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Democracy in Peril: Examining the Resurgence of Fascism and the Radical Right in Europe

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Department of Political
Science

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ABSTRACT

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ADVISOR: Robert Hislope

Fascism and the radical right are on the rise in Europe in ways that haven't been seen since the Second World War. Understanding the reason for this phenomenon is imperative to democracy's defense. Europe is the birthplace of democracy and political liberalism, and the continent is a model of these ideas for the rest of the world to strive to follow. European democracy's future is in peril with the resurgence of fascism and the radical right, fueled by growing Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, economic issues, and the overall disillusionment of democratic institutions. The new wave of conservatism and the far-right share many similarities with historical fascism, yet it is something different. Understanding this new mold of the radical right is vital to democracy's survival, as it is fundamentally changing the European political landscape.

Acknowledgments

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"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

-THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the Soviet Union, many scholars celebrated the victory of liberalism and democracy. Democracy was now king in Europe, and it seemed there to stay. One such scholar named Francis Fukuyama went so far as to state that the fall of communism marked:

‘not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.’

Yet today in Europe, democracy is in peril; fascism and the radical right pose the greatest threat to democracy since the height of their power in the Second World War. Understanding the reasons behind this resurgence and being able to differentiate this new threat is vital to defend democracy.

The first chapter will give a sufficient introduction to Europe and democracy. I will begin by explaining how Europe is defined. I will provide a historical account of both the conceptual and geographic evolution of the continent. Europe is difficult to define geographically, especially along its eastern border. For the purposes of my thesis, I settle with the conventional border that stretches from the Ural Mountains to the Caucasus Mountains. Although some may argue otherwise, I will exclude Turkey and Russia for various cultural and political reasons. Conceptually, Europe is currently united with the values of political liberalism and democracy that first arose from the French Revolution. However, these values do not define Europe, rather, they act as the glue that holds the continent together. A Europe without democracy is still Europe, albeit a weaker and fractured one.

I will then give a historical account of European democracy. I will begin with the French Revolution in 1789 and explain how the ideas born from this event evolved until the creation of the European Union. The fight for democracy, especially in Europe, was wrought with change and violence. Democracy is a feeble thing that must constantly be fought for as its own existence allows for its challengers' existence.

The second chapter will attempt to define fascism. Rising fascism and similar movements are the focus of this paper, so I must have a working definition to give the reader. I begin with how fascism first arose in interwar Europe, specifically in Italy and Germany. I will underscore the conditions that led to its creation to compare them in later chapters to contemporary Europe. I then compare the varying definitions of fascism and examine generic fascism, classical fascism, and neofascism. Through this analysis and comparison, I arrive at a “fascist minimum” that serves as the criteria for defining fascism.

In chapter three, I conduct a case study analysis of three popular far-right parties in Europe, often described as fascist. In each case, I begin with a brief historical account of the party. I then examine how each party may have changed over time. The party is examined further through analysis of its policies, leadership, and supporters. After this is done, I will then assess whether it is appropriate to label the party is fascist, using my “fascist minimum” as the final test. If fascist is proved an inappropriate label, then I will provide one that is better suited for that party.

In my conclusion, I will then state the ramifications of these movements on Europe and democracy as a whole. I will also discuss how these movements have changed the European political landscape. I will then analyze the radical right movement as a whole, incorporating my case study analysis with other examples and overall trends. The state of European democracy as

a whole is then examined with recent data that measures the strength of democracy and using this, I provide an outlook on its future.

CHAPTER ONE: EUROPE AND DEMOCRACY

Europe has long been a beacon of democracy and political liberalism in the world, but now that seems to be in jeopardy. In recent decades, Europe has been experiencing a steady increase in anti-democratic sentiment. Voters across Europe have become angry and disillusioned with their democracies and have shown increasing support for movements and parties that would challenge democratic institutions. These groups are largely on the radical-right, showing some, if not outright, fascist tendencies. The reasons behind this shift vary in each country and cultural region, whether it be rising xenophobia, economic strife, Euroscepticism, or several others. This chapter will give a historical account of Europe itself and its many definitions, then discuss the origins and evolution of European democracy.

What is Europe?

To first understand European democracy and fascism, it is important to ask what Europe itself actually is. This is no easy task; the concept of Europe and its borders has been debated since its creation, continuing to this day. There are multiple definitions of Europe, varying both ideologically and geographically. These definitions have changed over time with war, religion, and political and technological revolutions. The answer to the question of Europe depends on who one asks and what one is looking for.

Geographically, Europe is thought of as a continent. However, unlike most other continents, its borders are hard to pin down and have changed drastically over time. A continent is defined as a very large and contiguous landmass. Europe has many obvious borders: it is surrounded by the Arctic Sea to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Mediterranean

and Black Seas to the south. Its eastern border, however, is the cause of much debate. Many geographers would simply draw no border at all and call the vast Eurasian expanse of land a single continent. But for many, the two seem far too different to be considered a singular entity. The problem, then, has been deciding where to divide this large landmass when, at least geographically, there is no reason to do so (Jacobs 3).

Europe was originally thought of as merely a stretch of land that the Persians used to invade ancient Greece. This land now exists in Turkey, which, ironically, is thought by many to be excluded from Europe. Turkey, then may have a claim to be the original Europe (Jacobos 3). Turkey's general exclusion in Europe is based upon a broader concept that forms the backbone of most definitions of Europe today. This concept was formed in the early Middle Ages where Europe constituted a third of the world's landmass, the other two-thirds being occupied by Asia and Africa. All three regions converged on Jerusalem, thought to be the center of the world. Increasing threats from the Tartars in Russia and the Turks in the 13th century caused the concept of Europe to become more spiritual, bringing forth the identity of Christendom. This new concept forged a border between Turkey and Europe. This border, however, has changed over time with the advancement and eventual retreat of the Ottomans, creating the classical definition that places the border at a waterway that connects the Mediterranean and Black Seas (Jacobs 4-5).

As one looks farther north of the eastern border, things become increasingly complicated. The question of this border essentially boils down to how one defines Russia. In Western Europeans' eyes, this definition has changed much over time, and, subsequently, Europe's borders. Even from its earliest conclusions, the consensus from the West has always seemed to be that Russia is of little relation to Europe, if not something totally alien. Sully (1560-1641), a

French minister, expressed his thoughts on the inclusion of Russia into Europe, saying, “[T]here scarce remains any conformity among us with them; besides they belong to Asia as much as to Europe. We may indeed almost consider them as a barbarous country, and place them in the same class with Turkey” (Jacobs 5). The feeling was often mutual, as was seen in 1703 with the founding of St. Petersburg, its mission claiming the city was to be a “window on Europe” (Jacobs 6).



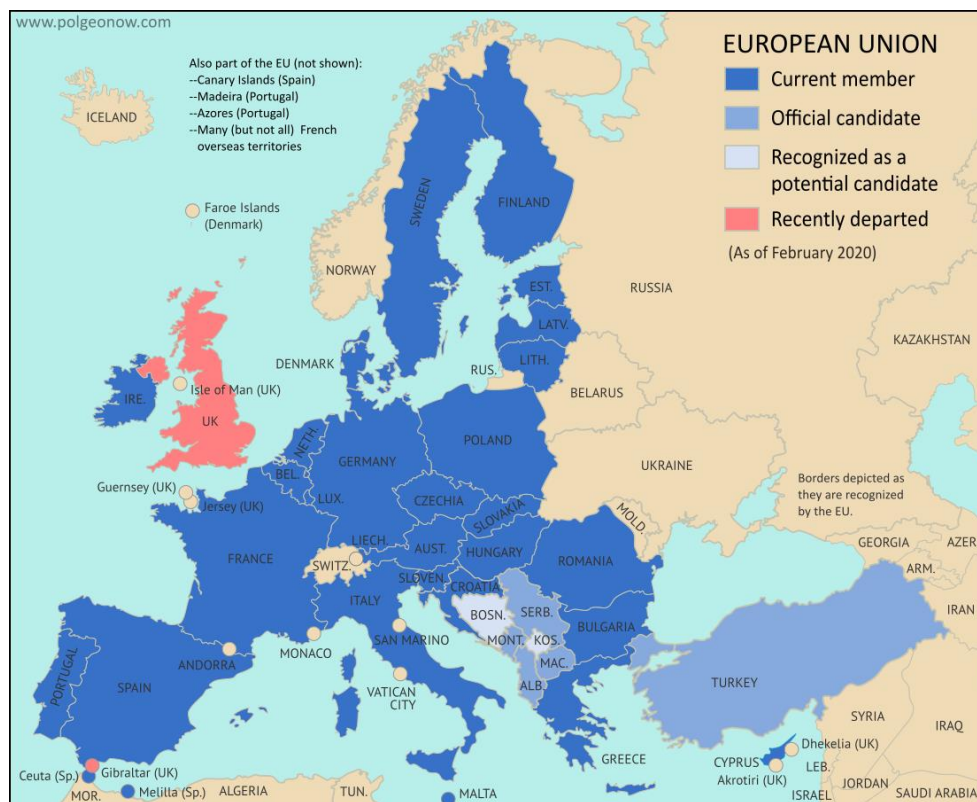
Joe Burgess/The New York Times

The eastern border has varied vastly as attitudes towards Russia changed over time. During the Renaissance, the border began with the river Don and continued upward to the White Sea. In the 17th century, this border changed to follow the rivers Don, Volga and Kama, and extended across to join with the river Ob. In 1730 Swedish geographer Philip Johan von

Strahlenberg proposed the Ural Mountains as the eastern border, which was widely accepted. In the early 19th century, this border was amended to include the Caucasus Mountains as the southern portion of the border by Conrad Malte-Brun and other French geographers. This amended border that stretches from the Urals to the Caucasus Mountains is still today regarded as the most conventional eastern border of Europe (Jacobs 7).

The widely accepted Urals-Caucasus border, however, is merely a geographical guideline. This border has been and continues to change as Europe as a concept changes. For instance, during the Cold War, this border was moved much farther west to exclude the Eastern Bloc countries and the Soviet Union, who were, at the time, not thought of as European (Jacobs 7). The balance of power in Europe has always been heavily favored towards the west. Western Europe holds the power to grant any given country or region entry into the European community. Eastern Europe, however, has always had trouble fitting in with the rest of the Europe. Eastern Europeans are not to blame for this; the region is simply a product of an unfortunate geographical location. Its proximity to Asia makes it the first to be hit by foreign invaders. Eastern Europe has acted as Western Europe's convenient buffer zone for centuries. The last invasion of Western Europe by non-Europeans was in 711 when the Moors invaded Spain. They were beaten in 732 and finally driven out in 1492. By contrast, Eastern Europe was not free of Turkish invaders until 1913. The lack of geographical barriers also makes it prone to attack (Roskin 7). Eastern Europe is also largely without many rivers and has little access to the open sea. This makes it hard to facilitate trade with a lack of trade routes, putting the region's economy at a disadvantage (Roskin 8). The history of weakness and poverty relative to the rest of Europe makes the "Europeanness" of the Eastern countries seem less real. Many of these countries, however, found themselves legitimized when granted entry into the European Union.

The members of the European Union often define contemporary Europe. However, some countries are not members of the EU yet are undoubtedly European, such as Britain and Switzerland. There are also members that are in the EU yet are questionably European, like Cyprus. Therefore, it is unwise to view the European Union as synonymous with Europe itself. It is merely an open membership body consisting of democratic states that cooperate for political and economic ends (Rose 5).



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How then can contemporary Europe be defined? The answer is nearly impossible to find. According to Richard Rose, “Any attempt to reduce contemporary Europe to a single idea is bound to fail, for Europeans differ about almost everything imaginable. There are striking differences *between* countries in language, religion, and economic prosperity” (3). Nonetheless,

for this thesis's purposes, the concept of Europe that I will analyze will be those states that exist within the conventional geographical borders previously mentioned, excluding Russia.

As championed by Richard Rose, the political concept of Europe is founded upon democratic values, political liberalism, and economic freedom. However, it is important to note that Europe is united by these values, not defined by them. A Europe without democracy is still Europe. Therefore, Europe is best defined in geographic terms, even though this can be difficult. It is not only important to settle Europe's borders; common historical experiences must also be accounted for that have contributed to its formation. Examples of such events are the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. These cultural experiences shaped the countries they touched with revolutionary ideas that created common ground. It is easier to define Europe today by looking at which countries experienced these revolutions, especially in Eastern Europe. Russia was largely left out of these events, so it is hard to categorize it as inherently European. Other eastern countries, such as Poland, were a part of these events and therefore share a link to the rest of Europe.



Dr. Gayle Olson-Raymer/Humboldt State University

These common democratic values serve to unite Europe and make it stronger, but the resurgence of forces that would undermine them only exist to weaken it. This can be seen in rising Euroscepticism, which has led to Brexit and defiance from other countries such as Poland and Hungary. A democratic Europe is undoubtedly worth fighting for, but will it remain united and survive rising stress from fascism?

European Democracy

Before analyzing democracy's challengers, it is important first to understand the conception and context of modern European democracy. Democracy in Europe began with the

French Revolution in 1789. With the collapse of the hereditary authoritarian regime and the introduction of many civil and political rights, this was the start of a new era in Europe. However, this did not last long, and in the span of a decade, France was back in control of another authoritarian regime led by Napoleon Bonaparte. Although democracy in France did not last long after its inception, its impact was still felt across Europe. Even France's authoritarian rule following the revolution saw many adjustments that included elements of political liberalism. The expectations of government changed with the new ideals of the revolution. King Louis XVIII ruled under a constitution after taking over in 1814. This new form of government included a two-chamber parliament and many civil liberties such as freedom of speech and equality before the law. This "liberal authoritarian" government was not met with open arms. King Louis XVIII and his successor Charles X never attained the power that kings had held before the revolution. The French people simply would not allow themselves to be ruled under such authority ever again. Even King Louis-Phillipe, who took power in 1830 and implemented an even more liberal government by greatly reducing the aristocracy and clergy's power and expanding suffrage, was met with widespread rejection (Berman 31-33).

This feeling was shared all across Europe had reached its tipping point with the Revolutions of 1848. The French regime fell, and, once again, this caused political upheaval across Europe. Protesters took to the streets all over the continent, demanding change. Even Europe's most authoritarian regimes were forced to heed the calls of their people. Emperor Ferdinand of the Austrian Empire adopted policies that decreased the power of the nobility and other reforms. Prussia's King Frederick William IV was forced to accept a reform constitution, a move one scholar stated, "...seemed to complete and make definitive the collapse of absolutism" in Europe (Berman 33). The Revolutions of 1848, however, as influential as they were, did not

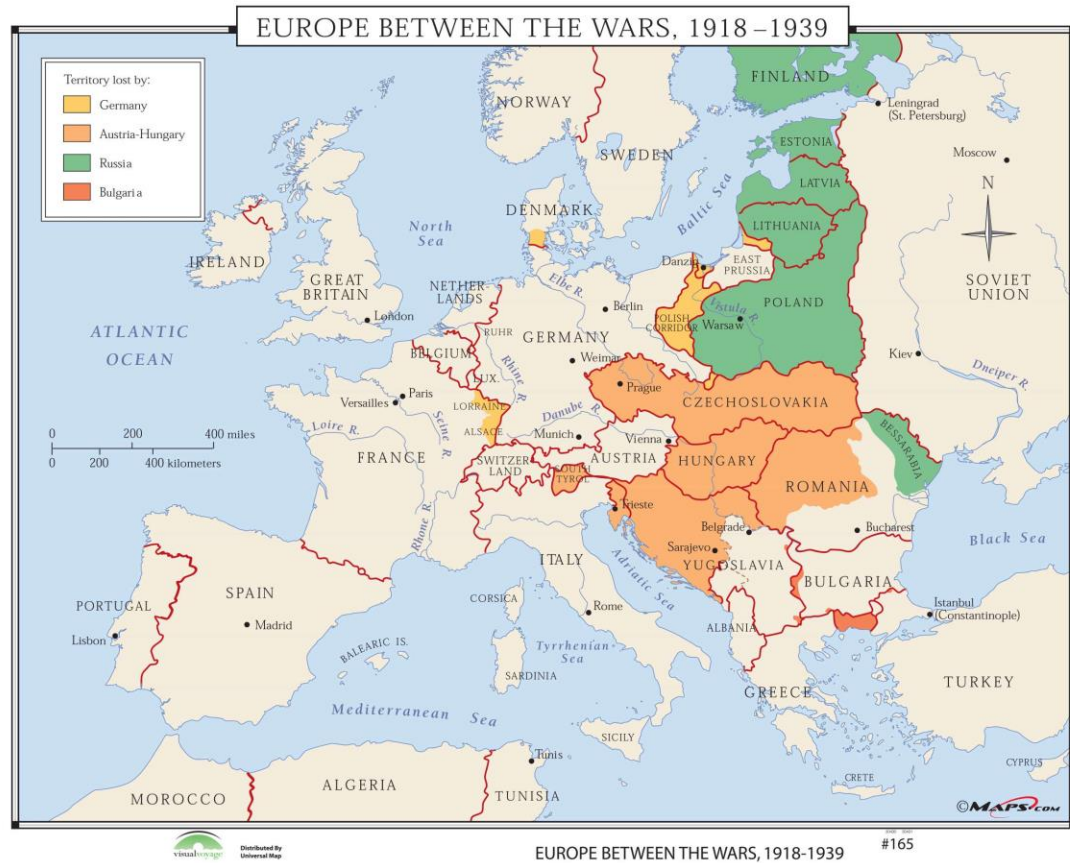
result in the culmination of a democratic Europe. Many places saw reform but remained under authoritarian rule.



The aftermath following the 1848 Revolutions created a highly charged political environment in Europe. Leaders across the continent now knew that they must respect the masses' wishes lest they face significant backlash. The unification of Italy and German came with even more debate over political representation. Italy settled on a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government, and a lower house of elected officials (Berman 34). Germany instituted a liberal authoritarian regime, one that saw foreign policy ruled by the kaiser and domestic policy overseen by the kaiser, the Bundesrat (delegates from Germany's constituent

states), and the Reichstag (democratically elected officials). Both governments, however, failed to deal with the plethora of issues they faced. In Italy, this resulted in decades of civil unrest. Germany, by 1914, found itself in political gridlock and much social tension. The failed transition to a more liberal government was not only seen in these two cases, however. The Austrian Empire, Spain, and France all instituted increasingly liberal reforms and forms of government, yet all seemed unable to govern properly and became increasingly unstable. The result was that Europe entered the first World War with decades of growing political discontent and mobilization (Berman 36).

World War I brought an end to the old order of governance, allowing democracy to take hold over much of Europe. These young democracies, however, were weak and overwhelmed with the vast amount of issues they faced, many resulting from the war, including, “the reintegration of huge numbers of veterans into peacetime society; economic devastation, inflation, and sometimes an obligation to pay reparations; paralyzing political divisions; violent oppositional movements of both right and left; and, for the losers, national humiliation” (Berman 37). Consequently, many of these democracies quickly collapsed. Italy resorted to Fascism in 1922, Germany adopted National Socialism, and Spain and Austria both found themselves in civil war and dictatorship in the 1930s. Like France and Britain, others were severely weakened and ill-equipped to fight the Second World War (Berman 37).



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After the Second World War, the West began the gradual march toward peace and prosperity across Europe. The aftermath of the war had brought an end to the old authoritarian regimes and ideal conditions for the consolidation of democracy. The old authoritarian order was largely discredited and lost most social, political, and economic support (Berman 37). With the Axis powers defeated, the Allies sought to bring democracy to the whole of the continent. The United States made a substantial commitment to the political and economic reconstruction of Europe, one that embodied liberalism and economic freedom. The European states, at least the Western half, echoed this sentiment, recognizing that democracy was the superior mode of governance. This endeavor is known as the European project. In summation, Takis Pappas

defines the main goals of the project as “1) the spreading of pluralist parliamentary democracy to nation after nation across the continent; 2) the forging of a multiethnic, multicultural, and ‘ever closer’ union of European peoples and states; and 3) the continual advancement of political liberalism” (Pappas 23). This project would face much opposition, however, as Europe was divided during the Cold War as opposing ideologies struggled for dominance.



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With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of communism, these goals were fully realized. Liberals viewed this event as a victory that promised future prosperity and that

economic and political liberalism had won and was here to stay. Francis Fukuyama prophesied this event as “the end of history,” or rather, “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (4). History, however, has obviously not ended, and it seems that the threats to democracy, thought to be defeated, are back from the dead.

Democracy is hard to attain and even harder to uphold. It certainly seems naive of Francis Fukuyama to believe that the consolidation of European democracy would remain forever stable and unchallenged. After all, even in France, the birthplace of modern democracy, it took over 150 years of violence and change to create a stable democracy. Two competing theories of democratization have emerged over the years, those two camps being preconditionists and universalists. Preconditionists believe that democracy can only emerge through a set of specific conditions and experiences. Universalists believe that democracy can emerge from a wide range of ways (Berman 28).

The preconditionist view could be a valid reason for the recent challenges to democracy. Many of the movements are seen in Eastern European countries that did not follow the West's same path of democratization. However, these movements are being found all across Europe, even in countries considered models of democracy like Britain and France. According to Sheri Berman, “The idea that a gradual, liberal path to democracy exists and that it makes sense to discourage countries that do not follow it from democratizing is a chimera based on a misreading or misinterpretation of history” (38).

John Higley and Michael G. Burton offer a notable addition to how democracies rise and fall over the course of history, hinging on elites' role. They add that a “stable regime” can only be attained through a “consensually unified” national elite. A stable regime can then have the

chance to eventually become a modern democracy. Such is the case with Britain, the United States, or Sweden. This, however, is rare. The most common state of national elites is a “disunified” one, where a series of “unstable regimes” that alternate back and forth from authoritarian to democratic is the result (Higley and Burton 17-18). They define “national elites” as “persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially” (18). Higley and Burton consider a consensually unified national elite one where its members:

‘(1) share a largely tacit consensus about rules and codes of political conduct amounting to a “restrained partisanship”, and (2) participate in a more or less comprehensively integrated structure of interaction that provides them with relatively reliable and effective access to each other and to the most central decision-makers’ (19).

The cooperation of these elites has been observed to be vital in forming a stable regime, and therefore modern democracy. The table below illustrates the historical timeline of consensually unified elites vs. the creation of the nation-state for many modern democracies.

Table 1. Types and Origins of National Elites in Selected Western Nation-States: A Schematic View

Nation-State Formation	Elite Type(s)	Origin of CU Elite
England (late medieval)	DU to 1689 CU 1689–1988	Elite settlement 1688–1689
Denmark (late medieval)	DU to 1901 CU 1935–88	2-step transformation 1901–35
Scotland (late medieval)	DU to 1707	None; merged w/England 1707
Portugal (late medieval)	DU to 1980s	None clearly indicated
Spain (from 16th cent.)	DU to 1977 CU 1979–88	Elite settlement 1977–79
Sweden (from 16th cent.)	DU to 1809 CU 1809–1988	Elite settlement 1808–9
Russia (from 17th cent.)	DU to 1917 IU 1921–88	None; revolutionary transformation, 1917–21
France (late 17th cent.)	DU to 1960 CU 1981–88	2-step transformation 1960–81
U.S.A. (from 1789)	CU 1789–1988	Colonial “home rule“ and independence struggle
Netherlands (from 1813)	CU 1813–1988	Fusion of provincial elites
Prussia (from 1815 or earlier)	DU to 1871	None; merged w/Germany 1871
Belgium (from 1830)	DU to 1890s CU 1961–1988	2-step transformation 1900–61
Switzerland (from 1848)	CU 1848–1988	Fusion of cantonal elites
Italy (from 1870)	DU to 1948 CU 1980–88	2-step transformation 1948–80
Germany (from 1871)	DU to 1933 IU 1933–45 CU 1966–88	Revolutionary transformation 1933 2-step transformation 1948–66
Norway (from 1884)	CU 1935–88	2-step transformation 1884–1935
Austria (from 1919 or earlier)	DU to 1938 CU 1948–88	Elite settlement 1945–48

Abbreviations: CU = Consensually Unified; DU = Disunified; IU = Ideologically Unified.

Higley and Burton

The influence of national elites on the success of democracy is interesting as it opposes the notion that democracy is made for the people and by the people. By paying attention to elites' behavior in contemporary Europe, we can better understand and predict the longevity of established regimes and prepare for the emergence of new ones, whether they be stable or not.

Modern democracy, in the grand scheme of human history, is still a very new phenomenon. Throughout the course of its inception and implementation, there has been much violence and turmoil. To think that it will no longer experience issues and challenges is ignorant. Democracy requires a devoted populace that embraces its core values of political liberalism and

freedom, however, it is this same freedom that gives rise to its challengers. Fascism, for instance, can only succeed in a liberal democratic system. In instances where fascism competed with a military dictatorship or a Communist regime, it was defeated. Fascism thrives in a democracy where there exists a full political spectrum of Left and Right. In this system, the fascists find weaknesses to exploit and indoctrinate those who would not have thought themselves radical. Historically, the collapse of democracy occurred because there were not enough democrats willing to take up its defense (Laqueur 18).

CHAPTER TWO: FASCISM

Opponents of Democracy and liberalism have risen from both the left and the right extremes of the political spectrum, ranging from communists to fascists. However, most of the movements seen portray more fascist tendencies, and these will be the focus of the following chapters. These radical-right movements oppose both liberalism and Communism, however since the fall of the Soviet bloc, the threat of Communism has significantly weakened. Therefore, these movements now hold antiliberalism and anticapitalism at the forefront of their ideology (Laqueur 4). Before these specific movements are analyzed, it is important to attain an understanding of what fascism itself is and how applicable this term can be in contemporary Europe. This chapter will give a historical account of fascism and outline varying definitions that have been presented and argued since its conception, ultimately deciding upon a working definition for the remainder of my thesis.

Fascism's Roots

Fascism first emerged during the interwar period in Europe. The ramifications of the first World War and the treaty of Versailles changed the landscape of Europe, carving up old empires into young democracies. As previously mentioned, these new democracies were weak and ill-equipped to deal with the problems they faced. Vast amounts of returning war veterans were not adequately dealt with and often turned into revolutionaries. The world economic crisis of the late 20s and early 30s brought high unemployment, increased inflation, and a decline in industrial production. These factors rocked these countries and fueled anti-democratic sentiment, causing a polarization of politics and support for anti-democratic movements (Berg-Schlosser 343). Some

of these countries buckled under the stress of these issues, giving in to authoritarian regimes. In the cases of Italy and Germany, they turned specifically to fascism.

Both countries were dissatisfied with their place in the world following World War I. Germany was the ultimate loser of the treaty of Versailles, and Italy, although being a winner of the war, did not achieve the spoils of victory that it wanted. In hindsight, conditions in each country were perfect for a fascist victory. According to Walter Laqueur, “Fascism prevailed in countries in which the old order seemed to no longer work, in which democracy was not deeply rooted, in which waves of nationalist resentment were running high, and which felt threatened by economic breakdown and social disorder” (16). Without World War I and the following postwar crisis, fascism would have never prevailed. Economic strife was not all that contributed to the victory of fascism in Italy and Germany. Economic issues of the same kind were seen all over Europe. Therefore, the postwar crises that fueled fascism were of moral and cultural origins, not economic.

It is important to note that there are stark differences between Italian Fascism and National Socialism. These two movements are textbook examples of fascism; however, they are each unique. To gain support, the Nazis looked to the peasantry, which was most vulnerable after the war. The Italians, however, found support among war veterans who struggled to reintegrate into civilian life and unemployed students (Laqueur 18). Both movements were able to mobilize previously inactive parts of the population.

Nazi ideology was based upon the myth of the *Volk*, which juxtaposed the German people to the Western idea of society. This idea placed the German people at the top of a hierarchy and called for a return to traditional values and community. It also warned that the superior German people were in danger of total destruction, and therefore the purity of their race

must be protected. Germany's main enemies were seen as the Jews, liberalism, Marxist socialism, and all supernational forces (Laqueur 24). National Socialism is also unique from other fascist movements in that it facilitated the Holocaust. Such mass extermination has not been seen in other fascist regimes.

Italian Fascism was rooted in the nation and the role of the state. They believed that the state creates the nation, not the other way around. This view of the state was a truly independent one, outside of which no human or spiritual values could exist. This state should control all political, moral, and economic forces, with its ultimate value being the greatness of the nation. The idea of a nation, however, was a myth, and fascists were aware of this. Mussolini himself stated, “We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, it is a passion, in our myth is the nation, and to this myth, to this grandeur we subordinate all the rest” (Laqueur 25). The myth of the nation and the supreme aim of greatness is echoed in both Italian Fascism and Nazism. According to *Mein Kampf*, one nation is the other’s enemy, and therefore any war is justified. The nation with the greatest willpower and brutal intent will prevail.

Although they share certain doctrinal differences, German National Socialism and Italian Fascism share much in common. Their differences seem to only be relevant philosophically rather than in their actual implementation of fascism.

Generic Fascism

Defining fascism is no easy task; even historically, this term is problematic as it seems to ignore the differences between Germany and Italy. Fascism is a complicated concept that is becoming increasingly complex. Even in its inception during the interwar period, there were multiple varying forms of it throughout Europe. This concept has also continued to evolve over

time and has become harder to define. The good news is it doesn't need to have an exact definition. According to Walter Laqueur, one does not need to define something in order to study it precisely. In his words, "Fascism resembles pornography in that it is difficult - perhaps impossible - to define in an operational, legally valid way, but those with experience know it when they see it" (6). Fascism is difficult to define because it can have many definitions. One can define fascism through National Socialism's lens; however, it would not be wholly applicable to any other fascist movement. The same is true for Italian Fascism. The problem arises when one tries to reach a definition that transcends a place and time, or "generic fascism" (Scholtyseck 258).

Some scholars, such as Stanley Payne, argue that a definition of fascism can never escape the confines of interwar Europe. Payne believes it is simply a historical phenomenon and that "the full characteristics of European fascism could not be reproduced on a significant scale outside Europe" (Payne 175). This is an understandable conclusion, as fascism emerged from Europe and was created from European models of organization and politics. However, other scholars, such as Roger Griffin, disagree. Griffin upholds that fascism did not end in 1945 but is still relevant today due to its connection with modernization and modernity. Griffin is a founding scholar of "generic fascism," stating that the ideal type of fascism has a "mythic core" where "the vision of the (perceived) crisis of the nation as betokening the birth-pangs of a new order" (Scholtyseck 258). According to Griffin, "a certain amount of secularization, a broadened suffrage, and a democratic setting were necessary prerequisites for the emergence of fascism, which used the attractions of traditional religion but distorted its values" (Scholtyseck 258). These conditions were, and are currently, primarily found in Europe, leading Griffin to reserve the label of "fascism" for mostly European movements. In Michael Mann's *Fascists*, he agrees

that fascism should remain solely a European phenomenon, however, he takes it further by focusing on movements in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Spain (Scholtyseck 259).

How, then, do we treat movements outside of Europe? “Islamofascism” has been a popular term to describe Muslim terrorist groups and dictatorships in the Middle East in recent decades. In some ways, the movements of this region share similarities with European fascist movements. Both share a fear of modernity have nationalistic elements. Both have charismatic leaders and are willing to resort to violence to achieve their goals. But to classify al-Qaeda and similar groups in the Middle East as fascist is incorrect. The main component of truly fascist movements is the perception of a “faltering liberal order” (Scholtyseck 254). Fascism in Europe arose from the failures of interwar democracy as a “Third Way” from both capitalism and communism as a means to fight against the established European order (Scholtyseck 250). “Islamofascist” groups and regimes in the Middle East simply do not have the appropriate preconditions to spawn true fascism. The “widely varying national fascisms of interwar Europe” have “very different resentments, demands, and strategies of the (equally heterogeneous) Muslim movements and insurgencies of our own time” (Judt 2). Also, fascist movements have been seen to create a “political religion,” defined by Giovanni Gentile as something that “sacralizes an ideology, movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth” (Scholtyseck 252). Muslim extremist groups, as we should appropriately call them, such as al-Qaeda, do not have a “political religion” at the core of their being; rather, it is a radical interpretation of Islam. Comparing Muslim extremists and fascists primarily because of their similar actions is misguided. A fascist movement need not be specifically in interwar Europe to

be considered fascist, but it still must share the core elements of the fascists in that time and place.

Neofascism

Fascist movements in recent decades have been classified as neofascism. However, this term, like fascism, is hard to define. European fascism today is set in a completely different world. Democratic institutions are now heavily rooted all across Europe, Communism is no longer a threat, and Europe is no longer the center of world power as it once was. In its heyday, fascism coexisted with war. The ability to so easily declare war on your perceived enemies is no longer possible, even if some neofascists may want it. How then can this new idea of neofascism be linked to generic, historical fascism? What is being seen today is something new and different (Laqueur 7). In an attempt to describe this new movement, many terms have been used, such as right-wing extremism, right-wing radicalism, right-wing populism, national populism, and national revolutionaries, among others (Laqueur 7-8). Any term that has been used, however, is to some degree unsatisfactory.

It is also important to distinguish fascism from populism, as the two are commonly confused with one another. The term “populism,” while sharing many characteristics with fascism, is used to define any illiberal but democratic and non-revolutionary form of politics. Populist movements are fueled by widespread mistrust of the ruling elites, both political and economical, both domestic and international. Fascist longing for an ultra-nation is not the driving force behind populism. Instead, it is the “feeling of vague existential threat streaming from modernity itself, of being a stranger in your own country, the longing to have roots, to have an identity, and to be ‘somewhere’ familiar, not to live in the new world of the revolutionary

imaginary” (Griffin 96). Populism, then, seems like merely a side effect of a modernizing and increasingly globalized world. Fascism, however, is completely antisystem and antidemocratic and steeped in racism, sexism, xenophobia, and ultranationalism.

It may help to analyze the mind of a fascist to better understand both historical fascism and neofascism. Fascists are propelled more with feelings than actual rational thought.

Passionate rhetoric leads to a tribal mentality that unites the masses. According to Robert O. Paxton, this rhetoric has “mobilizing passions” that are present in all fascisms. He organizes these characteristics as follows:

- ‘1. The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether universal or individual.
2. The belief that one’s group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action against the group’s enemies, internal as well as external.
3. Dread of the group’s decadence under the corrosive effect of individualistic and cosmopolitan liberalism.
4. Closer integration of the community within a brotherhood (fascio) whose unity and purity are forged by common conviction, if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary.
5. An enhanced sense of identity and belonging, in which the grandeur of the group reinforces individual self-esteem.
6. Authority of natural leaders (always male) throughout society, culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group’s destiny.

7. The beauty of violence and of will, when they are devoted to the group's success in a Darwinian struggle' (Paxton 6-7).

These beliefs are shared and echoed by fascist leaders to recruit followers. These "mobilizing passions" can be seen in Nazism and Italian Fascism and the fascist movements that are seen today. The fascist also substitutes tradition in the place of reason. Fascism cannot exist in harmony with reason, as it is irrational and opposes reason at its very core. Arthur J. Jacobson states:

'The fascist knows that in a world where reason is always a temptation, tradition must be merciless and hard. If it is not, then reason, which is always merciless and hard, will triumph and humanity will be destroyed. The fascist knows that sustaining a tradition in the face of reason requires discipline and violence. It requires total immersion in the texts and ways of the tradition. It requires intolerance. It requires keeping the strange, the different, the other at bay' (403-404).

Fascism favors tradition over reason and the absence of reason is remedied with faith. The fascist has faith that reason is not suitable for the human experience and successful civilization. Whether it be communist, liberal, or conservative, the products of reason are doomed because they do not hold the irrational terms of fascism (Jacobson 404). The foundation of the fascist tradition is bogus pageantry. The fascist "mobilizes its resources through theater, through music and the visual arts. Fascist emotions are theatrical emotions" (Jacobson 404). The passionate

rhetoric and showmanship of fascists inspire the masses to look past reason and believe in tradition.

These theatrics allow fascism to be capable of adaptation and disguise, especially today. In an interview with the US *New Republic* in 1986, concentration camp survivor Primo Levi spoke on the nature of fascism, stating:

‘Since it is difficult to distinguish true prophets from false, it is well to regard all prophets with suspicion. Yet it is clear that this formula is too simple to suffice in every case. A new fascism, with its trail of intolerance, abuse, and servitude, can be born outside our country and imported into it, walking on tiptoe and calling itself by other names; or it can loose itself from within with such violence that it routs all defenses. At that point, wise counsel no longer serves, ... and one must find strength to resist. But then, too, the memory of what happened in the heart of Europe, not very long ago, can serve as support and warning’ (Griffin 142).

No matter what it is called or how it is disguised, it is important to be vigilant against fascism in all its forms in defense of democracy.

The evasiveness of defining fascism today should not discourage the study of it. As fascism changes and adapts, so should we in being able to recognize it. We must pay attention to certain warning signs and ask ourselves the appropriate questions when analyzing these new movements. According to Robert O. Paxton, the important questions to ask are:

‘Are they becoming rooted as parties that represent major interests and feelings and wield major influence on the political scene? Is the economic or constitutional system in a state of blockage apparently insoluble by existing authorities? Is a rapid political mobilization threatening to escape the control of traditional elites, to the point where they would be tempted to look for tough helpers in order to stay in charge?’ (22).

By asking these questions and being cognizant of fascism's past, we will better identify today's equivalents to fascism.

Finding the “Fascist Minimum”

The misuse of the term “fascism” and “neofascism” has muddied the waters in today's political landscape. These terms are often used as synonyms for racialism, xenophobia, sexism, right-wing conservative and reactionary views, and more. Fascism is so commonly used and thrown around so liberally that it has essentially lost its meaning. Not every anti-Semite, ultranationalist, or someone who opposes immigration is fascist. There exists a “fascist minimum,” as Walter Laqueur puts it, and people may sympathize or share certain basic characteristics of fascism without being full-bodied fascists (7). Ernst Nolte identifies the requirements for the “fascist minimum” as being “anti-Marxism, anti-liberalism, a partial anti-conservatism, the existence of a party army, and the leader- principle” (Scholtyseck 248). The “fascist minimum” is similar to the concept of “generic fascism” as both attempt to identify fascist movements with a definition that transcends time and space.

The “fascist minimum” outlined by Nolte ignores some key concepts, however. Italian historian Emilio Gentile, in his definition of fascism, accounts for the religious aspect of fascism.

According to Gentile, fascism includes a “sacralization of politics” that is unique from other religious institutions (Scholtyseck 249). His definition also accounts for the ideological background that birthed fascism:

‘A mass movement with multi-class membership in which prevail, among the leaders and militants, the middle sectors, in large part new to political activity, organized as a party militia, that bases its identity not on social hierarchy or class origin, but on the sense of comradeship, believes itself invested with a mission of national regeneration, considers itself in a state of war against political adversaries and aims at conquering a monopoly of political power by using terror, parliamentary tactics, and deals with leading groups, to create a new regime that destroys parliamentary democracy’ (Scholtyseck 249).

Gentile’s definition is an improvement to the “fascist minimum,” however, more concepts must be added for it to be more widely applicable. Fascists are often drawn to new and different forms of organization and political action. This progressiveness and fluidity are included in Juan Linz’s multi-dimensional definition:

‘We define fascism as a hyper-nationalist, often pan-nationalist, anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal, anti-communist, populist and therefore anti-proletarian, partly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois, anti-clerical, or at least, non-clerical movement, with the aim of national-social integration through a single party and corporative representation not always equally emphasised; with a distinctive style and rhetoric, it relied on activist cadres ready

for violent action combined with electoral participation to gain power with totalitarian goals by a combination of legal and violent tactics' (Scholtyseck 250).

This definition, however, still does not satisfy the universality that fascism demands. The most current and widely accepted definitions of fascism are brought forth by Robert Paxton and Roger Eatwell. These definitions cover a wide range of fascist movements, include multiple European phenomena, and act as a guideline for universal fascism. Robert Paxton states:

'Fascism may be defined as a political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed national militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraint goals of internal cleansing and external expansion' (Scholtyseck 259).

Roger Eatwell adds:

'An ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a holistic-national radical third way, though in practice fascism has stressed style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichean demonisation of its enemies' (Scholtyseck 259).

These two final definitions best serve as the basis for fascism and the “fascist minimum” that will be used to analyze current movements in the next chapters. However, it is important to note that these definitions, although presently accepted, are subject to change. The study of fascism is a turbulent one, with much internal debate on what it precisely is. In MacGregor Knox’s words, the debate on fascism resembles “a deserted battlefield littered with the burnt-out, rusting hulls of failed theories” (Scholtyseck 259).

In summation, the “fascist minimum” that I have arrived at is best illustrated by the following checklist. A party or movement can be considered fascist if it consists of:

1. A disdain for and abandonment of democratic and liberal values.
2. Establishment of a “mythic” past that stresses the protection of a desired race/culture.
3. Demonization of a particular group to take action against.
4. Employs violence at will and abandons ethical and legal restraints.
5. Presence of a charismatic leader.
6. Views themselves as anti-establishment and an alternative to mainstream politics.
7. Against mainstream media, anti-clerical, and anti-communist.

This checklist will serve as the litmus test to decide whether a party or movement can be considered fascist or not. Some parties may only embody a few of these characteristics and will then need an alternative classification. The most important of these characteristics is undoubtedly point number one: the abandonment of democratic and liberal values. A party or movement is

most dangerous if it has no regard for the rules of democracy or liberal values. This is the most essential aspect of fascist ideology.

Alternative Classifications

The “fascist minimum,” which I have come to define in the previous section, can be considered more of a “lumper” approach to classifying fascism and similar movements. Other scholars, such as Takis Pappas, would disagree with my broader definition and champion multiple, more precise definitions in the place of mine. Takis Pappas, and those like him, are considered “splitters.”

Pappas distinguishes democracy's current challengers into three categories: antidemocrats, nativists, and populists. He defines antidemocrats as parties that “may take part in elections, but they do so as “antisystem” formations—they comply with some of the outward rules of parliamentarism, but they disdain its principles and spirit and would happily jettison them if given the chance” (24). Antidemocrats exist both on the right and the left. Leftist antidemocrats tend to “promote proletarian dictatorship, condemn European unification as the brainchild of a nefarious capitalism, and are ideologically committed to internationalism for all working people, including immigrants and refugees” (25). Antidemocrats on the right, however, “typically advocate ultranationalist—even racist—ideologies, focus on security issues, are hostile to the EU, and take a strong stand against immigration” (25).

Nativists, as described by Pappas, fear immigration and European Union multiculturalism above all else. Nativists see both of these as “grave threats to well-ordered, ethnoculturally coherent societies, to their established liberal-democratic values, and, perhaps most crucially, to the sustainability of the welfare states that these societies have inherited from the days before

mass immigration” (27). To define populism, Pappas simply uses the term “democratic illiberalism” (28). A party that fits this category “must harbor an allegiance to democracy, and it also must endorse illiberal tactics” (29).

These three alternative classifications for distinguishing the radical-right in contemporary European politics are useful. However, they do not aid in identifying and specifying fascism. The “fascist minimum” that I outlined previously, in line with Joachim Scholtyseck’s analysis, uses Robert Paxton’s and Roger Eatwell’s definitions for fascism as its foundation. Paxton and Eatwell’s definitions can easily bleed into each of the three categories that Pappas describes. Fascists can embody elements of antidemocrats, nativists, and populists all at once. Therefore, my established “fascist minimum,” although it may favor “lumper” ideology in its breadth, is the most appropriate form of classification going forward.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Now that a theoretical foundation has been established on the meanings and variations of fascism itself, I will examine three current radical-right parties in contemporary Europe. I will analyze the National Rally in France, the League in Italy, and Fidesz in Hungary. Each party holds a different amount of power within its government. The National Rally has never held any substantial power and has long existed on the periphery of politics. The League has been in control of Italy's government, but only as a part of a coalition. Fidesz, however, has maintained complete control of Hungary's government since 2014. In each case study, I will give a brief historical account of the party and analyze the party's demographic, leadership, various tactics to horde power, and behavior towards democratic and liberal values. I will then finally ascertain where each party lands on the political spectrum and determine the appropriate label for them, whether fascist or another more fitting term.

National Rally

History

The National Rally, or Rassemblement National, was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was the party's leader until 2011. Until June 2018, the party was known as the National Front for French Unity or National Front for short. Since its conception, the party has strongly advocated for French nationalism, immigration control and has often exhibited xenophobic and anti-Semitic behavior. Before founding the National Front, Le Pen served as a paratrooper in Algeria and French Indochina and was highly critical of Charles de Gaulle's decision to concede Algeria. Upon returning to France, he was elected to the National Assembly as its youngest

deputy in 1956. After his failure to be reelected in 1962, he founded a society that peddled Nazi speeches and German military songs. He then founded the National Front 10 years later (Britannica).

In its early years, the party was seen as the French take on western Europe's burgeoning neofascist movement. The National Front resurrected fascist slogans from the 1930s to attract support from right-wing populist citizens, including veterans of the Algerian War and supporters of the Poujadisme movement of the 1950s. However, the party struggled with electoral success with the emergence of Le Pen's alleged involvement in torture during the Algerian War, causing right-wing voters to support other candidates (The French Report). Le Pen later failed to secure the mere 500 signatures needed to appear on the 1981 presidential ballot (Britannica).

The early 1980s saw a turning point for the National Front, however, with success in the Paris and Dreux mayoral elections and the winning of 10 seats in the European Parliament. This was largely due to the softening of party policies by Le Pen, leading to increased support from other right-wing and center-right parties. By 1984 the party had a 17% approval rating and had much success in the 1986 legislative elections, securing 35 seats in the National Assembly, roughly 10% of the vote. In the 1988 presidential election, Le Pen accounted for an unprecedented 14.4% of the vote (The French Report). Despite his increasing success and support, Le Pen was consistently a divisive personality, with his comments leading to fines and widespread criticism. One such comment being the dismissal of the impact and scale of the Holocaust (Britannica).

By the 1990s, the National Front was an established force in French politics. In the 1995 presidential election, Le Pen won more than 15% of the vote, with the party also having successful mayoral elections in Toulon, Orange, and Marignane. Despite now finding itself amid

the French political scene, the party still identified itself as an organization that existed outside of the French establishment. It opposed mainstream politics and any party that it included, from the French Communist Party to the neo-Gaullist Rally for the Republic (Britannica).

The 2002 presidential election saw Le Pen's greatest showing yet, after his surprising first-round victory over Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. He was then pitted against incumbent President Jacques Chirac in a runoff election, the first of which since 1969 where neither candidate belonged to a left-wing party. Despite his unexpected win in the first round, Le Pen was soundly defeated in what is the largest margin of victory in the history of the French presidency. Le Pen's divisive tactics led many disparate parties to shift support behind Chirac, allowing him to win more than 82% of the vote, with polls showing that 71% of that was simply to prevent a Le Pen victory (The French Report).

Le Pen's performance in the 2007 presidential election was far less successful with his failure to advance past the first round of balloting. The next year Jean-Marie was sentenced to a three-month suspension and 10,000 Euro fine for his comments that violated France's statute on Holocaust denial. It soon became clear that Jean-Marie was no longer fit to lead the party, and he resigned as president of the National Front in 2008. In 2011, after three years of campaigning, Jean-Marie's daughter Marine Le Pen won an overwhelming majority to succeed him as the National Front leader (Britannica).

Upon taking the reins of the National Front, Marine Le Pen began shifting the party away from its radical-right roots to become more acceptable by the mainstream public and media. This process was dubbed "dediabolisation" by Marine due to the description of the National Front as "diabolical" that was popular in political discourse. Jean-Marie was famous for making extremely racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic comments that limited the party's success.

Marine's strategy to exercise the party of her father's extreme sentiments has been successful, as 68% of French people now consider the National Rally to be a mainstream party (Magnificat). Marine still embodies many right-wing values, however, the most important of which being immigration control, especially from Islamic countries.

In the first round of the 2012 presidential election, Marine finished third behind Socialist candidate Francois Hollande. She secured 18% of the vote, the highest ever for a candidate from the National Front. The party continued to garner increasing support, finishing first in the 2014 elections for the European Parliament with one-fourth of the vote. The National Front, now the National Rally, has continued to gain support since the success of the 2014 elections, despite a disappointing outcome of the 2017 presidential election (Britannica). Marine Le Pen is poised to be a front-runner for the 2022 presidential election with rising xenophobia and euro-skepticism.

Transition of Power

To orchestrate the ideological shift of the National Rally, Marine used a variety of tactics. Her use of identity politics helped to shield the party from its criticisms. Identity politics is defined as "political positions based on the interests and perspectives of social groups with which people identify. Moreover, identity politics includes the ways in which politics are shaped by aspects of their identity through loosely correlated social organizations" (Magnificat). To combat the criticism that the National Rally was racist and homophobic, Marine appointed several gay and minority members to the party in 2012. Although this move angered the party's Catholic and regionalist factions, it made the National Rally more appealing to the mainstream public. As a result, the rhetoric of the party underwent a fundamental change as well. In dealing with the issue of immigration, the party no longer demonized immigrants and showed disdain for certain

groups of people but rather expressed that they simply cannot assimilate successfully into France's society based on their vastly different upbringing. The same message of anti-immigration was still being sent; however, the wording was now much more widely acceptable (Magnificat).

Marine also distanced herself from her father as much as possible in an attempt to clear her name, and the name of the party, of his past transgressions. In 2013, she announced that Jean-Marie no longer had an official role within the party but remained as an advisor. In reference to Jean-Marie's past controversial comments, Marine remarked they were "unacceptable" and "from a past era" (Magnificat). In an attempt to save his reputation, Jean-Marie stated his support of the shift occurring in the party and denounced his past comments and decisions. This was all for not, however, when Jean-Marie implied that the gas chambers used during the Holocaust were a detail of a much larger war and that the "white world" is under attack in an interview (Magnificat). Marine quickly rejected Jean-Marie's comments and suspended him from the party. In reaction to his suspension, Jean-Marie publicly disowned Marine, and on April 10th, 2015, he announced his retirement from politics (Magnificat).

The falling out between Marine and her father Jean-Marie is symbolic of the greater schism that Marine created within the party. Old members and supporters of Jean-Marie have found themselves at odds with the younger members who support Marine. To further cleanse the party image and rid it of the old regime, Marine banned several militants from the party she considered to be too neo-fascist. She also called the Holocaust an "abomination," which is a drastic improvement to anything her father said on the subject. Jean Yves Camus speaks on this move, saying:

‘Its sincere rejection of Holocaust denial and Nazism also limits the persistence within the FN of radical militant nuclei whose vision of the world is based on necessity to repudiate all the founding ideas of liberal democracy, with a particular fixation against anti-racism, egalitarianism and universalism’ (Magnificat).

Marine’s stance on the Holocaust is in direct opposition to her father's ideals and the party’s older members. This was a significant step for the party to move further away from the far-right and to the center. In 2012, Marine also detached the party from significant far-right “alliances” such as the European Alliance for Freedom (Magnificat).

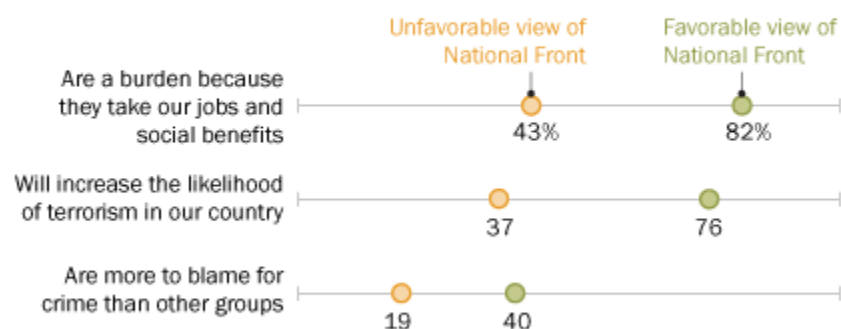
Identity and Policy

The shift away from Jean-Marie’s National Front to Marine’s National Rally has been methodical and carefully planned so as to not alienate its base. The party’s continued move to mainstream politics and the center risks the support of its members who liked that the party existed in protest to the political establishment. Regardless of this risk, the National Rally has remained an “anti-establishment” party. France’s system of presidential elections often leads voters to choose the lesser of two evils in its second round. This typically results in very low approval ratings for presidents, as they were not most of the voter’s first choice. In this sense, the National Rally has enjoyed the luxury of avoiding this scrutiny, having never won a presidency. The party remains on the periphery, and it is here that it holds some degree of immunity. It is also able to hold on to its historical base due to the multiple scandals within the conservative right, one such scandal being when Nicolas Sarkozy took money from Colonel Ghaddafi (Magnificat).

The National Rally is not only split between old and young, but also by North and South. Each region holds its own political views and priorities. The party's supporters in Northern France identify more with the new era of the National Rally led by Marine and want a more social party. The South, alternatively, leans more to the right. Both regions, however, agree on the party's central issue of immigration. According to the National Institute of French Public Opinion, both north and south electorates voted over 90% yes when asked if there were too many immigrants in France (Magnificat). To remedy the divide between the North and South, Marine has made the issue of immigration the central focus of the party.

Most who are partial to the National Front say refugees take jobs, increase threat of terrorism

Refugees in our country today ...



Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.

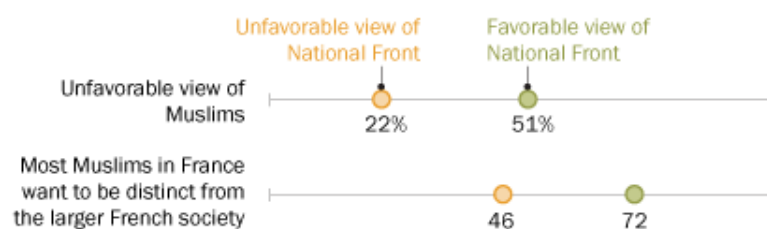
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According to the National Rally, immigration is the root of all evil, and the issue is a tool used by Marine Le Pen to unite those who would have disagreements over her policies. According to Marine, the first step to solving all issues in France is to increase border security. To accomplish this, she proposed using 50,000 military personnel, 15,000 policemen, and the construction of 40,000 prison cells during her 2017 presidential campaign (Magnificat). Marine

also hopes to limit France's total legal and illegal immigration to 10,000 people per year. To accomplish this, Marine has proposed the abolishment of the Schengen zone, effectively blocking Europeans from immigrating freely to France. She also wishes to end the right of soil for children born in France of foreign parents (Magnificat).

The disdain felt for immigrants within the National Rally is especially focused towards Islamic countries. After the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, the party has used the heightened Islamophobia within France to attract more support. More recently, a French middle school teacher was beheaded by a Muslim extremist after showing cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in October of 2020. Marine Le Pen has used such horrible acts of violence to spread fear of Muslims. Marine Le Pen has recently proposed a law to ban Islamist ideologies, which she describes as "totalitarian and murderous" (Ya Libnan).

Negative ratings for Muslims more common among those who favor National Front

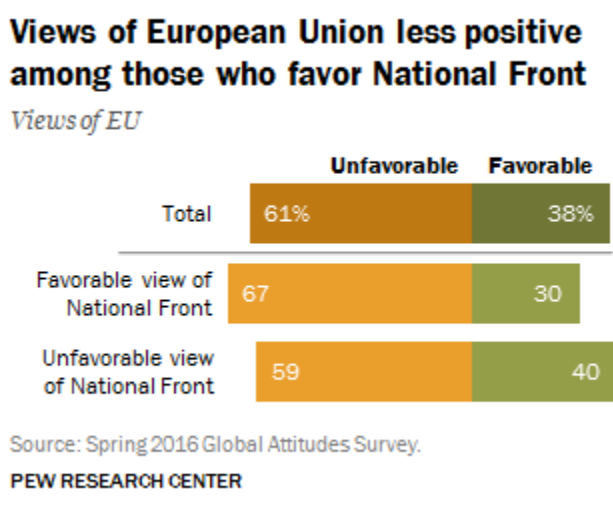


Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.

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Marine Le Pen is also fiercely against the European Union. She was elected to the EU parliament in 2014 while being openly anti-EU and was a roadblock for many pieces of legislation. She vehemently advocates for France's exit of the European Union, stressing the importance of sovereignty and control of borders and currency. Marine believes that economic decisions should be made by the French themselves and wants to escape the controls of the Euro

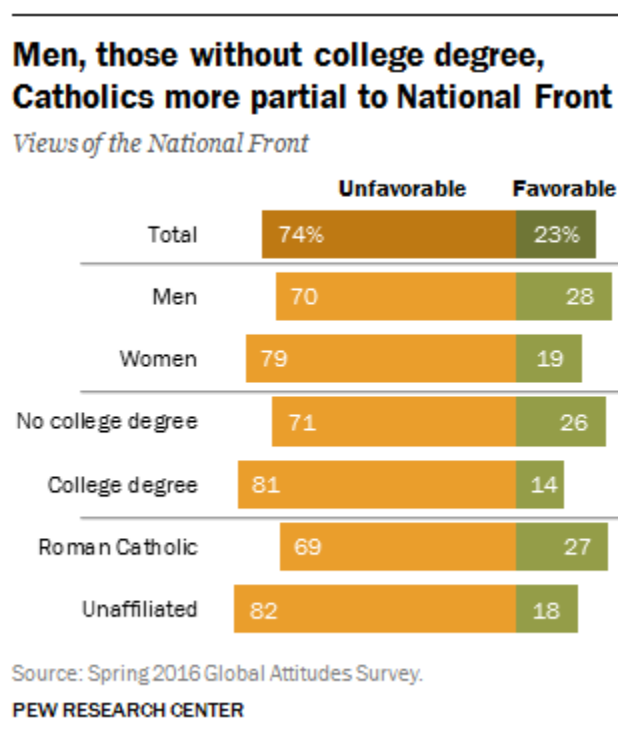
and the European Central Bank. According to Marine, France is being treated unfairly compared to other members of the EU, and the open borders of the EU result in a loss of jobs for the French people. She has also proposed a tax on companies that hire outside of France. (Magnificat).



Marine Le Pen has also been highly critical of NATO, believing that it is a strain on French sovereignty. It is believed that she would like to instead align France with Russia as she was a supporter of the annexation of Crimea. The National Rally was also given a hefty loan of 11 million Euros from Russia in 2014 which many political entities have highly criticized. Both the National Rally and Russia are anti-NATO and anti-EU (Magnificat).

Gay marriage is an issue that has become somewhat divisive within the National Rally. Christians and traditional Catholics that are opposed to gay marriage make up a large part of the party's base and still hold significant power within the party. In 2017, however, Marine promised the protection of the LGBTQ community from the threat of Islamism. This is in direct opposition to the anti-LGBTQ stance that most of her party adheres to, yet it seems that the threat of Muslim immigration has trumped that view. Marine still officially opposes same-sex marriage,

however, it is unclear if this position may change in the future to further solidify her rejection of Islamism (Magnificat). However, it is doubtful that she would do this, as Catholics contribute a significant amount to the party's support, as seen in the graph below.



Although Christians and Catholics make up a significant amount of the party's base, the National Rally is a large proponent of secularism. France is a hyper-secular country and has greatly limited the impact of religion on daily life. For instance, French schools have banned any and all religious objects or symbolism, including Muslim hijabs, Christian veils and signs, the Jewish kippa and more. The National Rally is a proponent of this secularism, especially when it comes to its defense against Islamism. In 2016, Marine Le Pen vowed to “protect the French family and the traditions of secularity” (Magnificat). The union of family values and secularism

is altogether something different than what is seen in other countries, especially the United States, where conservative family traditions and religious values typically exist in unison.

A New Generation

Marine and Jean-Marie are not the only Le Pens worth mentioning, however. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the granddaughter of Jean-Marie and niece of Marine, represents the newest generation of young conservatives in France. Marion seems to be the guiding figurehead leading an “evolving right-wing Popular Front” (Lilla 1). This new generation of conservatives believes in an organic conception of society, one that:

‘...sees Europe as a single Christian civilization composed of different nations with distinct languages and customs. These nations are composed of families, which are organisms, too, with differing but complementary roles and duties for mothers, fathers, and children. On this view, the fundamental task of society is to transmit knowledge, morality, and culture to future generations, perpetuating the life of the civilizational organism. It is not to serve an agglomeration of autonomous individuals bearing rights’ (Lilla 4).

These young conservatives denounce France’s involvement in the European Union because of its focus on individuals' economic self-interest and its rejection of the cultural-religious foundation of Europe. To them, the EU has also allowed for the immigration of Muslims, who are from a different and incompatible civilization. The EU has also ignored France’s most vulnerable

citizens through its consolidation of economic power in Brussels. In their eyes, the economy should be subordinate to social needs (Lilla 4).

Environmental conservation is also an important issue for this new generation, who criticize the severe impacts of neoliberal economics and environmental degradation. They denounce agribusiness, genetically modified crops, and suburbanization (Lilla 4).

In terms of family and sexuality, these young conservatives hold a traditionalist Catholic view, however, they argue this view purely through secularity. The increase of radical individualism has resulted in many problems for the family, including dropping rates of family formation, delayed child-bearing, rising numbers of single-parents, and pornography addiction. They argue that a return to more traditional values, ones that support strong, stable families, will solve these problems (Lilla 4).

The women of this new movement have adopted a new form of feminism called “alter-feminism” in rejection of the “career fetishism” of contemporary feminism (Lilla 4). They oppose the capitalist view that slaving for a boss is freedom, however, they do not only advocate for the traditional stay-at-home-mother role. They believe that women instead need a more realistic image for themselves, one that embraces the traditional role of motherhood and reproduction but also embodies individual accomplishment in the workplace. Marianne Durano speaks on the harmfulness of contemporary feminism, saying:

‘We are the victims of a worldview in which we are supposed to live it up until the age of 25, then work like fiends from 25 to 40 (the age when you’re at the bottom of the professional scrap heap), avoid commitments and having children before 30. All of this goes completely against the rhythm of women’s lives’ (Lilla 4).

This “alter-feminism” praises the efforts of feminists in the past; however, it questions the new wave that has rejected the traditional role and values of women.

Marion is not her grandfather, nor is she her aunt. She embodies a new form of conservatism and has the stage and personality to unite it. She has the potential to lead a moderate conservative movement that is not primarily motivated by xenophobia and anti-elitism but rather one that wishes for a more stable and less fluid world, both economically and culturally. This new classical, organic conservatism could oppose the alt-right by simply stressing tradition, solidarity, and care for the earth (Lilla 7). Marion could also, however, use the traditional, organic view of this new generation to foster a new wave of Christian nationalism, one that can span Europe and lead to joint political action between many right-wing populist parties (Lilla 7). Either way, Marion will undoubtedly be a significant player in not only French conservatism but also European conservatism in the near future.

Assessment

Now that the party has been fully analyzed, is it reasonable to consider the National Rally a fascist party? The National Rally is a long-standing party that has undergone copious amounts of change over its history. It was most certainly fascist in its early years under Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership; however, in recent years, it has shifted away from its founding ideals. Under Marine Le Pen's leadership, the party has adopted more progressive forms of thinking and rhetoric. Marine's break with her overtly fascist father and her full recognition of the Holocaust's horrors have helped her cause immensely. Even the name change of “National Front,” which has aggressive and militaristic undertones, has been a step away from the party's fascist history. The

National Rally, however, still has undoubtedly remained on the radical-right end of the political spectrum. Xenophobia, Euroscepticism, distrust of the media, islamophobia, and homophobia all remain as central motivators of the party. In this initial analysis, however, I would not call the National Rally fascist. It does not currently meet the qualifications of my previously mentioned “fascist minimum.” Rather, I believe it to be a right-wing populist party.

The League

History

Lega, or “League” in English, formerly known as the “Northern League,” was founded in 1991 by Umberto Bossi. It is the oldest existing party in Italy. Bossi was a northern-regionalist politician who created the League by uniting the various autonomous movements across the Po River valley. The League was founded to lead a movement of northern secession from the Italian state in favor of a new “Federal Republic of Padania.” The League was also founded as a populist party, with its rhetoric denouncing the central government, referring to it as “Roma ladrona” (Rome the Thief). The government was seen as “a nest of corrupt elites allegedly bent on exploiting hardworking northerners for the benefit of lazy, profligate southerners” (D'Alimonte 122).

The League soon took the national stage in the 1992 general elections, where it won 8.7% of the votes, 56 deputies and 26 senators. In 1994 the party won only 8.4% of the votes. However, it increased its deputies to 117 and senators to 56 for greater parliamentary representation. Also in 1994, the League joined Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale, and the Centro Cristiano Democratico to form a coalition government under Silvio Berlusconi. The League obtained five ministries in this government. In the 1996 general elections, the party won 10.1% of the votes (Life in Italy).

However, the League shifted from secessionism to federalism in 2000, following its second alliance with Silvio Berlusconi. Alongside Forza Italia, the League governed Italy from 2001-2006. Despite this change, the party still upholds its pledge to free its regional home from

the Italian Republic (D'Alimonte 121-122). In 2008, spurred by Romano Prodi's government's fall, the League secured 8.3% of the votes in the early general elections (Life in Italy).

In 2013, Matteo Salvini became the leader of the League. For the next few years the League remained largely on the periphery of the political landscape until the 2018 parliamentary election. In this election, Italy became the only country in Western Europe with a populist majority. The League, in conjunction with the Five Star Movement, won a combined 50.3% of the popular vote and 56% of the seats in the lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies (D'Alimonte 114). The Five Star Movement was by far the single largest party with 227 seats in the 630-seat Chamber and 122 seats in the 315-seat senate. The League, by contrast, was the second-largest single party in the house with 125 seats. In the Senate, the League captured 58 seats, the third-largest amount by a single party (D'Alimonte 114). The League also overtook Forza Italia as the country's top party in the center-right bloc. The party system has therefore shifted, with components of the right becoming increasingly more radical. The coined "Government of Change" currently had Salvini as Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister, along with Luigi Di Maio of the Five Star Movement.

TABLE—RESULTS OF ITALY’S 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Lists and Coalitions	Chamber of Deputies					Senate				
	% Vote	PR	FPTP	Abroad	Total	% Vote	PR	FPTP	Abroad	Total
Center Right										
Lega (L)	17.3	73	50	2	125	17.6	37	21	-	58
Forza Italia (FI)	14.0	59	43	1	103	14.4	33	22	2	57
Brothers of Italy (Fdi)	4.4	19	13	-	32	4.3	7	11	-	18
Noi con l'Italia-UdC (NCI-UDC)	1.3	0	5	0	5	1.2	0	4	0	4
FI-Fdi-Mov. Nuova Valle D'Aosta*	0.0	-	0	-	0	0	-	0	-	0
Total	37.0	151	111	3	265	37.5	77	58	2	137
5 Star Movement (M5S)	32.7	133	93	1	227	32.2	68	44	0	112
Center Left										
Democratic Party (PD)	18.8	86	21	5	112	19.1	43	8	2	53
+Europa	2.6	0	2	1	3	2.4	0	1	0	1
Insieme	0.6	0	1	-	1	0.5	0	1	-	1
Civica Popolare (CP)	0.5	0	2	0	2	0.5	0	1	0	1
SVP-PATT	0.4	2	2	-	4	0.4	1	2	-	3
PD-UV-UPV-EPAV**	0.0	-	0	-	0	0.1	-	1	-	1
Total	22.9	88	28	6	122	23	44	14	2	60
Liberi e Uguali (LEU)	3.4	14	0	0	14	3.3	4	0	0	4
Others	4.1	0	0	2	2	4	0	0	2	2
TOTAL	100	386	232	12	630	100	193	116	6	315

Sources: Supreme Court, Ministry of the Interior, and the Italian Center for Electoral Studies (CISE).

Notes: The “PR” column reports seats filled by proportional-representation voting; the “FPTP” column reports single-member-district seats filled by first-past-the-post voting.

*Electoral coalition between FI, FDI and a local movement in the Aosta Valley.

**Electoral coalition between PD and ethno-regionalist parties in the Aosta Valley.

Roberto D'Alimonte (116)

The Five Star Movement’s dominance declined in the 2019 European Parliament election, only securing 17%. The League, however, accounted for 34% of the vote. This was an almost exact inversion of the 2018 results (CNBC). This result marked a clear shift of support from the left-leaning Five Star Movement to the far-right League. Following the 2019 elections, the League joined the political group of European Parliament “Identity and Democracy,” formerly known as the “European Alliance for People and Nations” (Deutsche Welle). The group consists of Italy’s League, France’s National Rally, and Germany’s Alternative for Germany as member parties (Politico).

In July of 2019, Salvini and the League were accused of corruption linked to Russia, as recordings leaked of party members meeting with Russian agents in Moscow. The meeting centered around Russia funding the party with an illegal \$65 million (BuzzFeed). Italian authorities are currently investigating this case and other instances of Russian-linked corruption

by the League. It is also important to note that the League is an official cooperation party of United Russia, Russia's governing party (Financial Times).

In August 2019 the coalition government of the Five Star Movement and the League crumbled, allowing for a new government led by Giuseppe Conte to take power. This new coalition consisted of the Five Star Movement, the Democratic Party, the Free and Equal parliamentary group, and Italia Viva. The League was forced into the opposition once again; however, it still continued to gain support across Italy. Conte's government fell in January 2021 after losing support from Italia Viva (CNBC). President Mattarella has appointed Mario Draghi to form a cabinet, consisting of the League, the Five Star Movement, the Democratic Party, and Forza Italia.

Transforming the League

Under Matteo Salvini's leadership since 2013, the party has shifted its focus from regionalism to nationalism. The unofficial name change from "Northern League" to simply "League" reflects this shift, as the latter is undoubtedly more inclusive and universal. "Northern League" still exists as the official name in the party statute, however. Salvini's strategy for party success has been aided by the lack of a national right-wing party in Italy. Bossi's Northern League was right-wing but regionally based. Salvini's League has evolved into a national rightist party, as was seen by his slogan for the 2018 election, "Italians First." Patriotism has taken the place of regionalism, and Italy has replaced Padania. The European Union and immigrants have replaced Rome and southerners as the party's primary enemy. (D'Alimonte 122).

Salvini has become synonymous with the League, readily embodying the role of a charismatic leader. Like Marine with the National Rally and Viktor Orbán with Fidesz, the

success of the party is closely linked to Salvini and his personal success. This symbiotic relationship is visible in the evolution of the party logo, as shown below. The official logo remains highly regionalistic, with references to Padania. The electoral logo, however, brandishes Salvini's name instead.



Official logo (1994-1999) Official logo (1999-present) Electoral logo (2018-present)

leganord.org

The European Union, immigrants, and refugees must exist as a threat to Italy and its national identity in the eyes of the League. These threats affect all of Italy, not just the north, and allows Salvini to appeal to a wider range of voters. A large swath of the electorate in Italy already views immigrants and refugees as a threat, and Salvini has taken advantage of this. Of Italy's population of 61 million, immigrants only account for about 8%. One 2018 study, however, shows that many Italians estimate that immigrants make up 25% of the entire population. This is the largest gap between real and perceived immigrant share in all of Europe (D'Alimonte 122).

Salvini's xenophobic rhetoric and actions against immigration has successfully nationalized his party. His actions against NGOs that rescued and brought migrants from sea to Italy as Interior Minister were praised among voters. The rising distrust of elites and the political

class has voters viewing Salvini as a rare leader, one who actually accomplishes what he promised. Salvini has also received much criticism from the EU on his immigration policy, but this has only aided his effort. Criticism from the EU has only polished his image as the leader Italy needs to oppose EU interests.

The rapid decline of Berlusconi's Forza Italia has also helped the League break from its regionalist roots. Silvio Berlusconi is now 84, and his legal "imbroglios" paired with a crisis at the political center has allowed the League to cannibalize Forza Italia's voters. The League entered central and southern Italy under the banner "Us with Salvini" to rebrand the party to voters outside the north. Forza Italia now polls at a mere 7% compared to the League's 32%, with the League polling 22% in the south (Broder 13).

The League's increasing popularity and nationalism may soon come back to haunt the party, however. Salvini has done a strategic job of rebranding the party to appear more nationalist, however he has yet to totally abandon its regionalist roots. This issue has yet to be appropriately addressed by Salvini, who, so far, has chosen simply to delay dealing with this issue. Roberto D'Alimonte speaks on the League's paradoxical nature, saying:

'Yet there is lingering ambiguity regarding how regional or national it is— just weeks after running in the 2018 general election as Lega, it ran as the Northern League in a northern regional election and as Lega in a southern regional election—but so far this has not damaged Salvini. It is a League `a la carte. Sooner or later, however, the coexistence of the old Northern League with the new Lega will have to be addressed' (123).

Luckily for Salvini, his electoral success has thus far silenced public criticism on the issue. Despite this, Salvini must ask himself how long this will last. How long will regional party leaders sit by idly while Salvini panders to the Five Star Movement and the southern voter base? Currently, the party exists in a state of limbo, torn between its regionalist roots and Salvini's increasing nationalism. Only time will tell if Salvini can navigate this situation successfully and satisfy the constituents of both sides.

Identity and Policy

The League's mission today is nationalism. Salvini cares most about regaining control of national borders and national policies. Restoring sovereignty, specifically through the lens of eurocriticism and fear of technocracies, has become a primary issue of importance of the League. A party that champions nationalism and direct democracy cannot accept the legitimacy of decisions made by non-elected European institutions. In a 2019 rally, Salvini stated, "There are no extremists, racists or fascists in this square...the extremists are those who have governed Europe for 20 years in the names of poverty and precarity (The Guardian). Although the League challenges the idea of European integration, it has yet to reject the idea of a Union outright (D'Alimonte 124).

The party gains a significant amount of support from employers who struggle to compete with the European Union's single market. However, it does poorly with young professionals. But Salvini cannot withdraw from the eurozone to aid these employers, as doing so would default on Italy's national debt and eviscerate wealthier voter's savings. Salvini has ruled it out due to the backlash that would occur from such an action (Broder 14).

Salvini has attempted to tip-toe around the true confrontation with the EU, acting in opposition against it without totally committing to the struggle. When the League was in coalition with the Five Star Movement, they instituted a 2.4% budget deficit designed to oppose Brussels. This deficit was three times larger than the previous administration's. This allowed Salvini to "posture as a defender of Italian economic interests, even without risking an all-out confrontation with the EU" (Broder 14).

The League is strongly against immigration. In October of 2019, Salvini had Domenico Lucano, the antiracist mayor of Riace, Calabria arrested over allegations of "aiding and abetting illegal immigration" (Broder 14). During this time, Salvini also suggested that "ethnic shops" should close at 9 pm. Party loyalist and mayor of Lodi, Lombardi also cut funding for migrant pupils' right to free school meals. The party, much like other far-right parties in Europe, strongly opposes Islam and Muslim immigrants. Salvini sees himself as a defender of "Judeo-Christian" values and has slammed left-wing governments' immigration policy that is "transforming the Mediterranean into an open-air cemetery" (Euronews).

The League is in favor of the environment, supporting public green areas, natural parks, and recycling. The party also has a strong agricultural backing and likewise supports the protection of traditional food and opposes GMOs. It has also campaigned for a revision of the quota system of the Common Agricultural Policy (Chamber of Deputies). The party also typically takes socially conservative stances on social issues, opposing abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, artificial insemination, same-sex marriage, and drug use.

Assessment

The League is currently the most successful far-right party in Western Europe. Although they underwent a significant transformation from regionalism to nationalism, they never altered any rhetoric or actions that may label them fascist, unlike the National Rally. Italy's democratic system is much more vulnerable than France's, leading the League to have much more electoral success. The League embodies many things a fascist would: it is xenophobic, racist, islamophobic, hyper-nationalist, Euroskeptic, and has a charismatic leader. The party has, however, observed and obeyed democratic rules, even when in power. Thus, the party does not meet my "fascist minimum." Because of this, I do not find it appropriate to label Salvini's league fascist, but rather a far-right populist party, similar to the National Rally.

Fidesz

History

Fidesz was founded in 1988, with its full name being “Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége,” meaning “Alliance of Young Democrats” in English. The party grew from a liberal underground student activist movement that opposed the ruling communist party (Vox). After the fall of communism in Hungary, the country adopted a democratic system. Fidesz was started as a moderate centrist liberal party and found success early after its creation. In 1990, the party gained entry to the National Assembly after attaining 6% of the vote, winning 22 seats. In 1997 the party gained members in the National Assembly from a dismantled Christian Democratic group, effectively becoming the largest bloc. Fidesz became the single largest party in 1998, winning 148 seats. The party formed a coalition government with the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Independent Smallholders’ Party (Britannica). Viktor Orbán of Fidesz was appointed prime minister. Under Orbán’s rule, the party was considered conventionally conservative by European standards (Vox). It continued an austerity program, cut taxes and social insurance fees, and fought for Hungary’s European Union membership (Britannica).

Fidesz narrowly lost the 2002 elections to the Hungarian Socialist Party. In 2005, Fidesz’s nominee László Sólyom was elected President of Hungary and acted with a largely centrist mindset (index). In 2006, Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People’s Party formed a coalition for that year’s elections. They won 42% of the vote and 164 representatives out of 386, yet still lost to the social-democratic and liberal coalition of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats (BBC). Later that year, however, Fidesz won the municipal elections, 15 of 23 mayoralities in the largest Hungarian cities, and the majority in 18 of 20

regional assemblies (Taipei Times). Fidesz regained full control of the government in 2010, winning more than two-thirds of the seats. The landslide victory was spurred on by economic issues, especially Hungary's economic collapse in 2008.

In the 2010 parliamentary elections, Fidesz won 53% of the popular vote in the first round, leading to a supermajority of 68% of the seats. With this newfound power, Fidesz adopted an entirely new constitution, which has been harshly criticized by the Venice Commission for Democracy through Law, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the United States. The new constitution has received such criticism for concentrating far too much power in the hands of the ruling party, limiting oversight by the Constitutional Court of Hungary, and removing forms of democratic checks and balances, such as the media, supervision of elections, and the ordinary judiciary (The New York Times).

In 2014, Fidesz won a supermajority again in the nationwide parliamentary election. However, this supermajority was lost when Fidesz's own Tibor Navracsics was appointed to the European Commission. His seat was taken by an independent candidate in a by-election (The Wall Street Journal). In 2018, Fidesz won its third supermajority in the nationwide parliamentary elections, running primarily on a platform of anti-immigration and foreign meddling (EUobserver). Fidesz remains in power today as one of Europe's leading and most powerful right-wing populist parties.

Changes in Government

In 1989-1990, Hungary underwent a significant turning point. The fall of communism liberated Hungary and other members of the Soviet Bloc to pursue other systems of governance, many following the zeitgeist of democracy and liberalism. Until 2010, Hungary was seen as a

model of this transition as the country pursued a market economy based on the dominance of the rule of law and of private ownership. The 2010 victory of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz changed the course of Hungary's progress, beginning the dismemberment of the country's fundamental institutions of democracy (Kornai 280).

Under Orbán, the executive and legislative branches have essentially become one. Orbán and Fidesz control both and have effectively turned parliament into a "law factory" (Kornai 281). Between 2010 and 2014, no less than 88 bills were introduced and passed within the same week, with 13 of these being introduced and passed within the same or following day. Any investigation into potential fraud or corruption within Orbán's government has, without exception, been dismissed. Fidesz has power over organizations that are not legally controlled by the executive branch, which would provide a form of security to check the executive and legislative branches in real democracies. Such organizations are the constitutional court, the state audit office, the fiscal council, the competition authority, the ombudsman's office, and the central statistical office (Kornai 281).

Fidesz's government has done all it can to dismantle the institutions of the rule of law that had been established by 2010. One of the most important steps to undermine the rule of law was seen in the aforementioned new Hungarian constitution. The new constitution was drafted by a small group within Fidesz and passed quickly through the "law factory" of the executive and legislative branches (Kornai 281). The new constitution was riddled with shortcomings that many local and foreign legal experts criticized. This document, officially called "Fundamental Law," was amended five times due to the number of clauses it contained that served the political agenda of those in power (Kornai 281).

One major aspect of the rule of law, according to János Kornai, is that “no-one, not even those who hold the most power, should be above the law. The law must be respected” (281). Fidesz has completely ignored this idea by using legal tricks to pass laws that ensure favoritism. The current government also has taken control of the Prosecution Service, a centralized organization that, in theory, operates independently from the rest of the government. In any given case of the Prosecution Service, however, the chief prosecutor is chosen by the holder of supreme power and then formally appointed by parliament. From then on, the chief prosecutor is effectively no longer under the control of parliament. When the Prosecution Service has investigated cases of corruption and scandals pertaining to members of the current government, barring a few exceptions, the cases have never progressed past the investigative or prosecution phases. However, this is not the case when pertaining to members of the opposition, who the Prosecution Service often persecutes to the utmost degree (Kornai 282).

Fidesz has also worked to gain control over the courts. The President of the Supreme Court was dismissed early once Fidesz took power in 2010, and a new institution emerged, called the National Office for the Judiciary. This new organization was gifted with a wide array of powers, including the ability to appoint judges and decide which cases should be heard by which courts. The retirement age for judges was reduced from 70 to 62, resulting in the expulsion of the older, more liberal generation. An international court ultimately annulled this change; however, most judges that were ousted did not return to their previous positions (Kornai 282).

Fidesz has also targeted private property through legal, ideological, and economic attacks. The party has nationalized private pension funds financed from the obligatory contributions, severely hurting the principle of private property. The shift to state-owned rather

than privately owned has spread to banking, energy, public works, transportation, the media and advertising. In these areas, property rights were bought by the state, oftentimes well below market value and leaving little to no say for the previous owner. To further centralize things in Hungary, Fidesz greatly increased the powers of local government. Schools and hospitals, for instance, no longer belong to local authorities. Now, they are controlled by the bureaus of the central government (Kornai 283).

The methods of centralization enacted by Orbán and his party has put him in a position of supreme authority in government. Everything has become tied to the hierarchy he has created, with him alone at the top. János Kornai examines this system, stating:

‘A pyramid-like vertical hierarchy has emerged and solidified, with the supreme leader at its summit. Below him, ready to obey his every command, stand his hand-picked henchmen, who owe him unconditional loyalty. Moving on down, we find the next level of the pyramid, and the next: for each position people are chosen for their loyalty to the regime. Commands which take obedience for granted tightly bind each subordinate to his or her superiors. It is only the leader at the top who does not depend on his superior, only those at the very lowest level do not give orders to anyone. Everyone else incorporated into the levels in-between is simultaneously servant and master. It is in their interests to hang on in there, to move further up in the pyramid. Their position is not decided at elections, but depends on winning the trust of their superior by services and flattery, or at least by uncritical obedience. Hundreds of thousands of public employees, including those who work in the state-run educational and health sectors, feel defenseless: few dare to speak up, to protest, because they fear for their jobs. The regime is robust, partly

because it can surely count on the fear of the majority of people dependent on it, as well as on the "keep a low profile and obey" mentality' (283).

Civil society has long acted as an important mechanism for decentralization. Fidesz, in pursuit of total centralization, has neglected this mechanism. No relevant trade unions or organizations outside of government control are consulted when parliamentary bills are drafted. Likewise, declarations and demonstrations by people expressing their concerns are largely ignored (Kornai 283).

Orbán and Fidesz, even with all their tampering within the government, still exist within a democracy, albeit an illiberal one. However, Orbán employs propaganda to convince Hungarians and outsiders that the majority of the people want his leadership. Fidesz routinely boasted that they won a supermajority of two-thirds for two parliamentary cycles in a row, yet this is very misleading. In the 2014 election, pictured below, one-fourth of voters expressed support for Fidesz.

**Table 1. Results of parliamentary elections in 2010 and 2014:
share of Fidesz–KDNP supporters and mandates**

Parliamentary election	Fidesz voters		Fidesz deputies
	As a proportion of all eligible voters	As a proportion of all actual voters	As a proportion of all deputies
2010	41.5%	53.1%	68.1%
2014	26.6%	44.9%	66.8%

Source: The aggregate numbers of votes and mandates published by Nemzeti Választási Iroda (National Election Office 2010a, 2010b, 2014). The 2014 results are calculated including ballots cast abroad (in 2010, dual citizens without permanent Hungarian residency were unable to vote). The figure in the second row of the first column is an estimate calculated by the research institute Political Capital (see László and Krekó 2014).

Identity and Policy

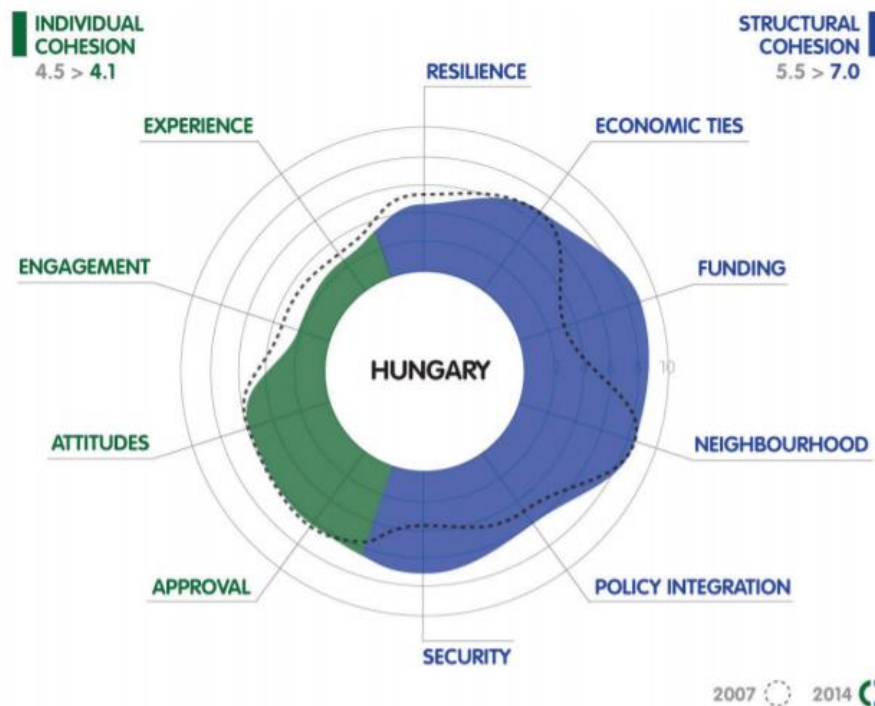
Viktor Orbán and other Fidesz officials have openly described Hungary's current government as an “illiberal democracy.” Orbán and Fidesz have been transforming Hungary into a Christian democracy, which according to Orbán, “...is not liberal...It is illiberal, if you like” (Reuters). Orbán explains why Christian democracy must be illiberal, adding that it rejects multiculturalism and immigration while being anti-communist and defending Christian values (Reuters). To Orbán, liberal democracy is inherently undemocratic because it is “intolerable of alternative views” (Reuters). He identifies China, Turkey, Russia, and Singapore as successful illiberal states (Politico).

Fidesz’s economic policy is typical of a far-right party in its skepticism of neoliberal economic values. As seen with its centralization of the Hungarian government, Fidesz supports more interventionist economic policies (Todosijević 421). However, Fidesz has implemented some more liberal policies, such as a flat income tax, reductions in the corporate tax rate, restrictions on unemployment benefits, and privatization of state-owned land (The Budapest Beacon). Fidesz’s more populist economic policies include a public works job program, pension hikes, utility bill cuts, a minimum wage increase, and cash gifts for retirees (Politico). The party has also instituted a national public works program that helps rural communities in need (The New York Times).

Fidesz has long been in conflict with the European Union. Orbán views the EU “...as a declining economic power with a questionable foreign policy, and sees its Western member states as having shaky democratic legitimacy” (Végh 72). Under Orbán, Hungary has significantly improved its relations with Russia, however it has also become increasingly dependent on Russia’s energy and financial support. This has led Orbán to openly question

Europe's treatment of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Orbán has also stood against the EU by informally leading a coalition, consisting of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary, that opposes the European Commission and Germany's immigration policies *Willkommenskultur* (Végh 72-73).

Orbán opposes the EU and instead supports the idea of a "Europe of nation states," arguing against further European inclusion. Although Orbán is firm in this stance, Hungary still greatly benefits from its EU membership. The EU Cohesion Monitor, pictured below, supports this, showing Hungary's increased structural cohesion paired with its decline of individual cohesion (Végh 73).



Zsuzsanna Végh (73)

Orbán's strong anti-immigration policies and rhetoric have been a staple of his government. Orbán has presented himself as the last protector of a Europe in which "Christianity and the nation-state are sacred succeeded both domestically and internationally" (Müller 4). In the spring of 2015, the Hungarian government built a fence along its border to keep out refugees from Serbia. Orbán employed many conspiracy theories to justify this action, calling the refugees economic migrants or Muslim terrorists (Müller 4).

To support his stance on immigration, Orbán has adopted a strong support of nativism. In a 2018 address, he stated,

'We must state that we do not want to be diverse and do not want to be mixed: we do not want our own colour, traditions and national culture to be mixed with those of others. We do not want this. We do not want that at all. We do not want to be a diverse country' (Ministry of Hungary).

Orbán supports a racially homogeneous society in Hungary, and his government has made changes in the constitution that have made it illegal to "settle foreign populations in Hungary" (The New York Times).

Assessment

Fidesz is one of the most influential far-right parties in all of Europe, but can it be considered fascist? The party is clearly the most radical thus far. It is openly against liberal and democratic institutions, xenophobic, racist, strongly against European integration, and has made immense changes to the democratic institutions and the rule of law in Hungary. Viktor Orbán is

undoubtedly a charismatic leader, not only of the party but for the radical-right across the globe. Paul Lendvai, an Austrian-Hungarian journalist, describes Orbán's regime as a "Führer Democracy" due to its extreme centralization of power. Lendvai does not believe it to be fascist because the government does not seek to mobilize people, encourage massive violence, or demand total ideological conformity (Müller 6). I agree with Lendvai's label. According to my established "fascist minimum," Fidesz fits many of the requirements, but not all. Hungary still operates within a democracy, albeit an "illiberal" one, as described by Orbán himself. Fidesz does not advocate for violence and the mobilization of the masses. Even when it lost power in 2002, Fidesz conceded to the winning socialist party, obeying democratic rules. The party is also not the least bit anti-clerical as it constantly emphasizes the need for a Christian democracy. Orbán and his party's transition to the radical right cannot be ignored, however. Fidesz and Orbán started out in support of democracy and liberal values, yet they have progressively moved further to the right, especially since regaining power in 2010. Fidesz has made monumental changes to its government to ensure it stays in power. It is possible that they may resort to violence in the future to keep this power if they should stray further to the right, but only time will tell. Therefore, it is best to describe Fidesz as an illiberal, far-right populist party. Fidesz does, however, embody the most defining characteristic of fascism, that being the abandonment of democratic and liberal values. Hungary was once a burgeoning young democracy and a model of communist transition. Since 2010, Orbán and Fidesz have turned it into a beacon of populism and far-right ideologies but has yet to reach outright fascism.

CONCLUSION

The far-right in Europe today has reached a level of legitimacy that has not been seen since the Second World War. Spurred on by intensifying Islamophobia, the success of Donald Trump and other right-wing politicians across the globe, and the escalating war on migrants, the far-right has enjoyed a substantial surge in public support and electoral success. However, is it fair to compare these contemporary movements to the “classical” fascism that rose during the interwar period? My analysis of such popular movements (National Rally, the League, and Fidesz), compared with my established “fascist minimum,” has not resulted in any meeting the requirements to be called fascist.

Today, we see a new mold of the radical right; many of these movements were conceived with fascist roots; however, they have since changed in favor of electoral success. Italian scholar Enzo Traverso suggests that this is “post-fascism.” These post-fascist parties had ties with historical fascism but have “mutated” and are currently “moving in a direction whose ultimate outcome remains unpredictable.” The National Rally is the best example of this mutation with the transition of power from Jean-Marie to Marine. The National Rally and other similar parties in Europe have strictly accepted a parliamentary strategy and now plan to change the system from within. This is unlike classical fascism, which sought to change everything and did not hesitate to use violence to do so (International Socialism).

Fascism today, then, has become somewhat antiquated. We are quick to call someone fascist who exhibits fascist characteristics. Oftentimes, as is seen in my case study analysis, they merely exist within the radical right or are fascist pretenders. Those who live and participate in democratic societies have a knee-jerk reaction when seeing these pretenders, excitedly and incorrectly, characterizing them as fascists. It seems the wounds inflicted by the original fascists

have not yet fully healed. However, we cannot liberally throw this term around at any far-right party or movement, lest we forget what fascism truly is.

Fascist parties and movements, ones that fully embody the characteristics of classical fascism, still exist within Europe today. One such part is the National Radical Camp in Poland. The National Radical Camp was originally founded in 1934 as an ultranationalist, antisemitic, and anti-communist party. The party today was reincarnated in 1993 and considers itself an ideological descendant of the original (The Guardian). This party has traditionally been a paramilitary and street fighting organization, but it has participated in elections under the National Movement Coalition. The party has enjoyed little electoral success yet has, on many occasions, drawn crowds of over 200,000 to their marches (dream deferred). The United Nations Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination considers the National Radical Camp a fascist party that promotes racial and national hatred and has called on Poland to enforce a constitutional ban on the party and similar groups (Poland In).

Many parties like the National Radical Camp exist throughout Europe. Most of these parties, however, do not achieve enough popular support to have electoral success. Radical right parties recognize this and have adopted a softer electoral periphery to enter mainstream politics. Fascism, as it existed in the interwar period, simply does not have an active base large enough to translate into electoral success (International Socialism). Thus, major parties that may have once been fascist have adapted to the contemporary political climate, changing their core beliefs and rhetoric to acquire more votes.

The recent accommodation of radical right into mainstream politics has fundamentally changed the political system. Rising support for the radical right has led the center-right and center-left to adapt their positions on certain issues, such as immigration and integration. These

adapted stances often mirror those that were initially held by the radical right. This is known as the “contagion effect,” where mainstream parties react to the threat of the radical right by adopting their positions (Wagner and Meyer 87). This strategy is used “...to contest the ownership of the immigration issue by the radical right and thereby to reduce their policy-based appeal” (Wagner and Meyer 87). The adoption of radical right positions is done to “...maximise their vote share and close down the issue space occupied by the radical right” (Wagner and Meyer 87).

An example of this strategy is seen in the recent actions of current French president Emmanuel Macron. The French government announced in February 2021 that it would launch an investigation into academic research that supposedly feeds “Islamist-leftist” tendencies that “corrupt society” (The New York Times). This attack on academic freedoms is in direct response to the burgeoning threat that Marine Le Pen poses in the upcoming presidential election. Le Pen was Macron’s main rival in the last election, and recent polls show that his lead is shrinking. Macron has adopted much of Le Pen’s xenophobic rhetoric in recent months, cracking down on “certain social science theories entirely imported from the United States” that would threaten France. Macron’s shift to the right is an attempt to draw support from Le Pen, who will likely be his main challenger in next year’s election (The New York Times).

The radical right has also changed the political system through its emphasis on certain issues. Typically, mainstream parties tend to focus more on economic issues, whereas the radical right has focused on liberal-authoritarian topics, such as immigration. The radical right’s emphasis on liberal-authoritarian topics leaves mainstream parties two options: either they ignore these issues and, in turn, ignore the radical right, or they adopt stances on these issues and address them, therefore indirectly including the radical right into mainstream politics. According

to Markus Wagner and Thomas M Meyer, mainstream parties have chosen the latter strategy.

They state:

‘Radical right parties may have been successful in their strategy of making immigration and related topics more important to political debate. By acting as such ‘issue entrepreneurs’, radical right parties change the issue content of party competition and therefore become more mainstream, less unusual competitors’ (88).

Although the radical right may have trouble entering mainstream politics directly through electoral means, they can affect the political landscape ideologically and create an environment that no longer sees them as extreme outsiders. The table below from Wagner and Meyer shows in detail how countries in Western Europe have accommodated for the radical right. 40 of 53 mainstream parties have shifted to the right on liberal-authoritarian issues, which dominates 10 of the 17 listed countries. Parties in Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, and Sweden reacted differently, and only in Ireland and Portugal were the changes of mainstream parties not to the right (Wagner and Meyer 93).

Table 1. Accommodation and Moderation Across Countries.

	H1a: Positional accommodation by mainstream parties		H1b: Positional moderation of radical right parties		H2a: Salience accommodation of mainstream parties				H2b: Salience moderation of radical right parties			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Liberal-authoritarian issues		Economic issues		Liberal-authoritarian issues		Economic issues	
Austria	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	2	1	1	2	0
Belgium	5	0	0	2	2	3	0	5	0	2	0	2
Denmark	4	0	1	1	4	0	0	4	0	2	0	2
Finland	3	0	0	1	0	3	0	3	0	1	0	1
France	3	0	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	1	1	0
Germany	3	0	NA		2	1	1	2	NA			
Great Britain	2	0	NA		2	0	2	0	NA			
Greece	1	1	NA		0	2	0	2	NA			
Ireland	0	3	NA		2	1	2	1	NA			
Italy	3	3	0	2	3	3	3	3	1	1	2	0
Luxembourg	2	1	NA		2	1	0	3	NA			
Netherlands	4	0	1	1	4	0	2	2	1	1	1	1
Norway	3	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	0	1	0	1
Portugal	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	1
Spain	1	1	NA		2	0	1	1	NA			
Sweden	1	2	NA		3	0	2	1	NA			
Switzerland	3	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	0	1	0	1
Total	40	13	4	11	31	22	15	38	3	12	6	9

Cell entries show the number of parties where time trends are in line with the hypothesis ('yes') or not ('no'). Estimates based on bivariate regression models for individual parties assuming a linear time trend. Note that for several countries, there is no radical right party where we have data for at least two elections (NA). Data from Volkens et al. (2015); for coding scheme, see footnotes 7 and 8. Full list of parties in Appendix 1.

Wagner and Meyer (94)

With the radical right threatening the very institutions of democracy, much of Europe is unsure how to address the inclusion of such parties. Democracy calls for a voice for all people, but if certain people seek to undermine democracy, how should they be treated? Germany's domestic intelligence agency has recently taken this matter into its own hands by placing the far-right Alternative for Germany under surveillance for extremism. The agency views the party as a potential threat to Germany's democracy, and no party has received such scrutiny in all of Germany's postwar history (The New York Times).

Germany, after all, is familiar with its own history, and it is no surprise that they would take these measures to ensure another Nazi party doesn't come to power, even at the expense of democracy. Their fears are warranted; one only needs to look at how Fidesz transformed Hungary's government to become wary of radical right parties. The best way to combat the radical right is to subdue them within democratic institutions. It is against democracy's very nature to ignore its citizens' voices, even if they are considered extreme. A party that obeys the rules of democracy should not be barred from democratic participation. Should such a party gain power, it is up to the government and the system of checks and balances within it to control it. Therefore, countries in Western Europe are better equipped to defend their democracies because their institutions are strong and long-established. Eastern Europe, however, contains many young democracies with weak institutions, most of which are flawed or have succumbed to authoritarian rule.

Democracy in Europe is currently in more peril than it has been in decades. Democracy in Eastern Europe is significantly worse off compared to the West. The Economist's 2020 Democracy Index states that not one "full" democracy exists within Eastern Europe. The average regional score of Eastern Europe dropped from 5.42 in 2019 to 5.36 in 2020. This is especially alarming considering the region's score was 5.76 in 2006 when the index was first published. Eastern Europe's democratic descent in recent years "...indicates the fragility of democracy in times of crisis and the willingness of governments to sacrifice civil liberties and exercise unchecked authority in an emergency situation" (The Economist). The region's poorly functioning institutions and weak political culture are persistent issues, with its average political culture score of 4.67 being the worst of any region. This indicative of Eastern Europe's current attitudes towards democracy, as many have a "deep democratic malaise and popular

disenchantment with the political status quo in the region,” coupled with “increasing support for military rule and strongman leaders” (The Economist). The table below provides a breakdown of Eastern Europe’s democracy by country.

Eastern Europe 2020

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Estonia	7.84	27=	1	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Czech Republic	7.67	31	2	9.58	6.07	6.67	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Slovenia	7.54	35	3	9.58	6.43	7.22	6.25	8.24	Flawed democracy
Latvia	7.24	38	4	9.58	6.07	6.67	5.63	8.24	Flawed democracy
Lithuania	7.13	42=	5	9.58	6.07	5.56	5.63	8.82	Flawed democracy
Slovakia	6.97	47	6	9.58	6.43	5.56	5.63	7.65	Flawed democracy
Poland	6.85	50	7	9.17	5.71	6.67	5.63	7.06	Flawed democracy
Bulgaria	6.71	52	8	9.17	5.71	7.22	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Hungary	6.56	55=	9	8.33	6.43	5.00	6.25	6.76	Flawed democracy
Croatia	6.50	59=	10	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Romania	6.40	62	11	9.17	5.36	6.67	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Serbia	6.22	66	12	8.25	5.36	6.67	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
Albania	6.08	71	13	7.00	5.36	4.44	6.25	7.35	Flawed democracy
North Macedonia	5.89	78	14	7.42	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.06	Hybrid regime
Ukraine	5.81	79	15	8.25	2.71	7.22	5.00	5.88	Hybrid regime
Moldova	5.78	80	16	7.00	4.64	6.11	4.38	6.76	Hybrid regime
Montenegro	5.77	81	17	7.42	5.71	6.11	3.13	6.47	Hybrid regime
Armenia	5.35	89	18	7.50	5.00	6.11	3.13	5.00	Hybrid regime
Georgia	5.31	91	19	7.83	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.29	Hybrid regime
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4.84	101	20	7.00	2.93	5.56	3.13	5.59	Hybrid regime
Kyrgyz Republic	4.21	107	21	4.75	2.93	5.56	3.13	4.71	Hybrid regime
Russia	3.31	124	22	2.17	2.14	5.00	3.13	4.12	Authoritarian
Kazakhstan	3.14	128	23	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Azerbaijan	2.68	146	24	0.50	2.86	3.33	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Belarus	2.59	148	25	0.00	2.00	3.89	5.00	2.06	Authoritarian
Uzbekistan	2.12	155	26	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Tajikistan	1.94	159	27	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	1.72	162	28	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.59	Authoritarian

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Western Europe, alternatively, has the highest regional score in the world. However, the region’s long-established democracies harbor strong institutions even though they are trending downwards on the democracy index. The region’s average score declined from 8.35 in 2019 to 8.29 in 2020, with most of this due to a decrease in civil liberties and the functioning of government. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a weakening trust in government, with citizens doubting its ability to handle such situations. This distrust, coupled with the overall

trend of disillusionment in democratic institutions, explains the recent downturn in Western Europe's democracies (The Economist). Nevertheless, Western Europe, especially the Scandinavian countries, remains the best region for democracy. The table below illustrates each individual country's score.

Western Europe 2020

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Norway	9.81	1	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Iceland	9.37	2	2	10.00	8.57	8.89	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Sweden	9.26	3	3	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.12	Full democracy
Finland	9.20	6	4	10.00	8.93	8.89	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Denmark	9.15	7	5	10.00	8.93	8.33	9.38	9.12	Full democracy
Ireland	9.05	8	6	10.00	7.86	8.33	9.38	9.71	Full democracy
Netherlands	8.96	9=	7	9.58	9.29	8.33	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Switzerland	8.83	12	8	9.58	8.57	7.78	9.38	8.82	Full democracy
Luxembourg	8.68	13	9	10.00	8.57	6.67	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Germany	8.67	14	10	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
United Kingdom	8.54	16	11	10.00	7.50	8.89	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
Austria	8.16	18=	12	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	8.53	Full democracy
Spain	8.12	22	13	9.58	7.14	7.22	8.13	8.53	Full democracy
France	7.99	24	14	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Portugal	7.90	26	15	9.58	7.50	6.11	7.50	8.82	Flawed democracy
Italy	7.74	29	16	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	7.94	Flawed democracy
Malta	7.68	30	17	9.17	6.79	6.11	8.13	8.24	Flawed democracy
Cyprus	7.56	34	18	9.17	5.36	7.22	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Belgium	7.51	36	19	9.58	7.86	5.00	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Greece	7.39	37	20	9.58	5.21	6.11	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Turkey	4.48	104	21	3.50	5.36	5.56	5.63	2.35	Hybrid regime

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

Overall, Europe's democracy is in a state of decline. Spurred on by rising Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, economic decline, and widespread distrust in government, radical right parties have acquired significant power and support across the continent. The defeat of Donald Trump in the 2020 American presidential election is promising for the future of European democracy. In many cases, especially in the ones examined in this paper, the radical right is poised to achieve unprecedented amounts of power. The study of these movements is imperative

to understand the nature of this new mold of conservatism in Europe and its followers. European democracy is currently at a crossroads, and although the future seems grim, it is unknown whether it will choose those who would protect it or those who would destroy it.

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