



POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND THE FAR RIGHT IN EUROPE: A social psychological perspective



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Outline



- The resurgence and rhetoric of the ‘new’ far right in Europe
- The far right in the great recession
- From macroeconomics to perceived threat: Theoretical models and empirical findings
- Communication strategies of the far right: Fascism recalibration
- Reactions and policies of the mainstream political system: rising intolerance, exploiting the fear of the far right, the failure of immigration policies
- The far right and the media
- Concluding remarks

The resurgence of the far right in Europe

Source

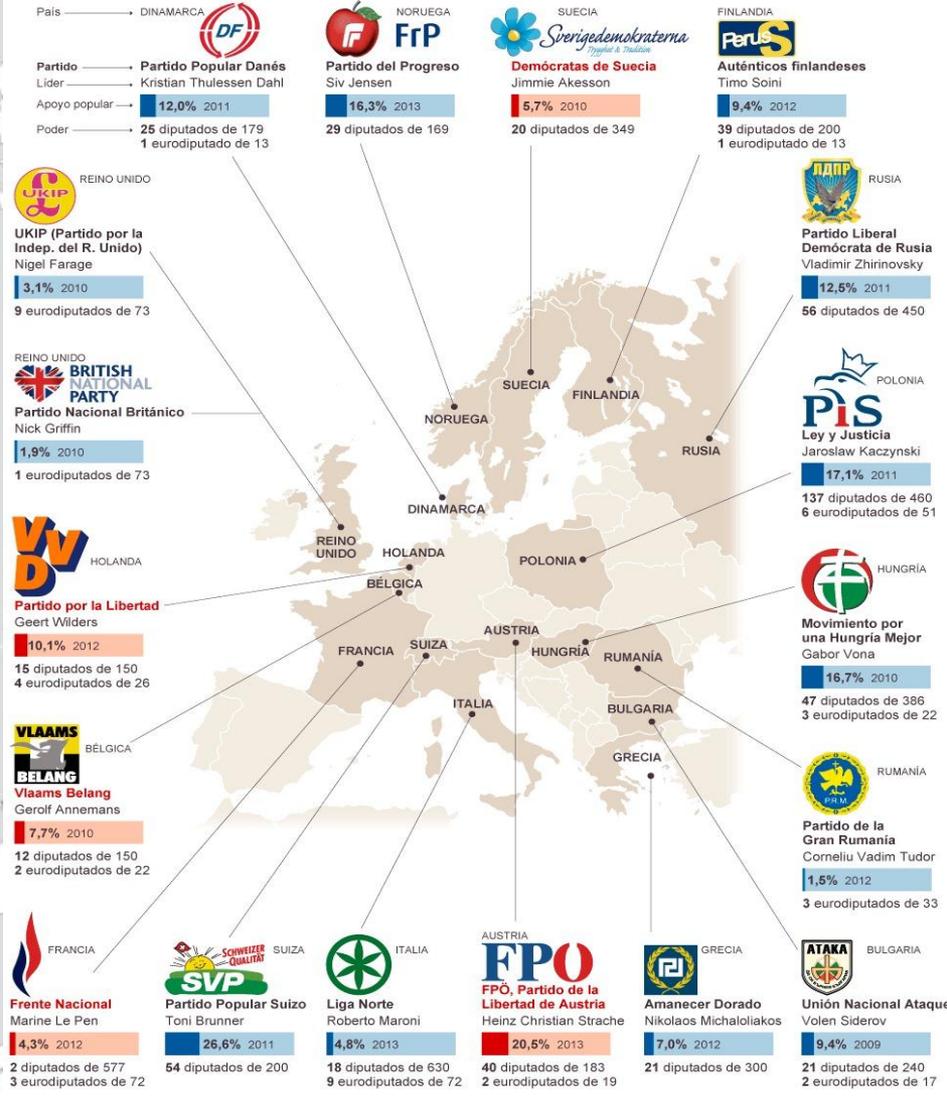
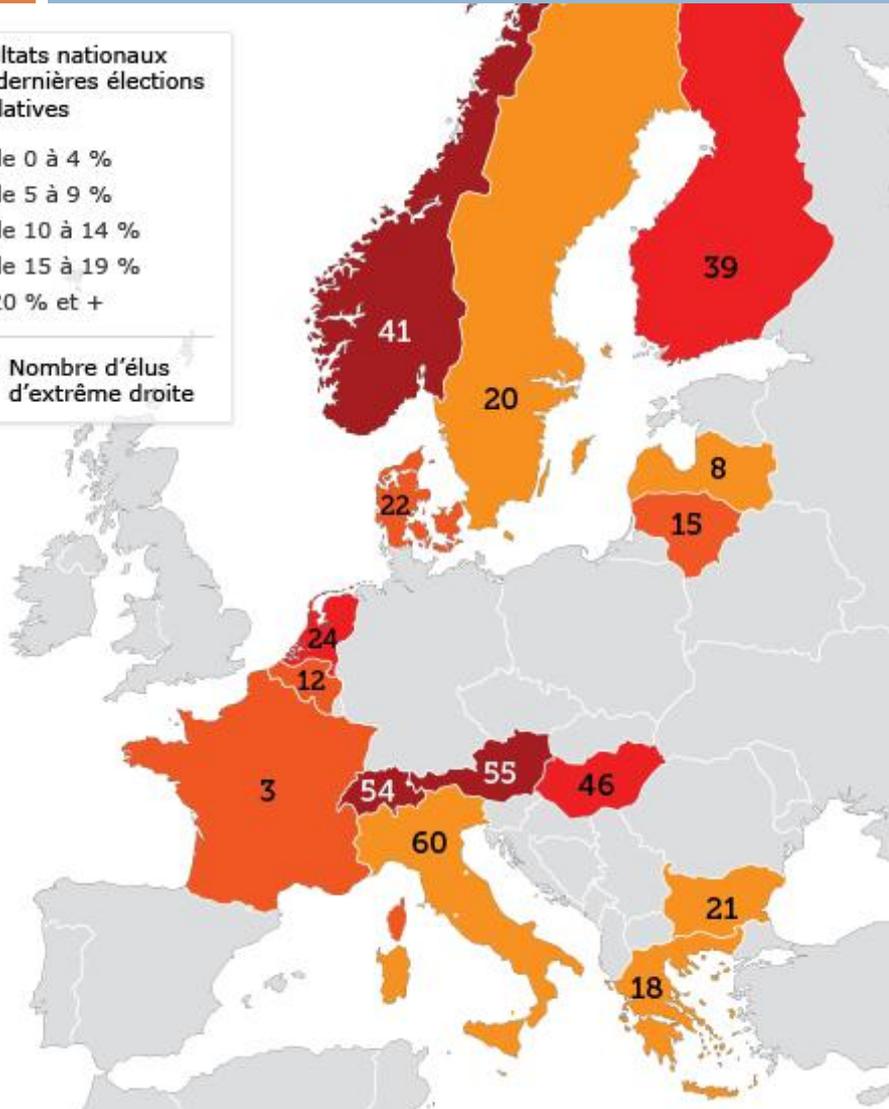
Le Figaro, 18/6/2012

El País, 27/10/2013

Résultats nationaux aux dernières élections législatives

- de 0 à 4 %
- de 5 à 9 %
- de 10 à 14 %
- de 15 à 19 %
- 20 % et +

XX Nombre d'élus d'extrême droite



The rhetoric of the 'new' far right

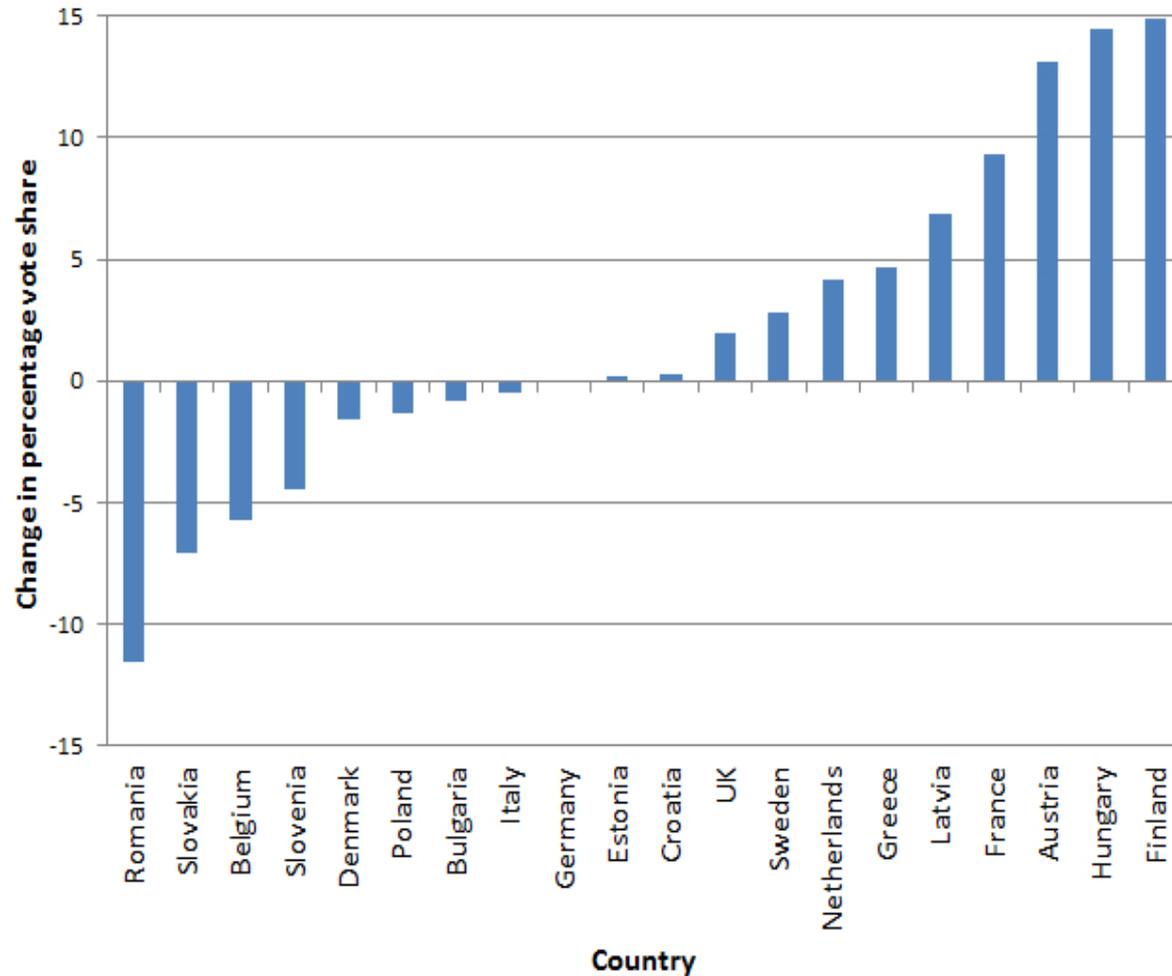
- Essentially fascist ideology, i.e., racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, anti-communist.
- The resurgence of nationalism raises strong anti-Muslim and, no less, anti-EU feelings.
- A new populism against mainstream institutions and their political representatives, as well as in favour of non-privileged groups (e.g., elderly, unemployed).



The shaping of the 'new' far right in light of the great recession

- The increasing popularity of far right parties is considered a strong indication that the existing socio-political and economic system has failed to meet the expectations of the peoples of Europe with regard to labour, health, education, personal security and social solidarity (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011).
- However, an explanation relying solely on economic factors may not be sufficient, as it is not always supported by the mere facts (Mudde, 2013):
 - Golden Dawn in bailout Greece
 - Freedom Party in triple-A credit rating Holland

Change in percentage vote share for far-right parties in elections before (2005-2008) and during (2009-2013) the financial crisis



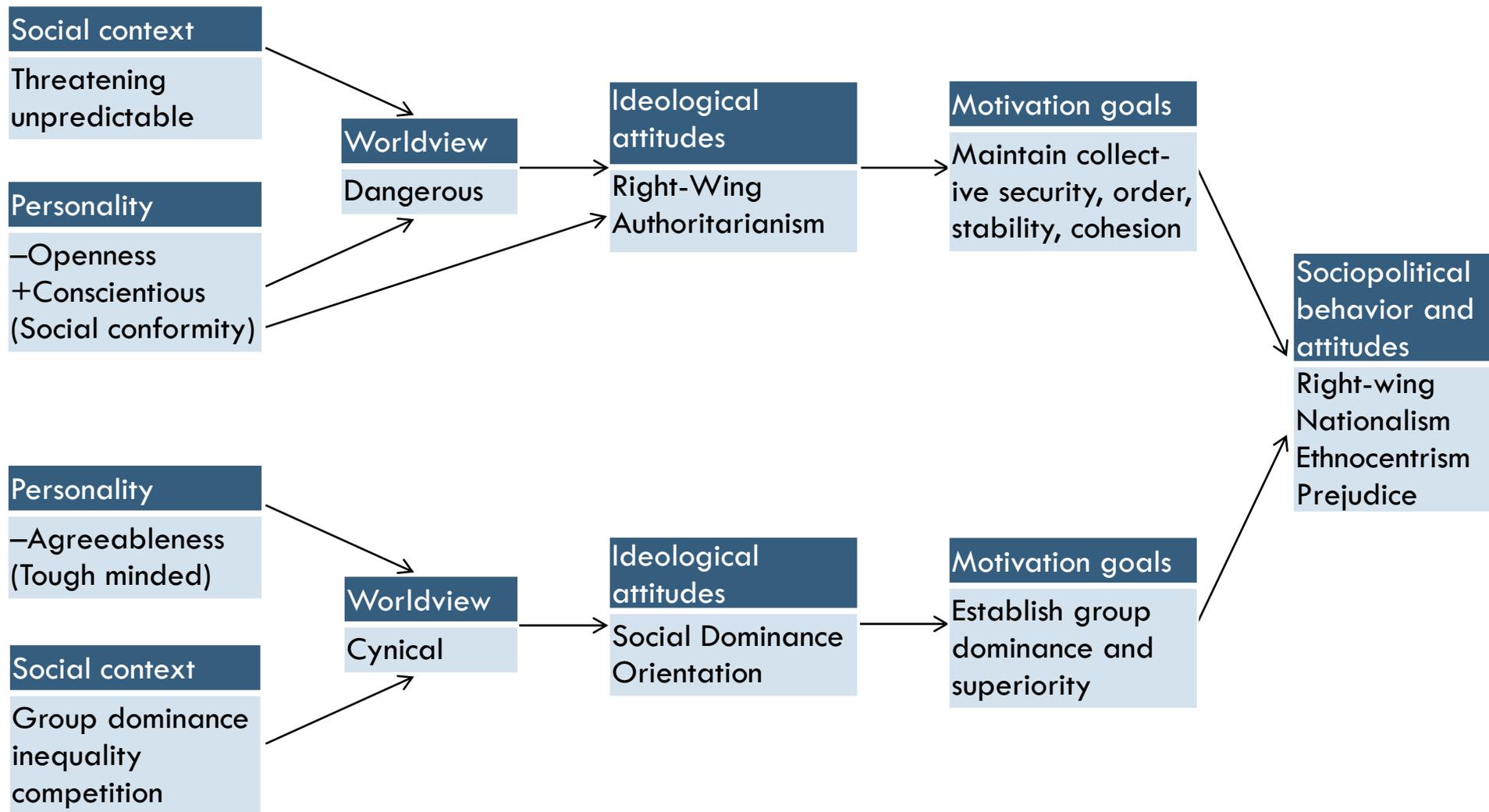
Fairly even split between EU countries having experienced an increase in support of the far right since the beginning of the economic crisis, in 2008, and those which have even witnessed a decrease during the same period of time (Mudde, 2013).

From macroeconomics to perceived threat

- Two ideological attitude dimensions relevant to behaviours and support for far right policies:
 - Right-Wing Authoritarianism refers to authoritarianism, social conservatism and traditionalism vs. openness, autonomy, liberalism and personal freedom (Altemeyer, 1981) .
 - Social Dominance Orientation refers to power, hierarchy and economic conservatism vs. egalitarianism, social welfare and social concern (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994).
- RWA and SDO are made chronically salient for individuals by their social worldview beliefs, which in turn are products of their personalities, socialization and exposure to particular contexts (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010).

A dual-process motivational model for the impact of personality, social environment, and worldview beliefs on sociopolitical behavior and attitudes

Source Duckitt & Sibley, 2010 (adapted)



From macroeconomics to perceived threat

- Other social psychological theories of intergroup relations focus on contextual factors in order to examine perceived threat:
 - The Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) proposes that mortality salience increases aversion to dissimilar others and minorities, e.g. immigrants or homosexuals.
 - The Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) identifies four components that cause perceived threat between social groups, namely realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes.

Identifying possible determinants of perceived inequality and threatening worldviews

- A crisis is not just about high adversity and lack of resources per se; rather, it is experienced as a dramatic downgrade threatening identities no less than well-being.
- Possible determinants of negative worldviews are to be sought, beyond 'objective' economic indices, in the relative position of individuals and social groups, as it is framed by demographic (e.g., age, education level, SES), sociopolitical (e.g., citizenship regime, welfare state) and cultural (e.g., ethnic identity, social trust, intergroup contact) factors (Rubin, Taylor, Pollitt, Krapels, & Pardal, 2014).

Overview of factors associated with intolerance

Source | Rubin, Taylor, Pollitt, Krapels, & Pardal, 2014 (adapted)

Strong evidence

Generally strong evidence with some contradictory findings

Mixed, inconclusive or no evidence of association

Economic factors



Perceived economic threat ↑

Individual unemployment ↑

GDP growth

Unemployment rate

Demographic factors



SES / Social class ↓

Personal income ↓

Age ↑

Education ↓

Sociopolitical factors



Right-wing political preference ↑

Restricted citizenship regime ↑

Comprehensive welfare state ↑

Cultural factors



Out-group contact ↓

Perceived ethnic threat ↑

Social trust ↓

Out-group size

KEY ↑ Higher amount associated
↓ Lower amount associated

The shaping of broader political discourse and mainstream policies by the far right



- Ingroup perspectives examine the strategies employed by the far right political parties and their leaders, esp. in defense of accusations of fascism and racism.
- Outgroup perspectives focus on the reactions and policies of the mainstream political system towards the rising of the far right

Communication strategies of the far right: 'Fascism recalibration' (Copsey, 2007)

- Contemporary far-right parties employ a duplicitous strategy, according to which their rhetoric can still be aggressive when talking to their hard-core supporters, yet notably softer when addressing larger audiences (Billig, 2001). Some examples are drawn from Figgou et al., in press; Goodman & Johnson 2013; and Johnson & Goodman, 2013:
 - Shift of focus away from race to concerns regarding resource allocation.
 - The party being presented as a moderating force, in contrast to other extremists.
 - Its policies acting in support of minority groups.

Communication strategies of the far right: 'Fascism recalibration' (Copsey, 2007)

- Returning the blame to opposing minority groups for being prejudiced.
- Presenting the 'indigenous people' as the victims, rather than the perpetrators of racism.
- Accusing a vaguely-defined elite of anti-white racism and enforced multiculturalism.
- Ideological extremity being framed as a necessary response at times of equally 'extreme' socioeconomic conditions.
- The party being presented as a minority with regards to political power, yet as majority with regards to the people's needs.

Reactions and policies of the mainstream political system relevant to the far right

- Rising manifestations of intolerance at the level of policy across Europe, e.g., the decision of the French government to deport over 8,000 ethnic Roma (2010); the legislations banning the wearing of Islamic veils in public, in France, the Netherlands and Belgium (2010-12); the ban of minarets in Switzerland (2009).
 - These instances of subtle racism familiarize citizens with intolerance, in such a way that extreme right campaigns will appear eventually as legitimate variations of the mainstream political parties.

Reactions and policies of the mainstream political system relevant to the far right

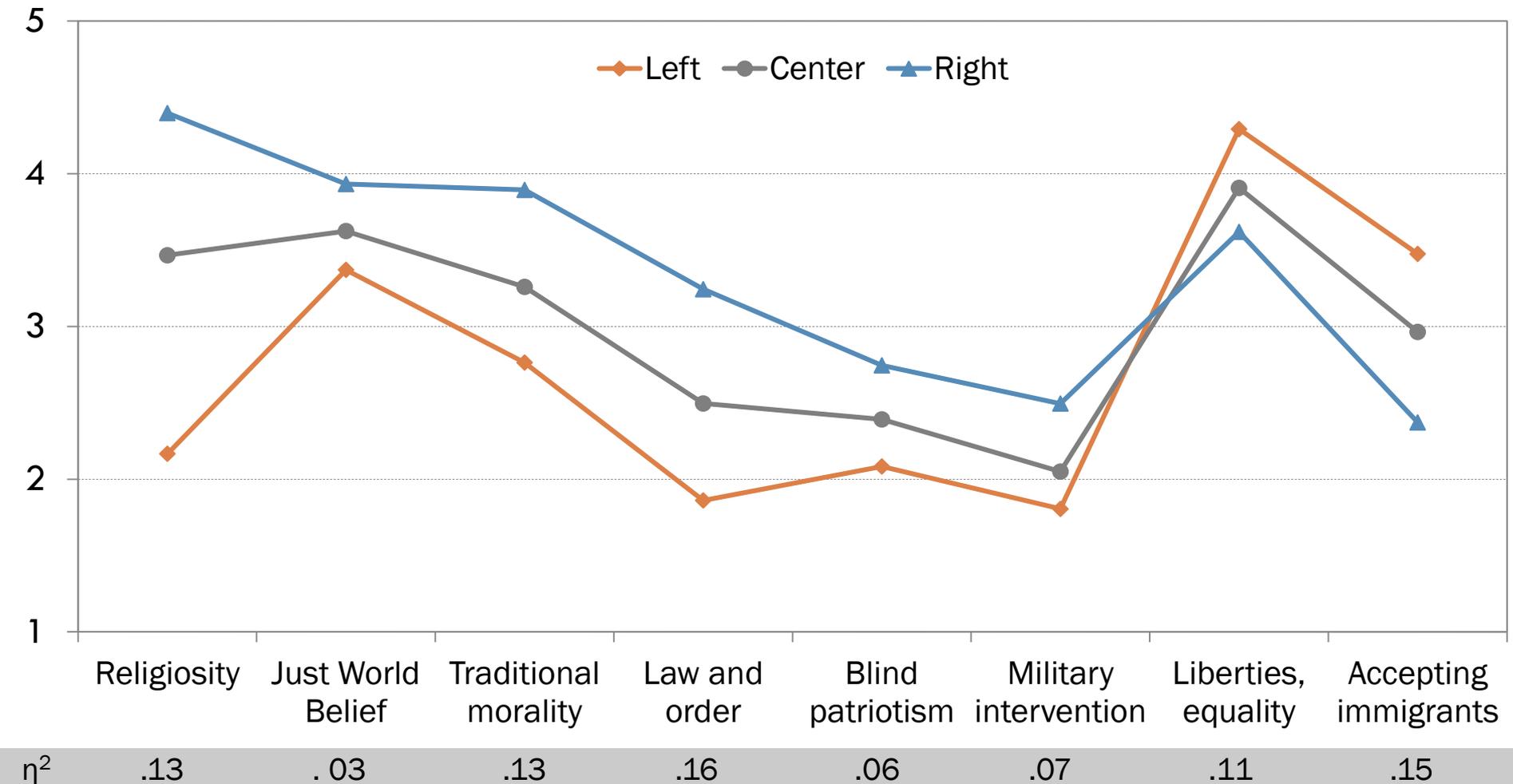
- The fear of the far right is being manipulated by government officials. Across Europe, politicians use the alleged threat of a far right resurgence, backed by the economic crisis, to push through illiberal policies. Then they defend their actions as necessary in the wake of far right pressures and present their government as the only realistic solution (Mudde, 2013).
 - Any reasoning of this kind is dangerous as it may have the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy by overstating the actual impact of far right parties in countries where they are not even close to gaining political power.

Reactions and policies of the mainstream political system relevant to the far right

- The so-called centrist/extremist or horseshoe theory points to notorious similarities between the two extremes of the political spectrum (e.g., authoritarianism). It remains alive though many sociologists consider it to have been thoroughly discredited (Berlet & Lyons, 2000). Furthermore, the ideological profiles of the two political poles have been found to differ considerably (Pavlopoulos, 2013).
 - The centrist/extremist hypothesis narrows civic political debate and undermines progressive organizing.
 - Matching the neo-Nazi with the radical left leads to the legitimization of far-right ideology and practices.

In opposition of the centrist/extremist theory: Ideological profiles of left, center and right-wing voters in Greece

Source Pavlopoulos, 2013



Note. Group mean differences in all dependent variables are statistically significant at $\alpha = .001$; $N \approx 400$.

Reactions and policies of the mainstream political system relevant to the far right

- European immigration policies have proved to be inconclusive, hesitant and ineffective. Migration is a force that escapes the current constellation of political sovereignty and changes the socio-economic geography of border zones (Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). This, in turn, is alleged to fuel the success of anti-immigration parties.
 - However, Dinas and Van Spanje (2011) showed that citizens are more likely to vote for anti-immigrant parties only when they perceive a link between immigration and crime. So, if we wish to reduce the appeal of far right parties, confronting the criminalization of immigrants can be a more realistic and fruitful strategy than trying to stop immigration.

The far right and the media: A short note

- Rising electoral popularity brings about the increasing curiosity of the media. This publicity pays off with increased percentages in opinion polls and, eventually, in national elections.
- Even negative publicity may benefit, rather than hurt, far right parties (Ellinas, 2013), esp. if covered by populist media.
- Extreme right-wing groups use their web sites primarily in order to forward information for community engagement and mobilize militants into action (Padovani, 2008).
- In addition, these web sites provide the youth with a powerful source for identity-building through connection among like-minded people and local communities.

Concluding remarks

- The duplicitous argumentation imposed by the strategy of ‘fascism recalibration’ could eventually prove a double sword for far right parties (Ellinas, 2013).
- As long as mainstream political systems in European countries fail to overcome their multiple crises, there will be plenty of room for right-wing extremism and populism to grow on grounds of perceived threat and competition over resource allocation.
- It is important that Europeans stay alert against the far right, but they should not be overwhelmed with fear, which would turn them into the uncritical masses of opportunistic, so called ‘democratic’ political leaders (Mudde, 2013).



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