonationalism," wherein far-right actors instrumentalise women's rights to justify exclusivist policies. These formations demonstrate how far-right movements adapt progressive discourses to exclusionary ends, producing new repertoires of legitimacy.

On the other hand, in countries like the Netherlands or Germany, manipulating gender and sexuality issues has become a notable feature, whereas in Hungary or Poland, far-right politics has remained firmly rooted in conservative religious traditions. Nevertheless, these ideological divergences do not prevent strategic alliances. For example, far-right parties with different cultural stances frequently congratulate each other's electoral successes (Körömi, 2024).

Secularism has emerged as an unexpected cultural resource for far-right actors beyond the Christian world. Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders offers a striking example. Despite his staunch Islamophobia, Wilders has praised Kemalist secularism in Türkiye, presenting it as a form of "acceptable Turkishness" (Koç, 2023). In doing so, he re-frames the debate: the dividing line is not biology but values. Western orientation, secularism, and "enlightenment" ideals are elevated as signs of cultural worth, while "backward Islamic values" are cast as threats. This framing allows Wilders to maintain his Islamophobic stance while selectively endorsing a Turkish tradition he associates with modernity. Such rhetoric also resonates within Türkiye's own secular far-right nationalism, where Islamophobia is translated into exclusionary politics directed not at Muslims as a whole but specifically at Arabs and Kurds. In this way, secular nationalism becomes a shared ideological bridge, showing how the far right can learn from and adapt to each other across national contexts.

In this light, the far-right's global resurgence cannot be explained solely by domestic conditions. Rather, it is situated within a shared political economy of neoliberal exclusion and a transnational cultural discourse of superiority. These two dimensions not only facilitate the mobilisation of disaffected constituencies but also foster cross-national learning and cooperation among far-right actors. Recognising this dual foundation is essential for understanding the resilience and adaptability of far-right politics in the contemporary era.

Communication Technologies, Manipulation, and the Far-Right

The exponential development of communication technologies has fundamentally altered the dynamics of political discourse and mobilisation. With virtually every corner of the globe accessible at the touch of a screen, the present era can be compared to earlier moments of profound communicative transformation, such as the invention of the printing press. In principle, these technologies enable a democratisation of knowledge, breaking down barriers to information and allowing for the creation of transnational public spheres. However, the ownership and governance of these digital infrastructures remain concentrated in the hands of powerful private corporations and wealthy individuals. This concentration of communicative power raises fundamental concerns about accountability, transparency, and the potential for manipulation.

As one of the first indicators, the Cambridge Analytica scandal exemplified the vulnerability of contemporary societies to such manipulation. By harvesting personal data and micro-targeting voters with tailored political messages, the scandal demonstrated how digital platforms could be weaponised to influence democratic processes (Isaak & Hanna, 2018). Rather than serving as neutral channels of information, communication technologies have increasingly become tools for shaping perceptions and preferences, often through opaque means. For far-right movements, this dynamic provides both a source of rhetorical ammunition and a practical mechanism of mobilisation. On the one hand, the concentration of communicative power in corporate hands bolsters their anti-elite narratives, as they portray themselves as defenders of ordinary people against unaccountable global actors. On the other hand, far-right organisations themselves exploit these very tools to propagate conspiracy theories, delegitimise mainstream media, and erode the value of objective truth (Waisbord, 2018).

Recent developments at X (formerly Twitter) following Elon Musk's acquisition illustrate the interplay between technological concentration and political manipulation. Musk's emphasis on "free speech absolutism" has been hailed by supporters as a corrective to perceived liberal bias, while critics argue it encourages hate speech and misinformation (Spring, 2024). For far-right actors, these shifts represent both opportunity and validation: they reinforce claims of mainstream bias while providing less restricted spaces for far-right discourse. The Musk-Twitter case thus shows

how corporate control can reshape the balance between content regulation and political expression, with significant implications for far-right communication strategies.

This paradox—far-right movements criticising elite control of digital platforms while simultaneously thriving on them—highlights the ambivalent role of technology in politics. Far-right actors exploit virality and algorithmic amplification to circulate emotive narratives that bypass traditional gatekeepers. The rise of "post-truth" politics, which prioritises emotional resonance over factual accuracy, further strengthens these strategies (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

Ultimately, communication technologies do not merely provide platforms for information exchange but also shape the epistemic foundations of democracy itself. Their concentration in private hands, susceptibility to manipulation, and resonance with far-right strategies highlight the urgent need for critical governance mechanisms. Without such measures, the very tools that promise democratization risk deepening polarisation, empowering extremist actors, and undermining trust in democratic institutions. In this regard, it is important to note that media manipulation and similar political tactics are not exclusive to the far-right agenda. Democratic institutions, including the media, have already lost credibility and eroded public trust.



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External Political and Economic Actors in the Strengthening of the Far-Right

Beyond domestic socio-economic and cultural dynamics, the rise of far-right movements has also been facilitated by external political and economic actors that find strategic value in their growth. These actors often view far-right movements not as ideological allies but as instrumental partners for advancing specific geopolitical or domestic interests. By supporting these movements, external powers secure cooperative actors within foreign political landscapes, amplify narratives aligned with their strategic agendas, and exert pressure on established democratic systems. Among the most prominent examples are Russia and Israel, both of which have cultivated relationships with far-right forces across different contexts.

Russia's engagement with far-right movements in Europe illustrates the geopolitical utility of such alliances. Moscow has long sought to expand its sphere of influence in the European continent by destabilising the cohesion of the European Union and weakening NATO's political front. One effective strategy has been the cultivation of financial and political ties with far-right parties such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany and the Rassemblement

National (RN) in France. Investigative reports and academic analyses have uncovered evidence of financial loans and covert connections between Russian institutions and Marine Le Pen's RN, which received substantial loans from Russian banks in the mid-2010s (Gatehouse, 2017). In return, far-right leaders have often taken stances favourable to Russia's foreign policy. Le Pen, for instance, openly legitimised Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (ibid.). Such positions demonstrate how external backing not only supports far-right movements financially but also aligns their discursive repertoires with the geopolitical aims of powerful states.

Israel's engagement with far-right forces represents another dimension of this dynamic, though its logic differs from Russia's geopolitical destabilisation strategy. Since the late 20th century, Israel has actively cultivated ties with far-right governments and parties to secure international support for its policies in Palestine. Examples also include Israel's warm relations with non-Western allies like Narendra Modi's India and Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil, both governed by right-wing populist administrations sympathetic to Israel's security narrative and supportive of its international standing. These alliances extend beyond pragmatic diplomacy, functioning as mechanisms for legitimising Israel's controversial occupation policies and its broader framing of Palestinian resistance as terrorism.

The roots of this discursive strategy can be traced to the mid-1970s, when the ascendance of right-wing parties within Israel accelerated the production of a cultural and political narrative that conflated Islam and terrorism. As Deepa Kumar (2021) has shown, Israeli political elites and supportive lobbying networks played an instrumental role in embedding the discourse of "Islamic terrorism" into Western imaginaries, particularly in the United States. Through cultural production—such as film and media portrayals—as well as sustained political rhetoric, Muslim identities were increasingly framed as synonymous with violence and threat. Similarly, pro-Israel lobby organisations in Europe, such as the European Coalition for Israel (ECI), invested in amplifying the narrative of Muslims as existential threats to Western civilisation (King, 2016). This narrative construction not only aligned with Israel's strategic objectives but also provided ideological ammu-



(Russian Presidential - Anadolu Agency)

dition that far-right movements across Europe and North America readily adopted. In this sense, Israel's discursive interventions can be seen as constitutive of far-right worldviews, even if not intentionally designed to serve them.

These external interventions underscore the importance of considering transnational linkages in the study of far-right politics. While economic discontent and cultural anxieties explain much of the domestic appeal of these movements, their institutional survival and discursive power are often enhanced by external sponsorship and ideological reinforcement. Russia provides material and geopolitical resources, while Israel offers a discursive framework that legitimises exclusionary politics under the guise of security and counterterrorism. These two countries serve as prominent examples in this regard. However,

this domain remains highly vulnerable to similar abuses. Together, these cases demonstrate that far-right politics cannot be understood solely within the boundaries of the nation-state. Instead, they emerge within transnational networks where economic, political, and cultural resources are exchanged and adapted.

In conclusion, external actors have played a significant role in shaping and empowering far-right movements across the globe. Whether through direct financial assistance, geopolitical alignment, or the production of ideological narratives, these actors expand the reach and resilience of far-right politics. Recognising this dimension is essential for understanding the persistence and global spread of far-right movements in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

The far right, leaving aside certain exceptional contexts, neither constitutes an autonomous ideological framework capable of sustaining itself globally nor genuinely represents a coherent social group. However, one of its greatest achievements lies in constructing discursive tools that exploit the alienation of lower classes from democratic regimes—a condition produced by the neoliberal mode of governance that steadily undermines democracy. This success has been amplified by the far right's ability to access the necessary medium through contemporary communication technologies. At the same time, the involvement of states and interest groups, which deploy these movements as instruments of attack and propaganda, provides the far right with significant resources.

As a result, the far right contributes to the exclusionary reconfiguration of democracies, the normalisation of both overt and covert forms of racism, and the growing prominence of securitised narratives in domestic and foreign policy. Nevertheless, the structural conditions that gave rise to the far right also hold national and international politics captive.

Both national establishments and the international system exhibit significant weaknesses in listening to people's demands and translating these into action. The very reason the far right proves effective, after all, is that it channels mass mobilisation through populism against bureaucracies stripped of political agency, only to redirect that energy toward new constellations of vested interests.

Unless international law and communication function properly, unless the socio-economic inequalities that constitute the primary drivers of migration and class resentment are addressed, and unless democratic institutions are reshaped into mechanisms through which popular voices directly influence politics—rather than stagnant bureaucracies in the hands of technocrats—the far right and similar movements will continue to find fertile ground for exploitation. Furthermore, the capture of communication tools by economic and political interest groups enables large-scale manipulation of public opinion. By contrast, an egalitarian, free, yet effectively regulated global communication sphere could provide the conditions for replacing polarisation and exclusionary rhetoric with a democratic global public sphere.



(Haim Zach / GPO / Handout - Anadolu Agency)

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