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Contents

Politics, Economics, and the Far Right in Europe: Social Psychological Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper adopts a social psychological perspective to review individual and socio-political factors accounting for the resurgence of the far right in Europe, in light of the economic crisis. The paper addresses three main questions in relation to this review. First, what psychological processes translate unfavorable contextual attributes into perceptions of uncertainty, threat and ruthless competition that may trigger ideological attitudes, behaviors, and policies relevant to the far right? Second, what strategies do far-right leaders implement in order to counter accusations of fascism and racism? And third, what is the role of the mainstream political system and the media with regard to the legitimization of right-wing extremism and populism? The paper draws upon examples from different member countries of the European Union, with an emphasis on Greece. It is concluded that European citizens should remain vigilant towards the far right, though avoiding oversimplifications and emotionally driven reactions that would allow corrupt, opportunistic leaders to amass political power by exploiting generalized fear against the far right.

Keywords: Far right, politics, economics, social psychological perspective, Europe.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that Europe has recently witnessed a resurgence of the far right. Far-right parties constitute the most rapidly growing party family in Europe (Golder, 2016). As frequently illustrated by the media (e.g., Licourt, 2017; Martínez & Lotito, 2014; Polakow-Suransky, 2016), extreme-right political parties have seen an increase in the number of votes they receive in national elections. This is reflected in their representation in 13 European parliaments between 2010-2013, when the European sovereign debt crisis reached its peak (Carbó-Valverde et al., 2015; see also Table 1). To name but a few examples, in Austria, the Freedom Party reached a percentage as high as 20%; in France, Front National won 18% of first-round votes; only somewhat lower was the performance of the aggressive Jobbik in Hungary (17%); Greece's Golden Dawn won parliamentary seats for the first time; and the Danish People's Party and the Party for Freedom were the third largest in Denmark and the Netherlands, respectively. Moreover, in the upcoming European parliamentary elections, far-right parties from six countries have already moved to form a faction (Baier, Steiner & Striethorst, 2013).

In parallel with political discourse, violence attributed to right-wing extremism has reached new levels that European democracies should not underestimate (Europol, 2012). The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (Kundnani, 2012) concludes in their report that at least 249 people have been killed in far-right violence in Europe since 1990, compared with 263 victims of jihadist extremism. More recently, racist attacks committed by members of Golden Dawn have emerged as one of the main reasons for immigrants' difficulties in accessing health services in Greece (Kitsaras & Baka, 2013). In fact, providing up-to-date statistics on the current situation can be difficult because of the rapid flow of information and multiple manifestations of relevant incidents.

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Table 1: *National election results of relevant extreme and populist parties in EU countries 2010-2013*

Year	Country (Party)	%	MPs
2013	Austria (Freedom Party)	20.5	40
2012	France (Front National)	17.9*	2
2010	Hungary (Jobbik)	16.7	47
2011	Denmark (Danish People's Party)	12.3	22
2012	The Netherlands (Party for Freedom)	10.1	15
2012	Finland (True Finns)	9.4	39
2010	Belgium (Vlaams Belang)	7.7	12
2013	Bulgaria (Attack)	7.3	23
2012	Greece (Golden Dawn)	6.9	21
2013	Luxembourg (Alternative Democratic Reform)	6.6	3
2010	Sweden (Sweden Democrats)	5.7	20
2012	Slovakia (Slovak National Party)	4.6	--
2013	Italy (Lega Nord)	4.1	18
2010	United Kingdom (Independence Party)*	3.1	--
2011	Slovenia (Slovenian National Party)	1.8	--
2013	Germany (National Democratic Party)	1.5	--
2012	Romania (Greater Romanian Party)	1.5	--
2013	Cyprus (National Popular Front)	0.9	--
2013	Czech Republic (Workers' Party)	0.9	--
2011	Croatia (Pure Party of Rights)	0.7	1
2011	Estonia (Estonian Independence Party)	0.4	--
2011	Portugal (National Renovator Party)	0.3	--

Note. Countries sorted by % of voters of far-right parties (descending order). In France, the percentage of Front National refers to the presidential (not the legislative) election. In UK, an additional 1.9% voted for the far-right British National Party. In Latvia, the far-right 'All For Latvia!' is part of the right-wing National Alliance coalition (7.8% and 8 MPs in the 2010 parliamentary election). No traceable representation of far-right parties was found in Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, and Spain at the level of national elections.

The variation in the rhetoric and practices of current far-right political parties in Europe makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of what the far right is really about. However, a common thread is the fascist nature of its ideological background. Traditionally, the far-right policies have been racist, nationalist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and –not to forget– anti-Semitic and anti-communist, favouring violence as a means to achieve political ends (Hilliard & Keith, 1999; see also Figure 1). In light of the great recession, Langenbacher and Schellenberg (2011) identify three core topics in right-wing extremist and right-wing populist agendas: They build upon the negative impact of social issues; they try to depict politics as corrupt and illegitimate; and they propagate ascriptions of national identity. These social issues roughly correspond to three types of socio-political crises currently attacking Europe –namely, the crisis of wealth distribution and access to social welfare, the crisis of democracy and political representation, and the crisis of ethnic identity.

Figure 1: *Selected manifestations of extreme right ideology in the political discourse and social life. (Top: nationalist/anti-immigrant; Sweden, UK. Middle: anti-Muslim, anti-European, anti-communist; Switzerland, Germany. Bottom: nationalist/populist; Greece.)*

The Shaping of the 'New' Far Right in Light of Recession: The Relative Contribution of Psychological and Social Structural Factors

In Europe, there is a widespread lay belief that the emotions of frustration, anger, and perceived threat of European citizens set a fertile ground for the rise of right-wing extremism. The increasing popularity of far-right parties is a strong indication that the existing socio-political and economic system has failed to satisfy basic human needs of the people, such as labour, health, education, personal security and social solidarity (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011). The present economic context in Europe is characterized to a varying –yet salient– degree by high unemployment, especially among youths, low wages, austerity measures, external market forces and increased taxes. These factors have led citizens to form a perception of the political system as frustrating and unsustainable. Even after the stabilization of the recent Eurozone crisis, one can view the delegitimization of institutionalized politics in persistent manifestations, such as the recent and violent Yellow Vest protests in France (e.g., Faure, 2018).

However, economic factors may not be the only reason for the increasing popularity of right-wing extremism and right-wing populism. For example, if the rise of Golden Dawn in Greece was due to the bailout that followed its bankruptcy in 2010, the same does not apply for the success of the Freedom Party, which won 15 seats in the Dutch parliament despite the

Netherlands's triple-A credit rating. Some researchers even doubt that Europe has indeed experienced a real shift to the far right *resulting of* the 2008 global financial crisis. Mudde (2013) notes that among the EU member countries who have far-right parties, the number of countries where far-right support has increased (e.g., Finland, Hungary, Austria and France) is almost equal to the number of countries where far-right support has decreased (e.g., Romania, Slovakia, Belgium, and Slovenia) (see Figure 2). A similar trend of mixed findings is evident in Rubin et al.'s (2014) recent study of intolerance in Western Europe.
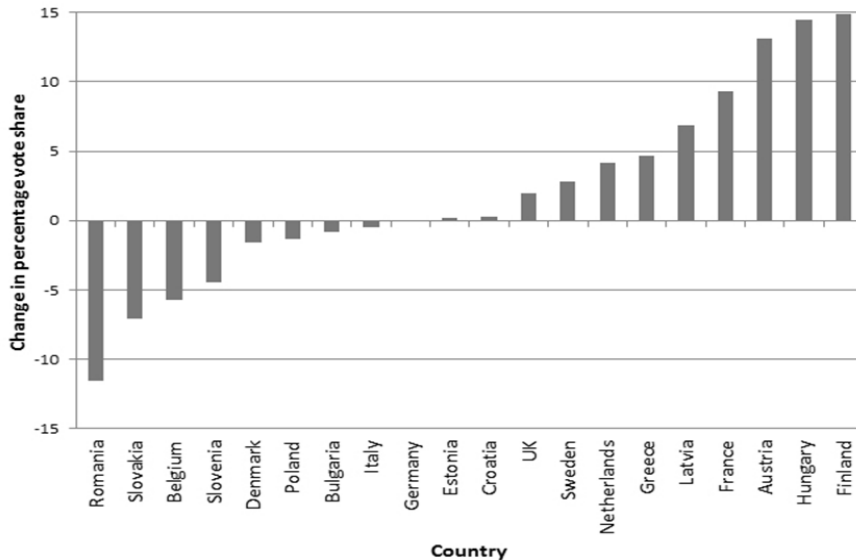

Figure 2: *Change in percentage vote share for far-right parties in European elections before (2005-2008) and during (2009-2013) the financial crisis (Mudde, 2013).*

Of course, this paper does not claim, in light of the findings presented above, that the far right is irrelevant in contemporary Europe. Rather, these findings warn against selective perceptions and naïve generalizations and instead draw our attention to the real political threats. If we are to fully understand such complex phenomena as the rise of the far right, we need to consider the interplay between the individual and group levels of analysis as well as the relative contribution of psychological, social structural, economic, political and cultural factors.

From Macroeconomics to Perceived Threat: Social Psychological Insights

There is an expanding body of literature in Social Psychology according to which two distinct ideological attitude dimensions –namely, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO)– may be used to understand socio-political behaviours and support for nationalist, xenophobic and prejudicial policies. Duckitt & Sibley (2010) systematically summarize research on the antecedents of RWA and SDO as well as their consequences for socio-political behaviour and attitudes (see Figure 3). RWA refers to authoritarianism, social conservatism and traditionalism vs. openness, autonomy, liberalism and personal freedom (Altemeyer, 1981). Individuals who endorse RWA are expected to be particularly negative towards outgroups, who are perceived as threats to collective security. Instead, they are supportive of political parties, policies or legitimizing myths that emphasize the control of relevant potential threats. SDO refers to economic conservatism, power, hierarchy and inequality vs. egalitarianism, humanitarianism, social welfare and social concern (Pratto et al., 1994). Individuals who endorse SDO are expected to be particularly negative towards groups of lower status, so that they themselves can maintain a positive social identity. They also negatively view outgroups when they are perceived as competing with them over power and resources. Therefore,

they are particularly supportive of political parties, policies or legitimizing myths that promote group superiority and inequality.
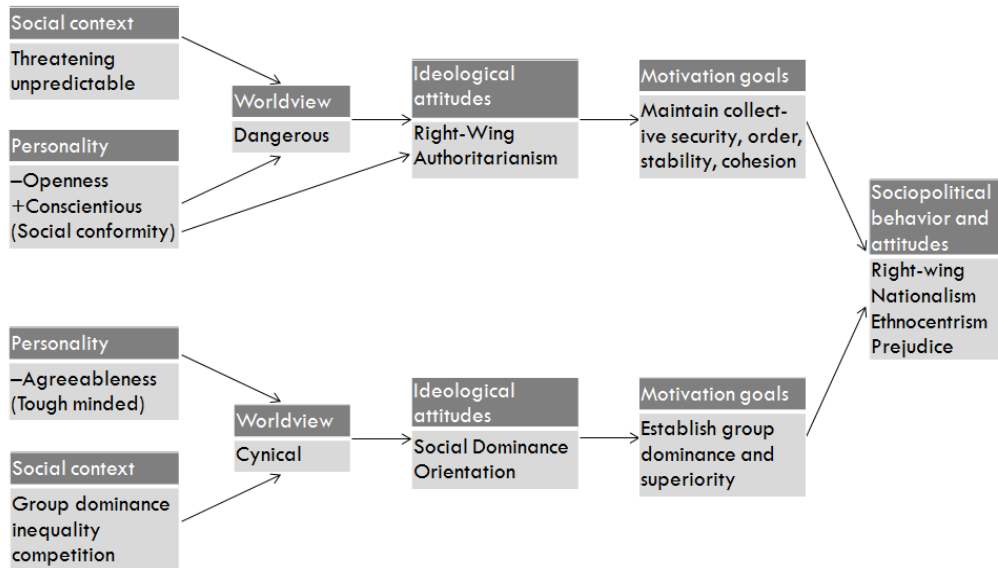

Figure 3: *A dual-process motivational model for the impact of personality, social environment, and worldview beliefs on socio-political behaviour and attitudes through the mediation of two dimensions of ideological attitudes, namely Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation (adapted from Duckitt & Sibley, 2010).*

According to the Dual Process Motivational Model of Ideology and Prejudice (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010), the socialized worldview beliefs of individuals render RWA and SDO quite salient. In turn, these beliefs are products of their personalities, socialization and exposure to particular contexts. Thus, an individual's strong belief in RWA is shaped by the socialized worldview that society is inherently and essentially dangerous, unpredictable and threatening (as opposed to safe, stable and secure). The personality dimension underlying this belief is social conformity (as opposed to autonomy). SDO stems from the socialized worldview that society is inherently and essentially a ruthless, competitive jungle where only the strong survive (as opposed to a place of cooperative harmony and solidarity). This belief of social cynicism is relevant to the personality dimension of tough- vs. tender-mindedness.

In another theory regarding the structure of the broad left/right continuum of political attitudes, Jost et al. (2003) present a similar conceptualization of two aspects –namely, advocating vs. resisting social change and rejecting vs. accepting inequality. Their influential analysis includes a top-down approach, which refers to the acquisition of political attitudes through exposure to relevant ideologies, as well a bottom-up approach, which focuses on the underlying psychological motives influencing receptiveness to specific ideological positions. With respect to the latter, Jost et al. (2003) suggest that at least three major classes of psychological variables comprise the motivational substructure of political ideology. These three classes are epistemic, existential and relational, meaning that ideology offers certainty, security, and solidarity, respectively (Jost, Federico & Napier, 2009).

A number of social psychological theories of intergroup relations focus on contextual factors in the examination of perceived threat. For example, the Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986) proposes that mortality salience increases one's aversion to dissimilar others and minorities, such as immigrants or homosexuals. This also implies that individuals who experience high levels of existential anxiety are more likely to endorse opinions and policies usually associated with the more conservative aspects of the political spectrum. In a different approach to the same issue, the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000)

identifies four components that cause perceived threat between social groups –namely, realistic threats (e.g., physical, economic, political and existential), symbolic threats (e.g., perceived differences in morals, beliefs and attitudes), intergroup anxiety in the course of interaction (e.g., embarrassment and rejection), and negative stereotypes.

The above theoretical models shed light on how negative developments in economic and social domains translate into support for extreme-right behaviours and policies. The propositions of these theoretical models are confirmed by growing empirical evidence. Jost & Amodio (2012) report data from the field of neuroscience, suggesting that right-wing political orientation is associated with greater neural sensitivity to threat and larger amygdala volume, as well as less sensitivity to response conflict and a smaller anterior cingulate volume. Perry, Sibley & Duckitt (2013) performed a meta-analysis of 46 studies and conclude that there is a significant association of moderate size between dangerous worldviews and RWA and an even stronger association between competitive worldviews and SDO. In Anson et al.'s (2009) review of studies conducted shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they show that reminders of death increased support for conservative moral issues and the use of extreme military force.

The long-lasting effects of the great recession, which was usually accompanied by horizontal austerity measures, set the foundation for a drastic shift in the lay beliefs of individuals. Downward social mobility undermines personal self-esteem, threatens collective identity and increases realistic group conflict, as opposing claims to scarce resources generate ethnocentrism and antagonism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The present becomes unstable and the future unpredictable, while the deficiencies of an underfunded welfare system intensify subjective deprivation, perceived inequality and social injustice. Such negative attributions can be salient not only to the poor and the weak –after all, they had never had much to lose– but also to the middle- and upper-classes in their attempt to maintain a favourable status. This pattern is essential to understanding any crisis, which is not just about high levels of adversity and a lack of resources; it is also experienced as a dramatic downgrade that threatens identities no less than well-being.

The relative (as opposed to absolute) nature of judgments on social issues, such as fairness or inequality, is at the core of the relative deprivation theory (Walker & Smith, 2001). Feelings of relative deprivation can be triggered by disappointing comparisons with one's own past (e.g., prior to the economic crisis) or with social reference groups (who are supposed to have been affected less or even to have profited from the economic crisis). In this realm of relative deprivation, far-right rhetoric is presented by far-right leaders as an effort to undo the detrimental effects of social change –driven by the forces of modernization or from the transition to postindustrial economy– on the new underclass of unemployed and other vulnerable groups (see Rydgren, 2007, for an informative review). In particular, group relative deprivation (i.e., when one's own group is perceived to be less fortunate than another group) has shown consistent associations with collective action, including the approval of violent politics or civil disobedience (see Smith et al., 2012, for a comprehensive meta-analytic review). Urbanska & Guimond (2018) also show that group relative deprivation predicts voting for the extreme right in France.

Correlates of Far-right Ideological Aspects

Although negative worldviews are considered necessary preconditions for susceptibility to far-right rhetoric, they do not fully account for ideological orientation, as they interact with demographic and social structural variables to form perceptions of uncertainty, competitiveness and threat to collective security. This section seeks to explore what these determinants of ideological orientation might be.
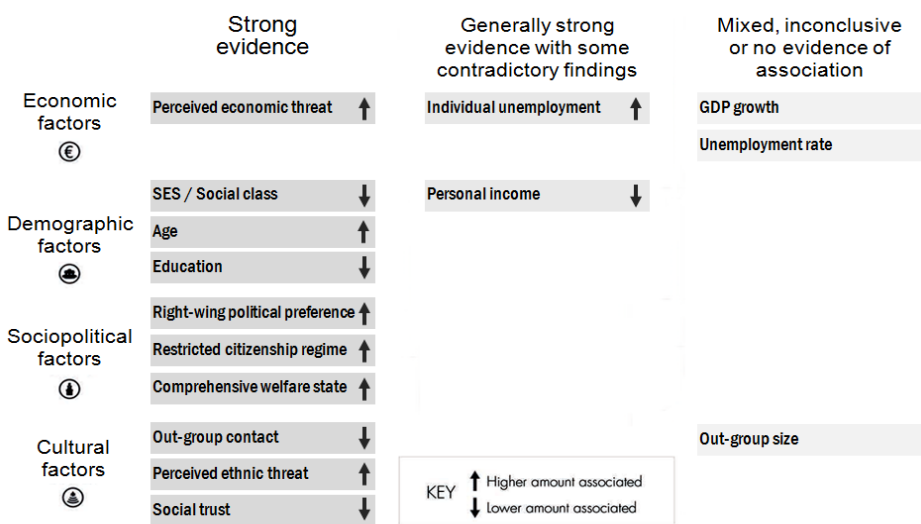
	Strong evidence	Generally strong evidence with some contradictory findings	Mixed, inconclusive or no evidence of association
Economic factors (€)	Perceived economic threat ↑	Individual unemployment ↑	GDP growth Unemployment rate
Demographic factors	SES / Social class ↓ Age ↑ Education ↓	Personal income ↓	
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

Figure 4: *Summary of factors associated with intolerance in eight European countries (adapted from Rubin et al., 2014)*

Rubin et al. (2014) performed an analysis of pan-European survey data between 1981-2008 on intolerance on the grounds of race, religion, nationality or ethnicity. Intolerance forms a core conceptual element of the extreme-right ideology. They identify four major groups of factors related to intolerance –namely economic, demographic, socio-political and cultural (see Figure 4).

Interestingly, predictors of intolerance yielded a different pattern of relationships at micro and macro levels. Although intolerance was positively associated with individual unemployment at the micro level, as expected, the evidence for a similar association with macroeconomic indicators, such as GDP growth or overall unemployment rate, was inconclusive. Similarly, the authors suggest distinguishing between intolerance expressed against immigrants, which is pronounced in times of economic crisis, and intolerance against immigration in general, which is not clearly related to macroeconomic factors.

Concerning demographics, age was positively related with intolerance, while education and socio-economic status had an equally strong but negative relationship with intolerance. This review also confirmed the positive association between intolerance and right-wing political orientation. As for other socio-political factors, comprehensive (vs. more liberal) welfare states were found to be associated with lower levels of intolerance, while citizens of countries with more restrictive citizenship regimes tended to express more intolerant attitudes. Finally, with regard to cultural factors, of particular interest for this paper is the finding that lower perceptions of threat and higher levels of social trust were consistently associated with lower levels of intolerance.

The report of Rubin et al. (2014) is discussed here in detail, not only for its relevance and comprehensiveness, but also because of its methodological consideration of both individual and societal levels of analysis. This helps us to disentangle confounded variables and gain a better understanding of the manifold factors associated with intolerance, which is an important component of far-right ideology.

The Shaping of Broader Political Discourse and Mainstream Policies by the Far Right: Ingroup and Outgroup Perspectives

How has the far right infiltrated mainstream institutions, such as parliaments, law enforcement and the media? How has the far right shaped broader political discourse? When answering questions such as these, we must not restrict ourselves to an examination of the tactics of far-right political leaders. The reactions and policies of the mainstream political system must also be explored to answer the questions presented above.

Vassilis Pavlopoulos

Communication Strategies of the Far Right: 'Fascism Recalibration'

Billig (2001) argues that contemporary far-right parties employ a duplicitous strategy, according to which legitimacy is sought through their public tokenism to moderation, yet privately the parties present a more extreme message. This means that their rhetoric can remain aggressive and blatant when addressing their hard-core supporters but becomes notably softer and more subtle when addressing larger audiences. When addressing audiences in public, they appear driven by a non-prejudiced, politically correct attitude in an attempt to create an aura of responsibility. The term 'fascism recalibration' (Copsey, 2007) is used to describe this process of modernization and moderation, especially with respect to the British National Party (BNP). The rhetoric of this party shifted its focus from issues of race to concerns regarding resource allocation. For example, arguments against immigration are framed in terms of limited resources, rather than on grounds of race.

Following this train of thought, a discursive analytic approach was implemented in order to study the speeches of the BNP leader during hostile media appearances (Goodman & Johnson 2013; Johnson & Goodman, 2013). At least five 'fascism recalibration' strategies were identified: (a) The party was presented as a moderating force in contrast to other extremists; (b) the party's policies acted in support of minority groups; (c) the leader returned the blame on opposing minority groups for being intolerant and prejudiced; (d) the leader presented 'indigenous people' as victims rather than perpetrators of racism; and (e) the leader accused a vaguely-defined elite (e.g., the political, ruling or liberal leaders) of anti-white racism and enforced multiculturalism. These last two strategies are often mobilized together by far-right parties. In another discursive analysis of a corpus of internet discussion forums about gypsies in the UK (Goodman & Rowe, 2014), far-right participants dissociated themselves from racism, yet they accepted that opposition to gypsies may constitute prejudice, so they presented this opposition as an inevitable result of gypsies' behaviour.

The above findings are in line with a qualitative analysis of the rhetoric of Golden Dawn in Greece (Figgou, Mylopoulou & Birbili-Karaleka, 2013). Again, Golden Dawn reconstructs ideological extremity as a coherent and necessary response in times of equally 'extreme' socio-economic conditions. With regard to its access to mainstream political power, Golden Dawn is self-presented as a minority, yet it is assigned a majority status with regard to people's interests and needs. Ellinas (2013) warns that in order to understand Golden Down's ideology, it is important to consider official party documents as well as its public rhetoric, writings and activities of the party leaders. Researchers' approaches that focus solely on the former are likely to miss much of what has given Golden Dawn the label of a neo-Nazi political formation.

A typical yet underestimated case study of 'fascism calibration' concerns the political party of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) in Greece. Explicitly nationalist and xenophobic from its beginning in 2000, LAOS associated immigration with rising unemployment, increased crime and national identity threats. However, its leader, Giorgos Karantzaferis, carefully polished his rhetoric by eliminating overtly racist statements during his frequent appearances in the media. He also appealed to left-wing voters with populist outbursts against foreign-owned companies and domestic commercial banks. This strategy meant that LAOS received a noteworthy 5.6% of votes in the Greek national election of 2009, which is somewhat lower yet close to the votes (6.9%) Golden Dawn received in the double election of 2012. It is not pure speculation to argue that the collapse of LAOS, largely due to its participation in the governmental coalition that sealed the Greek bailout of 2010, led to its supporters moving to Golden Dawn, which then appeared as the only 'truly anti-systemic' nationalist party. It seems that the main reason for the far right suddenly becoming prevalent in Greece was because Golden Dawn appeared more brutal than LAOS in its first foray into the political scene. However, this was a limited approach, as it failed to account for –and for the most part continues to ignore– the persistent existence of a hard core of extreme-right supporters in Greece before the rise of Golden Dawn and, presumably, after its decline.

Reactions and Policies of the Mainstream Political System

Aside from national elections, right-wing extremism and right-wing populism are also manifest in the rise in intolerance at policy level throughout Europe. This is exemplified in the French government's decision to deport over 8,000 Bulgarian and Romanian nationals to their countries of origin in 2010, a measure described by the EU Justice Commissioner as a 'disgrace' (Lungescu, 2010). In France, Belgium and the Netherlands, legislation was passed by the respective governments of these countries between 2010-2012 that banned the wearing of Islamic veils (e.g., hijabs, burqas, chadors) in public. The case of Switzerland also deserves special attention: In 2009, a ban on minarets was voted into the Swiss constitution. Minarets were deemed unnecessary for the practice of Islam; instead, they were viewed as symbols of fundamentalism, meaning that the amendment did not violate the freedom of religion. More recently, in 2014, the Swiss voters narrowly backed a referendum proposal to introduce strict quotas on immigrants coming from EU countries.

The above examples are prototypical components of the definition of subtle racism that comprises the defence of traditional values, exaggeration of cultural differences and denial of positive emotions, as Pettigrew & Meertens (1995) describe in their study of seven samples from Western Europe. The aforementioned examples are also clear indications of policies and practices that are very close to the spirit of the far right. Through these policies and practices, citizens become familiar with intolerance and prejudice in such a way that far-right campaigns appear as legitimate variations of the political positions of mainstream parties.

On the other hand, the fear of the far right can sometimes be manipulated by government officials for their own interests. Throughout Europe, politicians use the alleged threat of a far-right resurgence, backed by the thesis of the economic crisis, to pass illiberal policies that restrict human rights. Mudde (2013) illustrates two instances: The first is the Greek prime minister's increasing support for tough measures on immigration and immigrants. The second is the Hungarian prime minister's frontal attack on the country's constitutional order. Both have defended their actions as necessary in the wake of mounting far-right pressures and have presented their governments as the only realistic alternatives to the far-right menace. Reasoning of this kind can be dangerous as it may trigger a self-fulfilling prophecy by overstating the real impact of far-right parties in countries where they are far from gaining political power, in spite of their increased popularity.

The far right is also exploited by mainstream politicians' use of the so-called centrist/extremist or horseshoe theory, the proponents of which point to similarities between the extreme left and extreme right, where the two sides presumably share a rigid, authoritarian element. Many sociologists who study right-wing movements consider the centrist/extremist theory to have been thoroughly discredited (Berlet & Lyons, 2000). Furthermore, in a recent study conducted in Greece (Pavlopoulos & Vecchione, 2014), the ideological profiles of the two political poles were found to differ dramatically, with the extreme right group (representing 14% of participants, or +1 SD on the left/right political axis) scoring significantly higher in religiosity, belief in a just word, traditional morality, law and order, blind patriotism and militarism. The extreme-left group (representing 13% of participants, or –1 SD on the left/right political axis) favoured civic liberties, equality and the acceptance of immigrants (Figure 5).

However, the centrist/extremist theory remains alive in the public discourse, where it is sometimes reflected in over-simplified generalizations, such as the statement blindly condemning violence 'from wherever it comes' (e.g., Rahman, 2018). This strategy clearly attempts to utilize the emotional reactions of citizens who are against the far right in order to narrow the boundaries of civic political debate and undermine forms of progressive organizing. More importantly, matching the neo-Nazis with communists or with the radical left may inversely lead to the legitimization of the far right rather than the political marginalization of the left, as its instigators would have wished. Van Der Valk (2003), who analyzed the commonalities and differences in discourses of the right and extreme right on ethnic minority issues in France and the Netherlands, reaches a similar conclusion. She highlights that in France, the mainstream right's effort to delegitimize the left, rather than the extreme right, resulted in justifying and reinforcing an anti-immigrant discourse of its own. This discourse was not so different from the agenda of the far right.
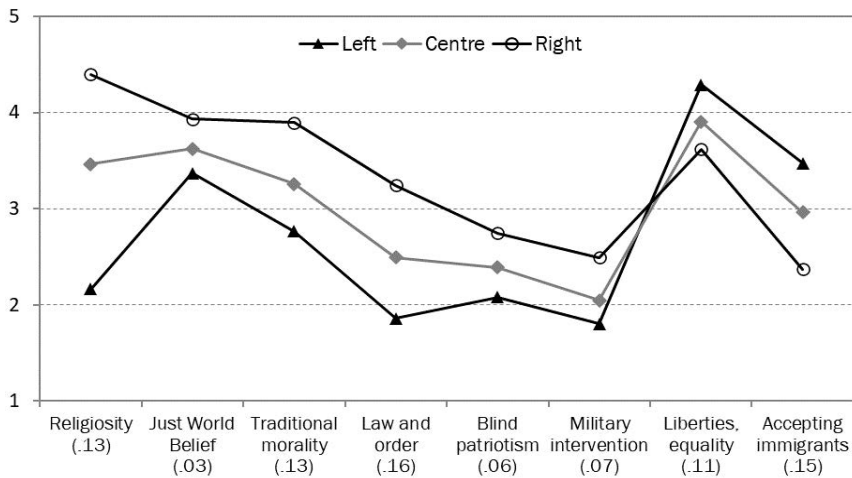
Figure 5: *In opposition of the centrist/extremist theory: Ideological profiles of left-, centre-
and right-wing voters in Greece (N≈400; numbers in parentheses represent eta-squared effect
sizes of group mean differences) (adapted from Pavlopoulos & Vecchione, 2014)*

Immigration frequently arises as a relevant issue in discussions concerning right-wing extremism
and right-wing populism. This does not come as a surprise, since xenophobia and anti-immigrant
attitudes are core ideological components of the far right, becoming more prominent under
conditions of expanding immigrant populations in several EU countries. In a study of four
Eurobarometer surveys conducted between 1988-2000, Kessler & Freeman (2005) claim that
anti-immigrant sentiment was a stronger predictor of intention to vote for extreme-right parties
than were more traditional socio-economic characteristics, such as manual occupational status
or personal unemployment.

Unfortunately, European immigration policies have proven to be hesitant, inconclusive and
ineffective. As Tsianos & Karakayali (2010) highlight, migration can be understood as a force
that escapes the current constellation of political sovereignty. The authors conclude that despite
the elements of increasing control within the doctrine of 'Fortress Europe', migration still occurs
and changes the socio-economic geography of border zones by evading their regulation and by
challenging liminal porocratic institutions' regime of mobility control. This, in turn, is alleged
by many to fuel the success of anti-immigration parties. However, Dinas & Van Spanje (2011)
revisit the above consideration by providing evidence to show that citizens are only more likely
to vote for anti-immigrant parties when they perceive an association between immigration and
crime. The implications of this finding for policy making are quite interesting: If one wishes to
reduce the appeal of far-right parties, then confronting the propagated criminalization of
immigrants can be a more realistic and fruitful strategy than trying to stop immigration.

Far Right and the Media

The association of the far right with the media is another critical though controversial issue.
There is no doubt that rising electoral popularity results in the increasing curiosity of TV and the
press. As in other aspects of the political and social sphere, most of what is known to the public
about far-right parties is due to the information disseminated by the media. This media publicity
pays off, resulting in increased support in opinion polls and, eventually, national elections. The
Greek experience showed, among others, that even negative publicity benefited Golden Dawn.
This is an analogue to the association of extremist parties with violence, rewarding them with
more voters in countries in West Europe (Ellinas, 2013). In such cases, violence is likely framed
as a radical manifestation of punishment for those who are considered responsible for the crisis.
In addition, the populist coverage by some media outlets of the 'social work' of Golden Down,
such as public security (neighbourhood patrols against criminals), health (blood donation only
for Greek patients) and welfare (free distribution of food; again, exclusively for Greeks)

enhanced the party's anti-systemic profile. This helped them legitimize violent activities, such as 'cleansing' operations in workplaces and districts with large immigrant populations.

Along with conventional media (e.g., radio, TV, newspapers), we should consider new information technology and the internet in this regard, not only because of their inherently revolutionary nature but also for their appeal to specific groups, particularly the young. Often ignored in mainstream press, a seemingly endless number of web pages and online forums with extreme-right ideological content are created, either as a direct method of propaganda or as recruitment efforts hidden behind life-style, music and fashion content. These sites are problematic for authorities, including the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution or the Greek Cyber Crime Division, as they frequently act on the edge of the law. In her analysis, Padovani (2008) concludes that Italian extreme-right groups primarily use their websites primarily to forward information for community engagement and mobilize militants into action. These websites provide the youth with a powerful tool for identity building by connecting with like-minded people and local communities. This is a fairly neglected issue in analyses of the intrusion of the far right in public discourse.

However, research findings into the journey from citizens' media exposure to eventual support for far-right parties are inconclusive. Ceron & Memoli (2015), using Eurobarometer survey data from 27 countries, found that the media tends to echo individual ideological views, with which it interacts, rather than exerting a direct influence on citizens. In their study conducted in three European countries, Macek et al. (2018) point to another parameter –namely, the ideological tension (authoritarian vs. tolerant) between mainstream and alternative media. This tension varies across different contexts and may have a differential impact on media trust. In relation to EU-related political action, Pavlopoulos, Kostoglou & Motti-Stefanidi (in press) conclude that although online participation offers young people an appealing and alternative form of citizenship, its endorsement depends on a number of factors, such as European identity belonging and exploration, and political efficacy beliefs. Thus, the role of the media in supporting far-right parties is complex.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, two issues relevant to the resurgence of the far right in Europe were addressed: The economic issue, which comprises the shaping of the new far right in light of the great recession in many European countries, and the political issue, which comprises the far right's shaping of broader political discourse and mainstream policies. The paper emphasized the relative contribution of different levels of analysis –namely, psychological and social structural– in identifying possible determinants of the rise of extreme-right ideology. This analysis attempted to consider both ingroup and outgroup perspectives (i.e., the strategies employed by far-right parties and the reactions and policies of the mainstream political system).

This brief review is intended to be selective rather than exhaustive, and it seeks to stimulate further discussion on each of the points raised. However, it would be left incomplete without a short note on the far right's prospects. In his case study of Greece, Ellinas (2013) adopts the Sartorian 'threshold of relevance' to conclude that, since the electoral relevance of Golden Dawn, its electoral fortune lies in its own hands. This means that the party's future will depend on its capacity to adjust to the emerging political environment in the aftermath of the economic crisis. However, this prediction has since become outdated: The Greek judiciary has already examined the criminal activities of Golden Dawn, resulting in the prosecution and detention of party leaders. Or one might argue that Ellinas was correct, since it was the shocking murder of 34-year-old anti-fascist musician Pavlos Fyssas by a member of Golden Dawn that triggered these spectacular developments. This analysis is in line with Figgou's (2017) interpretation of the votes Golden Dawn has received: In the context of crisis, these votes are driven by anti-immigration beliefs, protest and a lack of ideology.

The duplicitous argumentation imposed by the strategy of 'fascism recalibration' could eventually prove to be a double sword for far-right parties. After all, the far right's placement of blame on outgroups, condemnation of the 'systemic elite' and invention of 'hierarchies of

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prejudices' (Goodman & Rowe, 2014) may not be sufficient to escape accusations of racism. However, this does not lessen the deleterious effects of such reasoning on vulnerable groups, such as immigrants or the Roma, who are targeted by the far right.

It is highly probable that as long as European mainstream political systems continue to fail to overcome multiple crises and provide viable solutions for their citizen's basic needs, there will be plenty of opportunities for right-wing extremism and right-wing populism to grow on the grounds of perceived threats, uncertainty avoidance and competition over resource allocation. In the meantime, mainstream political leaders who attempt to manipulate the fear of the far right and take advantage of the realignment of the electorate to regain or establish power are in dangerous territory. After all, right-wind extremism and right-wing populism are not mere voting percentages in national elections; rather, they can have a critical impact during troubled and unstable times. For example, in their analysis of the Brexit referendum, Goodwin & Heath (2016) conclude that public support for the Leave closely mirrored past support for the nationalist, anti-immigration UK Independence Party. As Mudde (2013) warns, it is important that Europeans are aware of the far right, but they should not become overwhelmed by fear. This fear can turn them into uncritical masses who elect opportunistic and power-hungry 'democratic' political leaders. In order to avoid this, social and political scientists need to study right-wing activism. This form of political participation is excluded by definition in mainstream research that adopts a narrow conceptualization of civic action as de facto democratic (Banaji, 2008). Inclusive, interdisciplinary, context sensitive and historically informed approaches are necessary to remove ignorant oversimplification and seemingly apolitical voices offering bad services by fuelling rather than confronting far-right populist rhetoric.

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