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# SHIFTING TIDES: RADICAL-RIGHT POPULISM AND IMMIGRATION POLICY IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

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By Martin A. Schain

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August 2018

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## Executive Summary

In recent electoral cycles, a wave of support for populist radical-right policies, particularly in the immigration arena, has reshaped the political landscape in Europe and the United States. These policies vary from country to country, but generally share several common threads: a sense of exclusive nationalism, belief that national identity is under threat from foreign cultures, desire to sharply cut immigration, and distrust of elites. And although candidates who espouse such positions have achieved only limited electoral success—with notable exceptions that include the United States in 2016 and Italy in 2018—this ideology has had an unduly large influence on the political agendas and priorities of mainstream parties. While it is too soon to tell when, or if, the current wave of radical-right populism will lose steam, it is a crucial moment to examine the broader societal drivers underpinning its success and how it is shaping immigration policymaking and institutions.

The United States is unique compared to most European countries in that it does not have a prominent radical-right party; rather, strains of this ideology as it relates to border and immigration policy have at various points in recent history flared up in corners of the Republican Party. By contrast, the current iteration of anti-immigrant, radical-right populism in Europe has existed and endured for decades, with varying degrees of success. Despite ebbs and flows in popularity, several discernible trends have created fertile ground for its recent electoral breakthroughs. Most significantly, economic and social changes—such as the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and of the mobilizing capacity of trade unions, and the growth of secular over Christian religious identities—have undermined support from traditional electoral bases on both the left and the right, and made that support more conditional on particular issues.

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At the same time, new issues have emerged on the political agenda as a result of changing patterns of immigration, growing ethnic and religious diversity, and concerns about how well immigrants (and especially Muslim immigrants) are integrating into Western societies. Even in the United States, where the public has long viewed immigration and growing diversity more positively, this confidence has been shaken by border-security challenges (such as the surge in unaccompanied child migration at the southern U.S. border that began in 2014) and a series of high-profile terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States perpetrated by people with immigration backgrounds. Ultimately, these long-term trends and new issues have loosened the traditional connection between voters and established parties and created a pool of alienated voters for radical-right candidates to court.

As largely single-issue parties in much of Europe, the impact of the populist radical right on immigration policymaking, until now, has been limited and mostly indirect. Rather than directly shaping policy, their most significant impact has been on the party system itself and on the political agenda. In response to the electoral pressure exerted by the successes of populist radical-right politicians, center-right parties have tended either to co-opt some of the issues on the radical-right agenda to regain lost votes or to isolate their challengers by cooperating only with other established parties (or, as in France and the Netherlands, to do both). As a result of the first strategy, the policy priorities of parties across the political spectrum have narrowed considerably in recent elections such that the radical right no longer “owns” issues such as immigration, Islamophobia, security, and Euroskepticism.



While its power over the political agenda has not always translated into significant parliamentary power—particularly in first-past-the-post electoral systems—radical-right populism has had other forms of influence. Countries with proportional representation have given more seats to radical-right parties, and in Austria, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland they have joined governing coalitions. Yet even in these cases, their membership in a governing coalition has not always allowed them direct influence over immigration policy. Populist radical-right parties have proven their ability to win votes but are generally less effective at governing: while they can get some of their priorities onto the political agenda, they have had limited impact on the development of public policy. Indeed, it is striking that the United States—a country without a dedicated populist radical-right party—has under the Trump administration seen the implementation of immigration policies more strongly inspired by this ideology than many enacted in Europe. More fundamentally, the popularity among voters of populist radical-right policies has placed pressure on established political elites, who are increasingly eager to prove their credibility as stewards of the public interest, sometimes through referenda (such as on Brexit in the United Kingdom or a ban on the construction of minarets in Switzerland), and whose reduced electoral power leaves them more likely to make concessions.

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Despite exerting influence over the political system and policy agendas of mainstream parties, there are two key dynamics that limit radical-right populism’s prospects for future growth. First, where populist radical-right parties exist, efforts to increase their electoral support are often linked to “de-demonization” or deradicalization strategies (e.g., attempts to disassociate the party from extreme or racist ideology), which can create internal divisions and lead to party splits. Between 2015 and 2017, France’s National Front (FN) attempted to break its longstanding links to Vichy France and anti-Semitism in order to expand electoral support. However, even though the party leader, Marine Le Pen, gained 34 percent of the vote in the second round of the 2017 presidential election—a record for the party—this deradicalization process was not extensive enough to create a winning coalition of voters, or to break down an intense wall of electoral opposition.

The second limitation to future growth is that, even where candidates who espouse populist radical-right policies have been electorally successful, participation in government tends to diminish, not increase, their electoral support. Radical-right movements and parties often suffers from weak internal cohesion that limits their ability to advance their agenda, even as part of a governing coalition, and can lead to a loss of electoral support and organizational splits. For example, Austria’s Freedom Party (FPÖ) was invited to form a coalition government with its conservative rivals following a major electoral victory in 1999, but it lost support while in office and performed poorly in the next election, then split in 2005. Back in opposition, the FPÖ adopted its traditional, more radical policy positions and obtained the third-largest share of votes in the 2017 legislative elections and formed a government with the conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP).

Looking ahead, it is likely that concerns about immigration and the challenges of integration will persist and continue to drive support for populist radical-right policies. Unless established parties target the underlying drivers of this support, instead of adopting elements of these policies or attempting to isolate the politicians who propose them, there is a risk that progressively more restrictive immigration and integration policies may ultimately prove to be counterproductive. Among the strategies established parties have adopted to counter this challenge are:

- **Creating a coalition.** Where multiple parties must form a coalition to govern, as in many European countries, committing to exclude populist radical-right parties can send a clear message



that their ideas are not welcome or endorsed within the political mainstream. However, including them in government recognizes the importance of their electoral following and, counterintuitively, may weaken the parties if they are unable to respond to the challenges of governance, or if their quest for increased power leads to party splits. At the same time, established parties may risk losing the support of their own base by cooperating with a potentially volatile party.

- ***Immigration and political mobilization.*** The proportion of citizens with an immigrant background is likely to increase amid ongoing immigration and demographic shifts. Yet established parties, particularly in Europe, underutilize efforts to reach out to voters and candidates with an immigration background. Politically mobilizing these communities could improve their participation and visibility in decision-making institutions, and create more incentives for political parties to address their concerns. However, this strategy may reap rewards only in the long term since it is generally only in densely populated urban areas that such voters are numerous enough to be major political actors.
- ***A whole-of-society approach.*** Addressing public skepticism about immigration requires fully engaging citizens' concerns across policy areas, while avoiding the trap of thinking that immigration, in and of itself, is the problem, as opposed to one among many drivers of support for the populist radical right. Notably, governments should look for ways to rebuild trust in political institutions, such as through new decision-making structures that can amplify citizens' voices in a political world perceived to be dominated by elites. For example, social media and the internet open new opportunities to communicate directly with voters, and to empower citizens to comment on important policies and legislation.
- ***Rebuilding economic confidence.*** Support for populist radical-right policies is strongly related to a lack of faith in the economy. Governments should think creatively about how best to serve the constituents who feel they have lost out to globalization and modern economic transitions, with the aim of boosting economic confidence and resilience. Such efforts may entail empowering trade unions, providing unemployment and retraining support, and committing to reduce austerity.

The recent support for radical-right populism is not a temporary political phenomenon. Rather, it is a manifestation of decades of rapid and intense societal change, and political systems that appear increasingly out of touch and ineffective in addressing the public's genuine concerns. Established political actors must think critically about how their own actions might stimulate support for populist radical-right policies, and consider the long-term but overdue policy shifts that can address the factors spurring this support. Reactive, crowd-pleasing changes to political agendas and policies may serve to keep established political leaders at the helm, but where this is the case, it will be radical-right populism that charts the course.

## I. Introduction

During the past two years, as citizens across Europe and the United States cast their votes in national and regional elections, there was a sense that a wave of support for populist radical-right parties and policies would tip populists into power. Until recently, candidates who espoused such policies were seen as part of temporarily destabilizing protest movements, vocalizing the concerns of a marginalized and volatile group of the electorate without posing a broader threat to the political system. However, as these actors have become established fixtures across the political landscape, albeit with varied degrees of electoral success, the gaps between populist radical-right agendas and those of more mainstream political players have been narrowing, particularly on the issue of immigration. While it is too early to tell whether the current wave of radical-right populism will dissipate or become the new normal, it is clear that



political systems are being transformed. In either case, it is crucial to understand how, and under what conditions, radical-right populism influences immigration policymaking and institutions.

The first half of this report examines the societal drivers and political dynamics that have contributed to the electoral breakthrough of politicians who run on a radical-right populist platform. It then looks at the impact of this ideology on politics and immigration policymaking, before considering its prospects for future impact and growth. The report concludes with an assessment of possible responses and policy choices that may prevent reactive immigration policymaking from becoming the norm.

## II. What Drives Support for Radical-Right Populism?

The current success and influence of radical-right populism is a function of a diverse range of complex and interconnected societal drivers. The factors can vary from country to country, but generally produce political narratives with several common elements: a sense of exclusive nationalism, belief that national identity is under threat from foreign cultures, desire to sharply cut immigration, and distrust of elites. Candidates who champion such views have gained support and legitimacy as serious (and sometimes successful) contenders in national and regional elections across Europe and the United States, though their popularity has ebbed and flowed in the last several decades. There are a number of discernible trends that have created fertile ground for their electoral breakthroughs, including the most recent wave since 2016.

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While the popularity of populist radical-right policies in Europe and the United States can be loosely traced to major shifts in immigration patterns, this relationship is complex and intertwined with other socioeconomic, geopolitical, and historical factors. In Europe, by the late 1960s, the balance of labor migration into Northern Europe shifted decidedly away from southern Europeans—mostly from Italy, Portugal, and Spain—and towards migrants from former colonies and beyond. However, with the exception of the United Kingdom, which moved to reduce immigration from Commonwealth countries after 1962, the political question of immigration remained relatively marginal, as did the parties of the radical right. Until the mid-1980s (or later), support for radical-right parties in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland averaged about 5 percent in elections.<sup>1</sup>

Radical-right populism evolved differently in the United States. While the United States lacks a fascist, antiregime tradition, it does have a long history of racist and anti-Semitic populism that has influenced the major political parties in different ways. The first and most electorally important anti-immigrant political party in the West was the American (“Know Nothing”) Party. It was largely an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic reaction to the surge of Irish immigration to the United States after 1840 and was

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<sup>1</sup> See Pippa Norris, *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.





powerfully entrenched in the northeast between 1850 and the Civil War (1861–65).<sup>2</sup> By the turn of the century, the immigration policy debate in the United States had come to focus on eugenics and racial purity. This informed the politics of both major parties, culminating in immigration legislation that was more exclusionary than that of any other Western country.<sup>3</sup> By the 1950s, however, radical-right populism in the United States was far more focused on the threats of Communism than immigration.<sup>4</sup>

What then has been driving the (re-)emergence of radical-right populism during the past 50 years? The subsections that follow examine some of the key factors, as well as how influential these trends have been in reshaping the political context and immigration policymaking in Europe and the United States.

## A. Economic Instability

A key driver of support for populist radical-right policies is economic instability, and the challenges of responding to this in a globalized economy. After almost 30 years of postwar economic growth and low unemployment through the early 1970s, economies in Europe slowed down after 1973.<sup>5</sup> The decline in growth resulted in rapidly rising unemployment and corresponded to a labor-market shift from manufacturing industries to service sectors.<sup>6</sup>

Many countries throughout Europe responded to the economic crisis of the 1970s by suspending labor immigration. But European governments, which were increasingly dependent on intra-European and global trade to sustain growth, found they had limited policy options to respond to the economic slowdown. The socialist government of François Mitterrand in France, for example, very quickly discovered that its spending on nationalization and expanded welfare programs, financed by monetary and fiscal policies, was limited by its dependence on trade and monetary stability.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the decline of traditional industries and the movement towards economic interdependence also reduced the membership and power of trade union organizations and their ability to negotiate effectively.

Likewise, during the economic crisis of 2008, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain all found that their integration into the European Union both slowed and defined their economic recovery. It also accentuated their deep dependence on other Member States and the European Union.<sup>8</sup> The asymmetric impact of the crisis, at both the national and subnational levels, reflected a variety of factors, such as the valuation of the housing market and construction industry, export dependency, and exposure of the financial sector to risky assets.<sup>9</sup> Despite the nuanced range of factors that exacerbated the crisis,

2 See Martin A. Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States: A Comparative Study*, 2nd edition (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012), Chapter 10.

3 One of the most significant examples is the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act*, which was enacted amid growing resentment towards Chinese laborers and enclaves. The law originally suspended immigration from China for ten years and was later extended indefinitely until its eventual repeal in 1943. The anti-Chinese legislation was fueled by nativist arguments that Chinese workers undercut wages, in addition to racist arguments that Chinese immigration would undermine the integrity of the United States' racial composition. See U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Historian, "Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts," accessed October 2, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/chinese-immigration>.

4 See Seymour Martin Lipset, *The Social Bases of Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1960).

5 Jean Fourestié, *Les Trente Glorieuses* (Paris: Fayard, 1979).

6 Although some manufacturing industries remained viable in terms of production, those that survived after the 1970s did so with reduced labor. See Barry Eichengreen, *The European Economy since 1945: Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond* (Princeton and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also Todd M. Godbout, "Employment Change and Sectoral Distribution in Ten Countries, 1970–90," *Monthly Labor Review* 116, no. 10 (1993): 8–10.

7 See Pepper D. Culpepper, "Capitalism, Coordination, and Economic Change: The French Political Economy since 1985," in *Changing France: The Politics That Markets Make*, eds. Pepper D. Culpepper, Peter A. Hall, and Bruno Palier (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006), 29–49.

8 Peter Hall, "Varieties of Capitalism in Light of the Euro Crisis," *Journal of European Public Policy* 25, no. 1 (2017): 7–30.

9 European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, *Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses* (Brussels: European Commission, 2009), [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/pages/publication15887\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/pages/publication15887_en.pdf).



EU Member States—and particularly those in the eurozone, with fixed exchange rates and common monetary policies—had a limited menu of fiscal, monetary, and budgetary policy response options.<sup>10</sup>

European unity has always had a mixed reception among European voters, for whom the costs and benefits have never been equally distributed.<sup>11</sup> For those engaged in business and trade, and for young people who freely cross European borders to travel and study, support for the European Union has long been strong. However, for workers in industry and services who associate Europe with increased competition and weaker job security, and for those who see free movement as a challenge to identity, opposition to the European project has grown. Anxiety has also grown among voters for whom “Europe” has come to mean an imposition of austerity and a loss of control over tools, such as monetary policy, that could ease the pain of the economic crisis. This reaction has been accentuated by the tendency of governments and established political parties to evade responsibility for difficult fiscal and economic decisions by blaming “Europe.”

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Politicians who champion populist radical-right policies have benefited from public disillusionment on both sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, they have focused on dissatisfaction with EU regulations and national governments’ loss of control. Although their counterparts in the United States cannot blame the European Union, they frequently use parallel arguments of a loss of control caused by globalization and the unwillingness of Washington to put “America first” and protect U.S. workers by curbing free trade and enforcing the border. The United States’ recovery from the 2008 economic crisis was relatively quick, but as in Europe, it was not uniform. Ten years later, national surveys reveal that nearly one-third of U.S. respondents are still feeling the effects of economic loss.<sup>12</sup> With national projections telling a story of recovery, buoyed by growth concentrated in the most productive regions, those at the margins feel left behind and forgotten.

## **B. Immigration and the Diversity Dilemma**

Another driver of support for radical-right populism is anxiety about immigrant integration and the pace of social change as religious and ethnic diversity grows. By the 1980s, integration and social

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10 Paul Krugman, “Europe’s Many Economic Disasters,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/07/03/opinion/paul-krugman-europes-many-disasters.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/03/opinion/paul-krugman-europes-many-disasters.html).

11 See European Commission, “Public Opinion in the European Union, National Report: United Kingdom” (Standard Eurobarometer 84, European Commission, Brussels, December 2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2098>; European Commission, “Public Opinion in the European Union” (Standard Eurobarometer 85, European Commission, Brussels, May 2016), <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2130>; European Commission, “Public Opinion in the European Union: First Results” (Standard Eurobarometer 87, European Commission, Brussels, May 2017), <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2142>.

12 Country Financial Security Index, “Ten Years after Financial Crisis, Nearly One-in-Three Americans Still Feeling the Sting: New Study Shows Women, African Americans and Low-Income Segments Most Affected,” updated July 13, 2017, [www.countryfinancial.com/en/about-us/newsroom/year2017/Americans-still-feeling-sting-of-financial-crisis.html](http://www.countryfinancial.com/en/about-us/newsroom/year2017/Americans-still-feeling-sting-of-financial-crisis.html).



unrest were becoming salient political issues in many countries.<sup>13</sup> In the United Kingdom, concerns over integration appeared on the political agenda even earlier. In a sharp turn from its postwar open-door policy, the *Commonwealth Immigrants Acts* of the 1960s severely restricted entry from non-White, newly independent Commonwealth countries.<sup>14</sup> These restrictions had two unintended consequences. First, they encouraged a spike in arrivals to “beat the ban.” Second, as labor immigration became more restricted (as in much of Europe), family reunification became a primary entry channel.<sup>15</sup> These factors ultimately transformed the profile of the immigrant population from primarily male laborers to mostly families.<sup>16</sup> Although the entry of non-EU immigrants either fell or remained stable through the 1970s (before beginning to rise again in the late 1980s), the proportion of the UK population from families with an immigrant background continued to grow.<sup>17</sup> One important result of this new pattern of settlement is the growing religious and ethnic diversity seen both in the United Kingdom and in many other European countries.

As Europe moved towards greater restrictiveness, national immigration policy in the United States became decidedly more open, at least towards countries whose nationals’ entry had been severely restricted under prior legislation. *The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965* radically changed the criteria for entry into the United States and raised the ceiling to almost 300,000 a year, with priority given to family members of U.S. citizens and legal residents.<sup>18</sup> This ceiling continued to rise to almost 1 million a year over the next 25 years, even as the unemployment rate rose during the economic crisis of the 1970s.

For particular groups, however, the *Immigration and Nationality Act* was more restrictive. Migration from Western and Northern Europe, which had previously been heavily favored, lost its advantages, and for the first time, U.S. immigration legislation applied the same limits on entry for immigrants from the Western Hemisphere (countries in the Americas) as it applied to those from the rest of the world. At the same time, the U.S. Congress scrapped the 1942 Bracero Program that had enabled circular migration for more than 4 million temporary agricultural workers from Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

These developments had many unanticipated results. First, as free movement across the southern border became more restricted, more migrants from Mexico and Central America decided to settle permanently, and both legal and illegal immigration rose.<sup>20</sup> Another outcome was a surge of immigration from Asia. By the 1980s, more than one-third of U.S. immigration was from Asia, compared with 12 percent when the *Immigration and Nationality Act* was passed.<sup>21</sup> According to national opinion polls since 1965, these shifts coincided with a steady increase in the share of Americans who want to see immigration levels decrease—peaking at 65 percent of respondents in 1996 before falling sharply. Since 2002, attitudes have generally

13 See Schain, *The Politics of Immigration*, 97 and 156. Salience is based on the priority that voters gave to these issues in exit polls conducted by Sofres between 1984 and 1997 in France; and MORI issue surveys between 1974 and 2010.

14 See Government of the United Kingdom, *Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962*, 10 and 11 Eliz. 2 Ch. 21.

15 Court orders made family reunification more difficult to restrict. See Leila Kavar, *Contesting Immigration Policy in Court: Legal Activism and Its Radiating Effects in the United States and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 64–76.

16 Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Penguin, 2017).

17 *Ibid.*, 48–49, 100–01.

18 Scholars have noted that the bias towards family migration resulted in a multiplication effect of “chain migration.” See John S. MacDonald and Leatrice D. MacDonald, “Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation, and Social Networks,” *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1964): 82–97.

19 Muzaffar Chishti, Faye Hipsman, and Isabel Ball, “Fifty Years on, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States,” *Migration Information Source*, October 15, 2015, [www.migrationpolicy.org/article/fifty-years-1965-immigration-and-nationality-act-continues-reshape-united-states](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/fifty-years-1965-immigration-and-nationality-act-continues-reshape-united-states).

20 Legal entries rose to more than 40 percent of total legal immigration by the 1980s.

21 See David Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 94–97.



reflected an even split between those in favor of either the present level or of increased immigration, and those in favor of decreased immigration.<sup>22</sup>

In both Europe and the United States, changing patterns of immigration resulted in growing ethnic and religious diversity, and mixed feelings about this change. In Europe, increased immigration from Muslim-majority countries and the growing visibility of Islamic cultural symbols in public life, such as women's religious dress and mosques with minarets, met with strong resistance in certain areas.<sup>23</sup> In the United States, the belief that increased cultural diversity makes the country a better place to live is held more strongly than in Europe—at 56 percent of U.S. survey respondents compared with 22 percent of those in Europe.<sup>24</sup> This more positive acceptance of religious and ethnic diversity had developed in the United States by the 1960s—even extending to minority religions and Asian immigrants who had been widely rejected as recently as the postwar period.<sup>25</sup>

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For political leaders in the United States, as well as for the general public, the core issue became illegal immigration, particularly after it began to accelerate after the 1980s.<sup>26</sup> Proposals to lower the ceiling for legal immigration put forth since the 1990s (and indeed by the president of the United States in 2017) have never been strongly supported either in public opinion or in Congress. Since the late 1990s, U.S. public opinion has overwhelmingly supported maintaining or even increasing current immigration ceilings, although a closer look at the data reveals sharp divisions along party lines.<sup>27</sup>

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- 22 Gallup's poll does not specify whether the immigration is legal or irregular, meaning respondents could be taking both into account. Notably, the number of Americans in favor of increased immigration rose from 8 percent in 2001 to 24 percent in 2017. See Justin McCarthy, "Overall U.S. Desire to Decrease Immigration Unchanged in 2017," Gallup News, June 27, 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/212846/overall-desire-decrease-immigration-unchanged-2017.aspx>.
- 23 For example, in 2009, 57.5 percent of voters in Switzerland voted in favor of a national ban on the construction of minarets. At the time, of the 150 mosques or prayer rooms in Switzerland, only four had minarets. See Nick Cumming-Bruce and Steven Erlanger, "Swiss Ban Building of Minarets on Mosques," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2009, [www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/world/europe/30swiss.html).
- 24 A majority of Americans (56 percent) agreed that an increase in the number of races, ethnic groups, and nationalities represented in the United States made the country a better place to live, compared with only 22 percent in the ten European countries surveyed. See Jacob Poushter, "Diversity Welcomed in Australia, U.S. Despite Uncertainty over Muslim Integration," Pew Research Center, February 6, 2017, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/06/diversity-welcomed-in-australia-u-s-despite-uncertainty-over-muslim-integration/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/06/diversity-welcomed-in-australia-u-s-despite-uncertainty-over-muslim-integration/).
- 25 This wider acceptance is visible using the proxy of intermarriage. See Wendy Wang, "Interracial Marriage: Who Is 'Marrying Out?'" Pew Research Center, June 12, 2015, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/12/interracial-marriage-who-is-marrying-out/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/12/interracial-marriage-who-is-marrying-out/).
- 26 In a 2006 study, only 4 percent of surveyed Americans believed that legal immigration was a bigger problem than illegal migration; 60 percent believed illegal migration was the bigger problem, and 22 percent thought they were equally as big. See Andrew Kohut et al., "America's Immigration Quandary," Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends, March 30, 2006, [www.pewhispanic.org/2006/03/30/americas-immigration-quandary/](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2006/03/30/americas-immigration-quandary/).
- 27 Indeed, other than a temporary decrease following the 9/11 terror attacks, there has been steady support for increased immigration since the 1990s. Each comprehensive immigration reform act that has passed the U.S. Senate (2006, 2011, and 2013) has modified the visa system to actually increase the ceiling on immigration entries. See Gallup News, "Immigration," accessed November 10, 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>.



### C. Migration, Security, and “Crisis”

Migration crises, and the chaos they engender, can also bolster support for populist radical-right and anti-immigration platforms. The electoral breakthroughs and success of European parties that campaign on such platforms long predate the recent migration crisis, but the pace and scale of arrivals in 2015 and 2016 fueled a radical-right discourse of borders being out of control and dangerous immigrants entering without proper vetting. Sweden and Austria originally accepted generous numbers of asylum seekers, but by 2017, as public services and housing supplies were overwhelmed, both countries sharply restricted additional applicants.<sup>28</sup> The success of the German far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) in September 2017 and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) a month later was directly related to a hardening of views by voters on both the right and the left in light of the refugee crisis.<sup>29</sup> In Austria, the largest parties on the right gained votes, while those on the left either lost votes (the Greens) or barely held their own (the Social Democrats). The FPÖ, which entered government for the first time in ten years, captured a number of key ministries, including the foreign ministry, the ministry of the interior, and the ministry of defense.<sup>30</sup>

The surges in Central American families and unaccompanied children crossing the southern U.S. border that began in 2014 have fueled a similar discourse that casts the immigration and asylum systems as ineffective. The apparent inability of government to manage borders effectively exacerbated some voters' concerns about the ability and willingness of established institutions and political leaders to respond to crises.<sup>31</sup> In Europe, the 2015–16 migration crisis not only strained migration-management and asylum institutions, it also posed a more existential challenge to European integration.

Feelings of insecurity linked to migration have been underpinned by a series of terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States. Very few of these attacks were perpetrated by asylum seekers, or by jihadists (13 out of 142 classified by Europol in 2016).<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, some high-profile attacks, such as the November 2015 attacks in Paris, were carried out by people with an immigration background, heightening concerns about integration and the vulnerability of some first- and second-generation immigrants to radicalization. The fear of future attacks remains high and is played upon by some politicians with populist radical-right views. The FN in France, for example, explicitly linked the Paris attacks to immigration (though most of the perpetrators were born in France or Belgium) and advocated for a moratorium on immigration and for France's withdrawal from the European Union and the Schengen area.<sup>33</sup>

### D. Politics and Voter Realignment

The economic and social changes cited above have had ramifications for politics, first by unmooring voters from their traditional party bases, then by adding new issues to the agenda. On both sides of the Atlantic,

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- 28 See Eurostat, “Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants by Citizenship, Age, and Sex. Monthly Data (Rounded) [migr\_asyappctzm],” updated 6 July 2018, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr\\_asyappctzm](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr_asyappctzm); Dan Bilefsky, “Sweden Toughens Rules for Refugees Seeking Asylum,” *The New York Times*, June 21, 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/06/22/world/europe/sweden-immigrant-restrictions.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/22/world/europe/sweden-immigrant-restrictions.html); Manasi Gopalakrishnan, “Austria Passes Tougher Asylum Law to Restrict Refugees,” *Deutsche Welle*, April 27, 2016, [www.dw.com/en/austria-passes-tougher-asylum-law-to-restrict-refugees/a-19218817](http://www.dw.com/en/austria-passes-tougher-asylum-law-to-restrict-refugees/a-19218817).
- 29 Jörg Michael Dostal, “The German Federal Election of 2017: How the Wedge Issue of Refugees and Migration Took the Shine off Chancellor Merkel and Transformed the Party System,” *The Political Quarterly*, 88, no. 4 (2017), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12445>.
- 30 See Melissa Eddy, “Austria's New Government: A Mix of Far Right, Pro-Europe and Youth,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/12/18/world/europe/austria-chancellor-kurz.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/18/world/europe/austria-chancellor-kurz.html).
- 31 See Randall Hansen and Demetrios G. Papademetriou, “Securing Borders: The Intended, Unintended, and Perverse Consequences,” in *Managing Borders in an Increasingly Borderless World*, eds. Randall Hansen and Demetrios G. Papademetriou (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013).
- 32 Europol, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017* (The Hague: Europol, 2017), [www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/tesat2017.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/tesat2017.pdf).
- 33 Lizzie Dearden, “French Elections: Marine Le Pen Vows to Suspend Immigration to ‘Protect France,’” *Independent*, April 18, 2017, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-elections-latest-marine-le-pen-immigration-suspend-protect-france-borders-front-national-fn-a7689326.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-elections-latest-marine-le-pen-immigration-suspend-protect-france-borders-front-national-fn-a7689326.html).



the bonds and commitments that tied voters to political parties had started to loosen considerably by the time of the economic crisis of the 1970s.

In Europe, the traditional strength of left-wing mainstream parties was eroded by the declining mobilization capacity of trade union movements, and by waning class consciousness among the diminishing number of blue-collar workers and the growing number of white-collar employees. However, even where communist, socialist, and labor parties remained electorally strong, their ties to their working-class base became less secure and more conditional on their policy agenda. The bonds that tied mainstream parties on the right (such as Christian democratic or Christian socialist parties) to their electorates also became weaker, undermined by the diminishing salience of Christian religious identities and by growing secularism throughout Europe. Even when voters continued to support these parties, their support was less intense, and, as on the left, more conditional. As early as the 1980s, surveys noted that voters' feelings of closeness to political parties were weak and diminishing in Europe.<sup>34</sup> These trends have tended to loosen the traditional connection between voters and established parties within the party system, and created a pool of alienated voters that populist radical-right politicians could court.

In the United States, the two-party system has remained entrenched, but the parties themselves have changed. An ongoing survey by the Pew Research Center has demonstrated a growing polarization of values between voters who identify with each of the major parties, with much less overlap in the political values of Republicans and Democrats today than in the past.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, trust in government institutions—as well as in public schools, media, and churches—has been in gradual decline over the last half century.<sup>36</sup> Spurred by the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent bank bailouts, disillusionment with institutions inspired high-profile protest movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, that took a critical stance against established political elites of both parties. Between 2007 and 2015, every major national poll revealed that less than 30 percent of Americans trusted the federal government to do what is right.<sup>37</sup> This distrust estranged voters from traditional party elites, creating room for fringe fiscal and socially conservative movements within the Republican Party (namely, the Tea Party and the closely linked Freedom Caucus). This in turn created a fertile platform for Donald Trump, whose unpolished remarks over Twitter and disdain for mainstream media, experts, and political elites resonated with a sizeable portion of the electorate.<sup>38</sup> These factors have also allowed the Trump administration to disparage the institutions that obstruct its priorities, such as the judiciary and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and to attack its critics under the banner of “fake news” and bias in the mainstream media.

### III. Electoral Breakthroughs and Establishment

Certain economic and social changes have underpinned the rising popularity and periodic electoral successes of candidates who run on populist radical-right platforms in Europe and the United States—but

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34 See European Commission, “Public Opinion in the European Community” (Standard Eurobarometer 24, European Commission, Brussels, December 1985), 43–50, [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb24/eb24\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb24/eb24_en.pdf).

35 Jocelyn Kiley, “In Polarized Era, Fewer Americans Hold a Mix of Conservative and Liberal Views,” Pew Research Center, October 23, 2017, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/23/in-polarized-era-fewer-americans-hold-a-mix-of-conservative-and-liberal-views/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/23/in-polarized-era-fewer-americans-hold-a-mix-of-conservative-and-liberal-views/).

36 Bill Bishop, “Americans Have Lost Faith in Institutions. That’s Not Because of Trump Or ‘Fake News,’” *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/03/03/americans-have-lost-faith-in-institutions-thats-not-because-of-trump-or-fake-news/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/03/03/americans-have-lost-faith-in-institutions-thats-not-because-of-trump-or-fake-news/).

37 Public trust oscillates over time, and in particular after major national events, such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the financial crisis. In the United States, public trust reached a post-WWII high of 77 percent in 1964. Trust varies according to party affiliation but differs little between demographic groups. See Pew Research Center, “Public Trust in Government: 1958–2017,” updated May 3, 2017, [www.people-press.org/2017/05/03/public-trust-in-government-1958-2017/](http://www.people-press.org/2017/05/03/public-trust-in-government-1958-2017/).

38 Uri Friedman, “Why Trump Is Thriving in an Age of Distrust,” *The Atlantic*, January 20, 2017, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/01/trump-edelman-trust-crisis/513350/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/01/trump-edelman-trust-crisis/513350/).



changes within political parties have been equally instrumental in garnering and cementing support. Over the past three decades, populist radical-right politicians have been uniquely able to cut across traditional electoral divides and mobilize new voters by appealing to concerns around the issue of immigration.

Research on the electoral breakthrough of several radical-right populist parties in Western Europe in the mid- to late 1980s generally credits two phenomena. First, a new wave of populist radical-right leaders were able to exploit the opportunities provided by a more volatile electorate. And, second, there were cultural changes as young people in Western societies who had come of age in the 1960s and 1970s held values that challenged the established system, and particularly the established left. Survey data indicate that voters were less attracted by the personalities of the sometimes charismatic radical-right leaders than by the issues, such as immigration and national identity.<sup>39</sup> But their shift in voting reflected the broader weakening of ties to established parties, related to the economic and social drivers described in the previous section, and the gaps between the rhetoric and achievements of mainstream political parties.

That populist radical-right politicians would champion restrictions on immigration was in no way predetermined. In Europe, the radical right has existed since the 1950s, but mostly as proponents of the biological racism and nationalism of prewar fascism or as opponents to the (sometimes fragile) democratic regimes that had been constructed in Western Europe after the Second World War.<sup>40</sup> Although there was massive immigration into Northern Europe throughout the postwar recovery period, immigration only formed part of radical-right policy agendas after the 1970s.

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*Survey data indicate that voters were less attracted by the personalities of the sometimes charismatic radical-right leaders than by the issues, such as immigration and national identity.*

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In many corners of Europe, concerns over immigration and integration resonated more strongly with voters than had previous radical-right agendas and paved the way for electoral success. The case of the FN in France is illustrative of how this change took place. Its electoral breakthrough occurred in a series of elections in the late 1980s, when the party shifted its focus towards immigration. This shift took place not during a growth or spike of non-European immigration to France, but when the French electorate was reacting to problems with the integration of second-generation immigrants, many of whom were or were becoming French citizens. Urban riots of people with an immigration background during the summer of 1981 (and periodically thereafter) were the most visible indication of growing ethnic tensions linked to integration. The politicization of immigration in France occurred, therefore, largely in the context of integration challenges, although the FN spoke more broadly about immigration and immigrants. It also focused on the fact that migrants were still entering France, when the rhetoric of official policy had been “zero immigration” for a decade or more.

Where politicians who espouse populist radical-right policies have built an electoral following, the initial shift in votes came primarily from previous supporters of established center-right parties and leaders.

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39 See Martin A. Schain, “The Extreme-Right and Immigration Policy-Making: Measuring Direct and Indirect Effects,” *West European Politics* 29, no. 2 (2006): 270–89.

40 Typically, political parties first gain attention not when they are formed, but when they achieve an electoral breakthrough that disrupts the expected distribution of votes within the party system. This electoral upset can be achieved in two ways: first, through conversion of voters who had previously voted for other political parties; and second, through the mobilization of new voters, including those who had previously abstained. If this breakthrough endures, it can result in an electoral realignment within the party system, in the context of a critical election or series of elections. See Pierre Martin, “Qui Vote Pour le Front National Français?” in *L’Extrême Droite en France et en Belgique*, eds. Pascal Delwit, Jean-Michel de Waele, and Andrea Rea (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1998), 153–60.



Then support came increasingly from young, often native-born working-class men and new voters. In Europe, these voters were disproportionately in sectors that were the “losers” in the emerging economy tied to European unification and the globalization of trade.<sup>41</sup> For example, within only three years of its founding, the AfD in Germany transformed itself from a “professors’ party,” with a Euroskeptic and national-conservative profile, into a party with strong links to an overwhelmingly male and working-class base.<sup>42</sup> In Austria, France, and the Netherlands, radical-right parties have attracted a higher percentage of blue- and white-collar workers in the private sector than either the socialists or the far left. Most such parties have also succeeded in bridging an age gap by attracting young male voters—a segment of the population that at one point was more likely to vote for the left.<sup>43</sup>

Surprisingly, there is not much evidence of any direct link between immigration and support for radical-right parties or policies; there is, however, considerable evidence that negative attitudes towards immigrants, even if few are present, are a strong predictor of how people vote.<sup>44</sup> Although it is unclear whether individuals’ attitudes towards immigration harden or soften as a result of party identification, or if particular political parties merely attract like-minded voters, attitudes towards immigration are an important predictor of party identification. In 1996, 61 percent of French survey respondents felt that there were “too many Arabs in France,” but among voters identified with parties of the left, the percentage who expressed this view was about half that among voters who identified with center-right parties (43 percent versus 80 percent, respectively).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, among voters of the left, the percentage opposing immigration declined as the proportion of immigrants in their communes went up, indicating greater acceptance with contact; while among voters on the center right, the high percentage of anti-immigrant sentiment did not vary with immigrant presence.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, a survey in the United States in 2016 found that 60 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning respondents expressed the belief that immigration should be decreased, compared with 20 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning respondents.<sup>47</sup>

There is also evidence that the differences in attitudes between voters on the left and right are related to two strategic political approaches to immigrants and political mobilization. The first approach, generally that of the right, seeks to mobilize voters against immigrants and frames immigration and immigrants as a challenge to national identity. This, of course, has been the approach of the radical-right parties in Europe, but it has also been that of other right and center-right parties in Austria, Italy, and sometimes France and the United Kingdom. Less frequently, parties on the left, such as the French Communist Party in the 1980s, have also used this mobilization strategy.

The second strategic approach, often used by socialist, communist, and labor parties (and the Democratic Party in the United States) sees immigrants as a political resource (i.e., as prospective voters) and focuses on mobilizing immigrants as a way to change the electoral balance in their favor. In some cases, the same party has used both approaches in different places (the U.S. Democratic Party) and at different times (the French Communist Party) in areas with a high concentration of immigrants.<sup>48</sup> In Europe, however,

41 Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

42 The Alternative for Germany (AfD) still retains a substantial minority of high-income earners; however, the share of supporters with high levels of education has decreased relative to support from voters with lower levels of education. The German Institute for Economic Research found that 69 percent of AfD supporters were men. See Martin Kroh and Karolina Fetz, *Das Profil der AfD-AnhängerInnen hat sich seit Gründung der Partei deutlich verändert* (Berlin: German Institute for Economic Research, 2016), [www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw\\_01.c.541584.de/16-34-1.pdf](http://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.541584.de/16-34-1.pdf).

43 See Kai Arzheimer, “Electoral Sociology—Who Votes for the Extreme Right and Why—and When?” in *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, ed. Cas Mudde (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 284–85.

44 See Geertje Lucassen and Marcel Lubbers, “Who Fears What? Explaining Far-Right-Wing Preference in Europe by Distinguishing Perceived Cultural and Economic Ethnic Threats,” *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 5 (2011): 547–74.

45 CSA survey 9662093, November 1996, in Schain, *The Politics of Immigration*, 118.

46 See *ibid.*, table 4.2, 115.

47 Frank Newport, “In U.S., Support for Decreasing Immigration Holds Steady,” Gallup News, August 24, 2016, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/194819/support-decreasing-immigration-holds-steady.aspx>.

48 Schain, *The Politics of Immigration*, 113–18, 184–85.





relatively few parliamentary constituencies have highly concentrated immigrant populations, and there have thus been only limited incentives, even for parties of the left, to pursue a strategy of immigrant mobilization. Fewer than 20 percent of parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom and France had high concentrations of immigrant populations in the early 2000s (defined at 10 percent or more), compared with 35 percent in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

Initially, the transfer of votes from established political actors to populist radical-right ones was frequently described by journalists and scholars as a protest vote—retaliation by a part of the electorate against established parties that had ignored their interests and concerns. However, this shift has proven to be remarkably durable. As is the case for more established political blocs, the radical-right vote has come to be comprised of a high percentage of loyalists, even among those young working-class voters typically considered the natural constituency of the left in Austria, France, and the Netherlands.<sup>50</sup> By the 1990s, radical-right parties were well established in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, France, Norway, and Switzerland (see Table 1). A decade later, these countries were joined by the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. By this time, the Italian National Alliance had evolved into a deradicalized, more conventional conservative party, but in 2018 the Northern League (now The League) captured the leadership of a coalition of the right with its best electoral showing since it was founded in 1991.

**Table 1. Most Successful Populist Radical-Right Parties in Western Europe, 1956–2018**

Country	Party	Year Founded	Year with Highest Vote Share	Vote Share (Parliamentary Election)	Formed a Government Coalition?
Austria	Freedom Party (FPÖ)	1956	2017	27%	Yes
Belgium	Vlaams Blok/ Vlaams Belang	1979/2004	2004	24%*	No
Denmark	Danish People's Party (DF)	1995	2015	21%	Yes, supported conservative coalition
France	National Front (FN)	1972	1997	15%	No
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AfD)	2013	2017	13%	No
Italy	National Alliance (AN)	1995	1996	16%	Yes, supported conservative coalition
	Northern League (LN)	1991	2018	17%	
The Netherlands	Party for Freedom (PVV)	2006	2010	15%	Yes
Norway	Progress Party (FrP)	1973	2009	23%	Yes
Switzerland	Swiss People's Party (SVP)	1971	2015	29%	Yes

\* Percentage of vote for the Flemish Parliament; the party only ran for seats in Flanders.

Sources: Cas Mudde, "Introduction to the Populist Radical Right," in *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, ed. Cas Mudde (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), Table 1, 7; updated by the author with recent results.

49 Ibid., 119, 185, 281. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that immigrants are overrepresented in densely populated urban areas in the European Union (57 percent of immigrants lived in urban areas compared with 38 percent of the native born). In the United Kingdom, Netherlands, and France, more than two-thirds of immigrants lived in densely populated areas. See OECD, *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015), [www.oecd.org/els/mig/Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration-2015.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration-2015.pdf).

50 See Pascal Perinneau, *Cette France de Gauche Qui Vote FN* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2017).



## IV. Gauging Influence over Immigration Policy and Policymaking

For all the attention given to the electoral breakthrough and establishment of populist radical-right parties in Western Europe, their political impact has been surprisingly limited (if nonetheless important).<sup>51</sup> Part of the reason for this is that although they have frequently attracted a high percentage of votes, reactions against them in public opinion and at the ballot box have been equally strong, effectively limiting their ability to either form a government or be included in governing coalitions. Nevertheless, these breakthroughs in Europe have had significant impacts on the parties themselves, the party system and the political agenda, and public policy.

Because the recent swell in support for populist radical-right immigration policies in the United States has occurred within the Republican Party at a moment when Republicans control the White House and both houses of Congress, its impact has been more direct and more profound.<sup>52</sup> Although the struggle for control is far from over, the U.S. party system has become increasingly polarized, and the political agenda has been shaped by both the policy priorities of the radical-right Tea Party/Freedom Caucus Republicans and those of President Trump with regard to both legal and illegal immigration.<sup>53</sup>

### A. Impact on the Party Itself

Electoral breakthrough generally enables a political party or party faction to organize a network of elected officials and activists on the basis of success and patronage. Organization, in turn, tends to stabilize electoral success through a growing capacity to mobilize voters around issues and personalities.

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*Organization and electoral success are mutually reinforcing, since elected officials are often more capable of attracting the resources necessary to organize.*

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Where a populist radical-right party, or strand within a larger party, has endured, this success is often due to a combination of the power of the issues raised, increased mobilization capacity, and the relative decline in the mobilization capacity of other actors. As the new group builds its organization, penetrates the political system with elected officials, and gains greater media exposure, its partisan and legislative impact should increase. Organization and electoral success are mutually reinforcing, since elected officials are often more capable of attracting the resources necessary to organize. In addition, greater electoral success frequently builds legitimacy and momentum in “conversions” from established parties or political blocs, both of candidates and of party workers. For example, the success of the FN in French local and regional elections after 1995 enabled it to benefit from state subsidies and patronage that helped it create

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51 For a good summary, see Michael Minkenberg, “The Radical Right and Anti-Immigrant Politics in Liberal Democracies since World War II: Evolution of a Political and Research Field” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 30–September 3, 2017), 20–21.

52 For a discussion of the effects of the Trump presidency on immigration policymaking and institutions, see Sarah Pierce and Andrew Selee, *Immigration under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year since the Election* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-under-trump-review-policy-shifts](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-under-trump-review-policy-shifts).

53 See Michael D. Shear and Julie Hirschfield Davis, “Stoking Fears, Trump Defied Bureaucracy to Advance Immigration Agenda,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/12/23/us/politics/trump-immigration.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/23/us/politics/trump-immigration.html).



a national network of party workers. It also attracted a record number of new candidates to run in its name.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, electoral breakthrough can sometimes undermine the strength of a party, party faction, or individual politician. For example, when the FPÖ entered government in Austria in 2000, this led to deep internal divisions that resulted in its split in 2005. Nevertheless, the impressive electoral success of the FPÖ in 2016–17 has given it another opportunity to build its organizational presence on a national level.

## **B. Impact on the Party System and Agenda Formation**

Even a short-lived breakthrough can have a significant impact on a party system and agenda formation if established politicians and parties—especially those that have lost the most support to populist radical-right competitors—readjust the way that they relate to one another and modify their agendas. Established groups typically employ two strategies to combat the electoral success of populist radical-right challengers. The first is to try to recapture the votes they have lost by co-opting at least part of the radical-right agenda. Discussions tend to focus on the new (immigration) issues that attracted the initial surge of voters. The second strategy is to isolate challengers by cooperating with other established parties or political factions. However, altering the issue agenda also alters the terms of engagement—in other words, in what manner and on which issues political actors attack or cooperate with one another—and, potentially, the electoral cleavages and divisions. In some cases (such as France and the Netherlands), the center right has tried both strategies. And in both Europe and the United States, the established right has faced a sharp challenge as the radical right has increasingly redefined the political “right” in terms of identity, as opposed to traditional neoliberal economics, limiting the scope of cooperation with others.

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*Altering the issue agenda also alters the terms of engagement ...  
and, potentially, the electoral cleavages and divisions.*

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The electoral establishment of the radical right has almost inevitably altered the political agenda for all parties. For example, in election after election, the key priorities of the FN—immigration and security—increased in importance for voters of other political parties as well. In 1984, after the FN first attracted 11 percent of the vote in European elections, what most clearly differentiated FN voters from all others was their prioritization of immigration issues. That year, only 3 percent of voters on the established right and 2 percent of those on the left cited “immigrants” as a priority issue in the European elections, compared with 26 percent of those voting for the FN.<sup>55</sup> By 1988, however, the importance of this issue, as well as “insecurity” (which was understood in terms of immigration) had come to rank alongside such issues as social inequality, and far higher than concerns about the environment, corruption, and the development of the European Union.<sup>56</sup> Only concerns about unemployment ranked higher.

Voters’ priority issues changed after the FN’s breakthrough, rather than before, and the change was rapid. In the years after 1988, a once-large gap in priorities progressively lessened. The issues of immigration and security became less significant as a way of differentiating FN voters from supporters of other political parties, but only because their prioritization had become so widespread.

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<sup>54</sup> See Schain, “The Extreme-Right and Immigration Policy-Making,” 280–82.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 277.



Over a 15-year period, the FN succeeded in realigning voting and prioritization patterns, as well as the relationships among parties in France. By attracting a large proportion of the working-class vote, it deeply wounded the French Communist Party, undermining its electoral success and ability to engage in coalition governments. The parties of the center right, fearful of losing a part of their electorate to the FN, were then effectively prevented from finding a consensus with the left on questions of immigration, despite efforts to do this in the late 1980s. By 1997, among parties on the political right, the FN was the most popular in 8 percent of the 577 constituencies and second most popular in 82 percent of constituencies, thus altering the balance of party forces within the borders of electoral districts.<sup>57</sup>

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*Even if the radical right is different in terms of degrees of intensity and perhaps rhetoric, they no longer “own” issues such as immigration, Islamophobia, security, and Euroskepticism.*

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The gap has shrunk, and continues to shrink, between the policy priorities of the radical right and those of almost every other political party in Europe.<sup>58</sup> The experience of the FN in France was not unique. Although neither the British National Front nor the UK Independence Party (UKIP) have ever achieved an electoral breakthrough under the first-past-the-post system,<sup>59</sup> their impact has been important in terms of shaping both the policy agenda and the organization of the UK political system.<sup>60</sup> UKIP has been better at mobilizing voters than winning elections in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, its ability to attract more than 4 million voters in the European elections in 2014, and then almost the same number in the parliamentary elections a year later, gained the attention of large numbers of Conservative (and Labour) backbenchers. This turnout was a strong factor in convincing the leadership of the Conservative Party to hold a referendum on the country’s membership in the European Union. Unsurprisingly, UKIP’s priorities of opposing free movement and restricting immigration became critical Brexit campaign issues.<sup>61</sup>

Yet even if the radical right is different in terms of degrees of intensity and perhaps rhetoric, they no longer “own” issues such as immigration, Islamophobia, security, and Euroskepticism. In the Netherlands, it was considered an important victory against the populist radical right when in 2017 the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) of Mark Rutte defeated the Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders. However, although Rutte’s rhetoric was softer than that of Wilders—who was found guilty of inciting hatred against Dutch Moroccans<sup>62</sup>—at times it bore a strong resemblance to the PVV’s restrictionist approach.<sup>63</sup> The leaders of both parties claimed to defend Dutch values and those of the Christian West against the threats of radical Islam and the secular left.<sup>64</sup>

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57 Ibid., 275.

58 See Cas Mudde, ed., *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 617–18.

59 The UK Independence Party (UKIP) won a single seat in parliament in the 2015 UK general election, though it had the third-largest vote share (12.6 percent). It lost this seat and suffered massive defeats at the local level in the 2017 elections.

60 Anthony Messina, “The Impacts of Post-WWII Migration to Britain: Policy Constraints, Political Opportunism and the Alteration of Representational Politics,” *The Review of Politics* 63, no. 2 (2001): 259–85. However, Cas Mudde has argued that radical-right parties have had little effect on party systems. See Cas Mudde, “Fighting the System? Populist Radical Right Parties and Party System Change,” *Party Politics* 20, no. 2 (2014): 217–26.

61 See Geoffrey Evans and Anand Menon, *Brexit and British Politics* (London: Wiley, 2017).

62 Gordon Darroch, “Geert Wilders Found Guilty of Inciting Discrimination,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 2016, [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/09/geert-wilders-found-guilty-in-hate-speech-trial-but-no-sentence-imposed](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/09/geert-wilders-found-guilty-in-hate-speech-trial-but-no-sentence-imposed).

63 Rutte’s public letter of January 23, 2017, which called on immigrants to “act normal or go away,” is an often cited example. See Tjitske Akkerman, *The Impact of Populist Radical-Right Parties on Immigration Policy Agendas: A Look at the Netherlands* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/populist-radical-right-parties-immigration-netherlands](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/populist-radical-right-parties-immigration-netherlands).

64 Cas Mudde, “‘Good’ Populism Beat ‘Bad’ in Dutch Election,” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/19/dutch-election-rutte-wilders-good-populism-bad-](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/19/dutch-election-rutte-wilders-good-populism-bad-).



On the other hand, the impact on the balance of forces within parliaments has been mixed and depends on how votes are translated into seats. In countries with first-past-the-post parliamentary systems, such as the United Kingdom and France, even impressive electoral showings of more than 10 percent of the vote have resulted in few seats—never more than eight out of 577 in France, and only one out of 650 in the United Kingdom. In Germany, with a modified system of proportional representation but a mandatory 5 percent threshold, the neo-nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) has had no representation in parliament. The AfD, however, became the first German radical-right party to achieve a national electoral breakthrough in the post-World War II era; with 13 percent of the vote in 2017, it gained 94 seats in the Bundestag.<sup>65</sup>

In countries with proportional representation systems, radical-right parties have on several occasions won 15 to 20 percent of the vote and entered parliament. One result has been that in Austria, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland, radical-right parties have formally joined government coalitions with conservative parties or have supported minority conservative governments.<sup>66</sup> As a result, these populist radical-right parties have been able to shape the government agenda. In Austria, the FPÖ was given control of the key ministries of the interior and defense under a December 2017 coalition deal, giving the party an unprecedented opportunity to influence immigration policy.

But arguably, representation of populist radical-right views is higher in the United States, with a first-past-the-post system, than in any comparable European country and similar to European countries with proportional representation systems. In 2015, more than 8 percent of the members of the U.S. House of Representatives were estimated to be members of the Tea Party-affiliated Freedom Caucus.<sup>67</sup> Although the numbers are relatively small, they include senior Republican members of the House with considerable influence over policy development.

Yet strong representation does not always pave a smooth path to policymaking. Although immigration was high on the U.S. president's agenda, Congress did not pass any significant legislation on immigration during the first year of the Trump administration.<sup>68</sup> Of the hundreds of bills introduced in Congress in 2017, only a small amount were related to immigration. Of those, the two that became law related to naming a highway checkpoint and to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Business Travel Cards. Inaction and blockages at the congressional level and legal challenges in some states and localities have somewhat limited the president's ability to advance his priorities, even through executive action. On the other hand, certain state legislatures have adopted and championed the Trump administration's agenda, including by increasing cooperation between state law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement officers.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, during the run-up to subsequent elections, some Republican politicians have echoed in their campaign promises Trump's immigration agenda (such as building a wall; ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program that shields

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65 Although the AfD won 94 seats, two candidates subsequently quit the party and decided to enter as independents. See Kate Connolly, "AfD Leader Quits Party Caucus Hours after German Election Breakthrough," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/25/afd-leader-frauke-petry-quits-party-german-election-breakthrough](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/25/afd-leader-frauke-petry-quits-party-german-election-breakthrough); German Parliament, "Distribution of Seats in the 19<sup>th</sup> German Bundestag," updated October 25, 2017, [www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats](http://www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats).

66 Sarah L. de Lange, "New Alliances: Why Mainstream Parties Govern with Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties," in *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, ed. Cas Mudde (London and New York: Routledge, 2016): 590–608.

67 While there is no formal membership list, see Drew Desilver, "What Is the House Freedom Caucus, and Who Is in It?" Pew Research Center, October 20, 2015, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/20/house-freedom-caucus-what-is-it-and-whos-in-it/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/20/house-freedom-caucus-what-is-it-and-whos-in-it/).

68 Margie McHugh, *In the Age of Trump: Populist Backlash and Progressive Resistance Create Divergent State Immigrant Integration Contexts* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/age-trump-populist-backlash-and-progressive-resistance-create-divergent-state-immigrant](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/age-trump-populist-backlash-and-progressive-resistance-create-divergent-state-immigrant); Pierce and Selee, *Immigration under Trump*.

69 For example, Texas passed such laws in May 2017. At the same time, other states have passed laws barring state and local law enforcement from this type of cooperation. See Randy Capps et al., *Revvving Up the Deportation Machinery: Enforcement under Trump and the Pushback* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/revving-deportation-machinery-under-trump-and-pushback](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/revving-deportation-machinery-under-trump-and-pushback).



from deportation some unauthorized immigrants who arrived in the United States as children; and cancelling the diversity visa lottery).<sup>70</sup>

Thus, there is general agreement that the electoral success of politicians advocating populist radical-right positions has had at least an indirect, agenda-setting impact on policy. This is generally dubbed a “contagion effect,” as other actors within the political system attempt to reduce the radical right’s influence by adjusting their own strategies and issue agendas.<sup>71</sup> This effect is so pervasive that its impacts on agenda setting have even been noted in countries without a strong radical-right presence.<sup>72</sup>

### C. Impact on Policy

But has the impact of radical-right populism on the party system and agenda setting made any difference in policy outputs? There is little evidence to support a more direct impact on the development of immigration or security policy.<sup>73</sup> Despite their electoral success, Western European radical-right parties have been remarkably weak direct participants in policymaking. First, they are often excluded from government coalitions. Second, even when they are included, they do not necessarily have robust policy suggestions on even their most pressing agenda items. They seem to have developed more party capacity to rally voters around particular issues than to govern<sup>74</sup> so that, once in office, organizational weaknesses undermine their ability to deliver.<sup>75</sup> When they have been in government, they have benefited from some prerogatives of power (patronage and money) and getting priorities onto the agenda, but have had relatively little impact on the development of public policy.

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*Despite their electoral success, Western European radical-right parties have been remarkably weak direct participants in policymaking.*

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Researchers have found little difference in policy outputs between center-right governments and radical-right party coalitions in Europe.<sup>76</sup> However, there are exceptions. The Danish minority cabinet in 2001 to 2005, supported by the Danish People’s Party (which, though it did not formally enter government, was in a de facto coalition), is one of the few notable examples. Among its outputs were the introduction of greater restrictions on access to citizenship and family reunification, and reduced welfare benefits for migrant workers.<sup>77</sup>

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70 Mathew Yglesias, “Arizona’s Already Very Complicated Senate Race, Explained: Martha McSally Hops into a Crowded Field,” Vox, January 12, 2018, [www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/12/16877796/mcsally-announcement-arizona-senate](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/12/16877796/mcsally-announcement-arizona-senate).

71 Jooste van Spanje, “Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties’ Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe,” *Party Politics* 16, no. 5 (2010): 563–86.

72 Tjitske Akkerman, “Comparing Radical Right Parties in Government: Immigration and Integration Policies in Nine Countries,” *West European Politics* 35, no. 3 (2012): 511–29.

73 The best comprehensive study of this question is Michelle Hale Williams, *The Impact of Radical Right-Wing Parties in West European Democracies* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006), chapter 8.

74 Cas Mudde, “Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe: So What?” *European Journal of Political Research* 52, no. 1 (2013): 1–19.

75 Williams, *The Impact of Radical Right-Wing Parties*, 523.

76 For example, according to a Nationalist Immigration and Integration Policy index that measures the extent to which the legislative output on immigration and integration has a radical right-wing signature, there was little difference between the policy outputs of center-right governments and those of radical-right party coalitions. This includes policies that promote preference for citizenship based on cultural and ethnic affinity, higher barriers to residence and naturalization for non-EU immigrants without those affinities, restrictive asylum procedures with less right of appeal, limited family reunification, making irregular migration a criminal offence, opposing regularizations, and minimizing access to basic goods for irregular migrants. See Akkerman, “Comparing Radical Right Parties in Government.”

77 Ibid.



Even without direct populist radical-right participation in the policymaking process (or support), some mainstream parties have implemented more right-wing, but often symbolic, policies, such as banning the wearing of the burqa in countries where it is not a widespread practice. Despite its being worn by only a few hundred women in the countries in question, burqa bans have now become common throughout Europe—including in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, and Germany—a trend that is indicative of more severe treatment of Muslim populations.<sup>78</sup> In the summer of 2016, local police patrolled the beaches of 30 French towns along the Riviera, forcing modestly attired Muslim women—dressed in so-called “burqinis”—to remove those garments deemed inappropriate. And many of the bans continued even after they were ruled illegal by French courts.<sup>79</sup> More fundamentally, the populist radical right creates a climate of desperation for established parties. In some instances, this has left them more eager to prove their credibility as stewards of public will through referenda (such as on EU membership in the United Kingdom and on the construction of minarets in Switzerland), or has left them in weaker negotiating positions and more likely to make concessions to form coalition governments.

The long-term impact of radical-right populism on immigration policy and policy implementation in the United States is not yet clear. Several Trump administration priorities have struggled to take hold, such as building a wall along the border with Mexico and increasing cooperation between the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local authorities (i.e., eliminating “sanctuary cities”).<sup>80</sup> A series of executive orders banning nationals of particular Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States also faced legal challenges and widespread public protests—though the latest, issued in September 2017, was eventually upheld by the Supreme Court.<sup>81</sup>

However, two policies in particular have had significant short-term impacts on refugee arrivals and internal apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants. First, in 2017, as one of his first acts in office, Trump reduced the number of refugees who could be admitted that fiscal year from 110,000 (as set by President Obama for 2017) to 50,000; he then capped admissions for fiscal year 2018 at 45,000.<sup>82</sup> Cuts in funding from the U.S. State Department are expected to further reduce capacity for resettlement, while the Trump administration’s stated preference for refugees with “assimilation potential” may restrict this further.<sup>83</sup> Second, the executive orders on internal enforcement have resulted in a dramatic increase in arrests. During the first eight months of the Trump presidency (January 20 to September 30, 2017), interior arrests by ICE increased by 42 percent, compared with the same period in 2016.<sup>84</sup> Thus while congressional reluctance to take up immigration issues has limited policy change through legislative channels, the administration has been able use other levers to significantly shift aspects of the U.S. immigration system into line with its priorities.

78 See Natalia Banusclu-Bogdan and Meghan Benton, *In Search of Common Values amid Large-Scale Immigrant Integration Pressures* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2017), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/search-common-values-amid-large-scale-immigrant-integration-pressures](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/search-common-values-amid-large-scale-immigrant-integration-pressures).

79 Aurelien Breenen and Lilia Blaise, “Court Overturns ‘Burkini’ Ban in French Town,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/world/europe/france-burkini-ban.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/world/europe/france-burkini-ban.html).

80 Capps et al., *Revving Up the Deportation Machinery*.

81 Robert Barnes and Ann E. Marimow, “Supreme Court Upholds Trump Travel Ban,” *The Washington Post*, June 26, 2018, [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts\\_law/supreme-court-upholds-trump-travel-ban/2018/06/26/b79cb09a-7943-11e8-80be-6d32e182a3bc\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/supreme-court-upholds-trump-travel-ban/2018/06/26/b79cb09a-7943-11e8-80be-6d32e182a3bc_story.html).

82 Christopher Ingraham, “The Incredible Shrinking Refugee Cap, in One Chart,” *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/26/the-incredible-shrinking-refugee-cap-in-one-chart/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/26/the-incredible-shrinking-refugee-cap-in-one-chart/).

83 Unlike in previous years, the *Proposed Refugee Admission for Fiscal Year 2018* states that “referrals may also take into account certain criteria that enhance a refugee’s likelihood of successful assimilation and contribution to the United States,” in addition to their protection needs. The word assimilation appears in the report 13 times, compared to zero times in the reports issued for two previous years. See U.S. Department of State (DOS), U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018* (Washington, DC: DOS, DHS, and HHS, 2017), [www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/274613.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/274613.htm). See also Yeganeh Torbati and Mica Rosenberg, “Exclusive: State Department Tells Refugee Agencies to Downsize U.S. Operations,” Reuters, December 21, 2017, [www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-refugees-exclusive/exclusive-state-department-tells-refugee-agencies-to-downsize-u-s-operations-idUSKBN1EF2S5](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-refugees-exclusive/exclusive-state-department-tells-refugee-agencies-to-downsize-u-s-operations-idUSKBN1EF2S5).

84 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), *Fiscal Year 2017 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report* (Washington, DC: DHS, 2017), [www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report/2017/iceEndOfYearFY2017.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report/2017/iceEndOfYearFY2017.pdf).



## V. Prospects for Future Impact

Radical-right populism is often viewed as an aberration. Yet the political parties and factions that champion such views do not suddenly appear and then disappear—rather, many are likely to endure if, as with other political entities, they develop a voter base that identifies with them and networks and organizations that solidify their support. While they may change form, leadership, and priorities, particularly as newer groups emerge, many have been a relatively stable presence. In this sense, they are conventional actors in the party system.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the narrowing gap between their priorities and those of their more mainstream competitors, radical-right actors remain distinct. This becomes apparent when they attempt to broaden their base or help form a coalition. Like many parties, their electoral support is conditional, and in their case, often built on the core issues of immigration and integration. But unlike others, they have had difficulty maintaining their identity while broadening their issue base to expand their electoral support.

The FN strategy between 2015 and 2017 provides an instructive case in point. In a bold move to “de-demonize” the party and broaden its electoral base, party leader Marine Le Pen removed her father (who had founded the party) from his party positions, signaling a movement away from traditional FN links to Vichy France and anti-Semitism. While the party maintained its anti-immigration orientation, it focused more broadly on the emerging issues of the European right: opposition to the European Union and globalism, and support for nationalist protectionism.

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*They have had difficulty maintaining their identity while broadening their issue base to expand their electoral support.*

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As an electoral strategy, it proved to be only modestly successful. With 21 percent of the vote in the first round of the presidential election in 2017, Le Pen came in second to Emmanuel Macron.<sup>86</sup> She increased her vote by about one-third in the second round, but she was not even close to defeating Macron, who more than doubled his first-round score. Macron benefited from his standing as an anti-establishment candidate, as well as from a wall of opposition to the FN.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Le Pen’s momentum in the presidential race did not carry over to the legislative elections a month later. With 13 percent of the vote, about the same as in 2012, the FN only increased its representation in the National Assembly from two to eight deputies (out of 577).<sup>88</sup>

Marine Le Pen’s vote gain of 34 percent in the second round of the presidential election was a record for the party, but probably indicated the limit of how far it would be able to expand its electoral support among voters who normally support other parties. Despite abandoning some party orientations (anti-Semitism, in particular) and adopting a fuller range of policy priorities, it continued to repel most voters who normally support the more established parties of the right. Attempts to

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85 While many of these parties are newer and subject to high levels of internal influx, other political parties also experience these shifts to some degree.

86 French Ministry of the Interior, “Résultats de l’élection présidentielle 2017,” accessed May 16, 2018, [www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/electresult\\_presidentielle-2017/\(path\)/presidentielle-2017/FE.html](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/electresult_presidentielle-2017/(path)/presidentielle-2017/FE.html).

87 Martin A. Schain, “A Historic but Unsurprising Election in France,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 24, 2017, [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2017-04-24/historic-unsurprising-election-france](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2017-04-24/historic-unsurprising-election-france).

88 French Ministry of the Interior, “Résultats des élections législatives 2012,” accessed May 16, 2018, [www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/electresult\\_LG2012/\(path\)/LG2012/FE.html](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/electresult_LG2012/(path)/LG2012/FE.html).





disassociate the party from its previous extreme and racist ideology were not sufficient to create a winning coalition of voters, or to extinguish intense electoral opposition.

Disappointment in both national and legislative elections resulted in a party shake-up a few months later that excluded some of the “de-demonizers.”<sup>89</sup> And while deradicalization was the party’s national policy, it was implemented inconsistently at the local level. Although the party in the northwest of France had generally followed the shifts in policy, there was more resistance from localities in the southern Mediterranean areas, where the party has been strong for decades. (The FN went through a similar crisis in 1998, after it was successful in the French regional elections that year; the party split a few months later and then slowly rebuilt.)

In fact, de-demonization has been difficult for many radical-right parties for many of the same reasons deradicalization was a problem for communist parties in Western Europe after the war, as they had to abandon their revolutionary goals of overthrowing the bourgeois democratic regime. A strategy calculated to broaden the electoral base raises questions about party identity, and has resulted in splits in numerous radical-right parties over the years, including the National Alliance (AN) in Italy in 2003 and the FPÖ in Austria in 2005. The AN split initially resulted from a conscious effort by the party leader, Gianfranco Fini, to move the party away from its fascist roots and recreate it as a centrist party of government. The AN participated in center-right coalition governments under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi between 2000 and 2008, and then dissolved into a new center-right party, the People of Freedom (PdL). By 2013, the AN group within the party had split many times, and it gained no representation in the 2013 legislative elections.

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*It is also worth noting that the traditional support base for radical-right populism is diminishing.*

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In Austria, the FPÖ won a major electoral victory in 1999, and then accepted an invitation to form a coalition government with its conservative rivals. However, participating in a governing coalition resulted in a loss of electoral support (an experience similar to that of radical-right parties in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway), and a split in the party in 2005. In opposition, the FPÖ once again took up many of its traditional, radical policy positions and regained electoral strength. With the third-largest percentage of votes in the 2017 legislative elections, the party entered a governing coalition with the conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP).

Thus, two dynamics limit radical-right populism’s prospects for growth. First, ambition for power is often linked to de-demonization, which can lead to organizational splits where unsuccessful. And even when this reorientation is successful, participation in government has tended to diminish, not increase, electoral support. In short, populist radical-right figures tend to be far more attractive in opposition than in government. Second, as their electoral support increases, so does the strength of electoral opposition that seeks to block them from gaining seats or forming coalitions.

It is also worth noting that the traditional support base for radical-right populism is diminishing. In the United States and in every country in Western Europe, the percentage of blue-collar workers in the workforce (and the electorate) has been declining for decades. In several midwestern states of the United States, where Donald Trump ultimately won the presidential election in 2016, one of the sectors with the strongest employment growth has been health services, a sector that employs large and

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<sup>89</sup> Aurelien Breeden and Elian Peltier, “A Marine Le Pen Aide Leaves Far-Right Party,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/world/europe/france-florian-philippot-national-front.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/world/europe/france-florian-philippot-national-front.html).



increasing numbers of immigrants.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, continuing immigration both in Europe and the United States is likely to result in growth of the share of the population with an immigration background. This will probably continue at moderate levels for the foreseeable future, primarily because of labor needs and the less impedible force of family unification.<sup>91</sup> Thus, over time, radical-right populism's working-class base is disappearing and being replaced by the very immigrant workers it has militantly opposed.

There is no evidence that the participation of politicians with populist radical-right positions in governing coalitions or the variation in the strength of the radical-right vote (either within countries or among countries) has had any influence on patterns of immigration to Europe or the United States.<sup>92</sup> However, as immigration and concerns about integration persist, they will continue to drive support for radical-right populism, and there is every possibility that policymakers will pursue stricter integration policies in Europe and the United States.

## VI. Policy Recommendations

Although the popularity of radical-right populism fluctuates over time, its entrenched presence in the political landscape of many countries makes it crucial for political leaders and policymakers to think critically about how to minimize its potential negative impacts on immigration policies and institutions. While politicians who espouse these views often focus on real problems (unemployment, cultural and economic change, and social inequalities), their solutions simplify these problems by scapegoating immigrants and, in some cases, may exacerbate rather than remedy the issues at hand if they further alienate or withdraw supports from immigrant communities. Without addressing the broader currents of change that contribute to their success, more mainstream political actors will find it difficult to truly turn the tide on radical-right populism. Thus far, governments and established politicians have adopted two main strategies to diminish support for radical-right opponents, neither of which has worked very well.

These strategies can be classified primarily as either constitutional or legal challenges on the one hand, and co-optation on the other. In the first category, at the most extreme end, are attempts to ban radical-right parties under constitutional provisions. This occurred most notably with the NPD in Germany in 2017 and the Vlaams Blok in Belgium in 2004. The German constitutional court rejected the German case, noting the lack of significant support for the party, as well as the uselessness of any ban on diminishing whatever support did exist.<sup>93</sup> In the Belgian case, the party reorganized under a slightly different name—Vlaams Belang—with increased electoral success.

Another legal or constitutional challenge focuses on electoral rules. While it is uncommon for a country to alter its electoral system, the consequences of doing so can be significant, particularly for smaller parties. The FN gained its parliamentary breakthrough in 1986, when the country trialed a

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90 See Pew Charitable Trusts, “Immigrant Employment by State and Industry,” updated December 21, 2015, [www.pewtrusts.org/en/multimedia/data-visualizations/2015/immigrant-employment-by-state-and-industry](http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/multimedia/data-visualizations/2015/immigrant-employment-by-state-and-industry).

91 For projections through 2015, see United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *International Migration Report 2013* (New York: UN DESA, 2013), 14–16, [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/migration/migration-report-2013.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/migration/migration-report-2013.shtml).

92 The number of resettled refugees will obviously reflect government policies, however. See Eurostat, “Immigration by Age Group, Sex, and Citizenship [migr\_imm1ctz],” updated April 9, 2018, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr\\_imm1ctz](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr_imm1ctz).

93 German Federal Constitutional Court, “No Prohibition of the National Democratic Party of Germany as There Are no Indications that It Will Succeed in Achieving Its Anti-Constitutional Aims” (press release no. 4/2017, January 17, 2017), [www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2017/bvg17-004.html](http://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2017/bvg17-004.html).



proportional representation system; the law was changed back after the election. In systems with proportional representation, such as the Belgium, Italy, and the Netherlands, populist radical-right parties have found it much easier to enter parliament and thereby improve their organization and networks of patronage. Until the electoral breakthrough of the AfD in September 2017, Germany's hybrid proportional representation system, which requires a minimum threshold of 5 percent of the vote to enter parliament, had kept populist radical-right parties out. While amending electoral rules could reduce the representation of radical-right parties and their access to resources and networks of patronage, such actions could be challenged as undemocratic and would also deprive other small parties of representation.

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*Co-optation is therefore a slippery slope that concedes agenda-setting power to a party's opponents.*

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The second strategy some mainstream politicians have used to diminish support for radical-right opponents has been to co-opt parts of their agenda and imitate their rhetoric—albeit in softer tones. This tactic has had mixed success across Europe at different times. For example, whereas co-optation was not at all successful in France in the 1990s, Nicolas Sarkozy of the center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) was able to capture enough FN voters to achieve electoral victory in 2007.<sup>94</sup> But while co-optation may allow mainstream actors to retain power, there are important tradeoffs. For example, in 2017, the resurgent ÖVP in Austria won votes (and seats) by co-opting some FPÖ issues. But in the process, it helped to increase support for the FPÖ by effectively creating a second megaphone for its ideas. Co-optation is therefore a slippery slope that concedes agenda-setting power to a party's opponents—in this case, the radical right. The question thus remains: are there, in fact, strategies established actors can adopt to minimize the growth and diminish the influence of radical-right candidates who attract voters but cannot themselves form a government? And if there are, what are the tradeoffs?

### **A. Potential for Participation**

Faced with a challenge from a populist radical-right party, many established center-right parties in Europe have chosen to isolate the party and prevent it from joining a governing coalition. Committing to exclude a populist radical-right party sends a clear normative message that its ideas are not endorsed or welcomed within the political system. However, this message will be effective only if the parties that send it are not concurrently co-opting key agenda issues from the radical right. This strategy also risks further marginalizing populist radical-right voters by shunning their genuine concerns.

Enabling populist radical-right parties to participate in governing coalitions, on the other hand, offers a platform for engaging the core concerns of their voters (excluding the most extreme elements) and recognizes their growing importance to an expanding electorate. Counterintuitively, participation in governing coalitions can weaken support for radical-right parties, who are often unable to deliver on their campaign promises. The FPÖ in Austria, and its loss of electoral strength following inclusion in government between 2000 and 2005, is a good example of this. The gritty realities and compromises involved in governance and policymaking may challenge the often fragile internal cohesion and organization of radical-right parties. The desire for more mainstream success can push these parties

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<sup>94</sup> Pascal Perrineau, *Le Vote de Rupture: Les Élections Présidentielles et Législatives d'Avril-Juin 2007* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, Chroniques Électorales, 2008).



closer to the center, as with the Italian National Alliance, making deradicalization and a party split more likely. Nevertheless, established parties must assess carefully whether, by cooperating with populist radical-right parties, they risk alienating their own electoral base or undermining their legitimacy.

## **B. Immigration and Political Mobilization**

Immigrant populations in Europe and the United States are frequently understood as objects of politics rather than as (potential) participants. Compared with the United States, efforts by left-wing politicians in Europe to mobilize and organize these voters have been more limited, and almost exclusively in geographic areas where voters with an immigration background are concentrated.

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*In the United States, candidates with immigrant backgrounds have been increasingly visible (and successful) in Congress as well as at the state and local levels.*

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In addition to harnessing more support for mainstream political figures, outreach to candidates and voters with an immigration background can increase their participation and visibility within decision-making institutions and encourage political parties to address and prioritize their concerns. This may reduce the temptation among mainstream candidates to pander to supporters of radical-right populism or make campaign promises (such as “zero immigration”) that cannot be kept. In the United States, candidates with immigrant backgrounds have been increasingly visible (and successful) in Congress as well as at the state and local levels. They have been less successful in accessing the less porous parties of Western Europe.<sup>95</sup> As the proportion of national electorates with an immigrant background looks set to increase, mainstream parties stand to lose the “first mover advantage” to smaller upstart parties—including, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, populist radical-right parties—if they continue to neglect this growing group of voters. For example, in Germany, the AfD made explicit overtures to the estimated 3.1 million ethnic German immigrants from the former Soviet Union—including by publishing its election agenda and campaign posters in Russian, creating a network of Russian Germans in the AfD, and touting Russian Germans as candidates.<sup>96</sup>

## **C. A “Whole-of-Society” Approach**

For economic and demographic reasons, immigration is likely to continue in Europe and the United States regardless of levels of support for radical-right populism. Even if conventional routes (such as labor migration) are more restricted, some migration is likely to continue irregularly or to be diverted through other channels, such as family reunification. While the question of immigration is at the very heart of the rise and sustenance of radical-right populism, the relationship is complex and nonlinear. Established actors should avoid falling into the trap of concluding that immigration, in and of itself, is the problem, as opposed to one social force among many that have contributed to the growth of the radical right. Rising levels of immigration do not necessarily lead to greater support for politicians with radical-right platforms, and areas with the highest proportions of immigrants are not usually the most hostile to newcomers.

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<sup>95</sup> See Schain, *The Politics of Immigration*, 18, 119, 186, 243, and 290.

<sup>96</sup> Many emigrants from the former Soviet Union were eligible for German citizenship under German ancestry laws. See Jessica Bither, “In Germany, Immigrants Are Becoming a Serious Political Force,” *The Washington Post*, September 19, 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/09/19/in-germany-immigrants-are-becoming-a-serious-political-force/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/09/19/in-germany-immigrants-are-becoming-a-serious-political-force/).



Addressing the anti-immigrant sentiment that has bolstered support for radical-right populism will require a whole-of-society approach that engages with citizens' concerns across policy areas—including the perceived challenges of immigration and integration. That trust in politicians and institutions has been decreasing across Europe<sup>97</sup> is not the fault of populist radical-right parties, but rather a symptom of broader societal trends that encourage their support. Established politicians may need to do some potentially painful soul-searching to (re-)connect with their modern base. Governments may also need to consider different forms of decision-making with a greater degree of direct democracy, such as citizens' panels and nonpartisan taskforces with clear powers and mandates that can restore trust in political institutions and amplify citizens' voices in a political world perceived as dominated by elites. There is also an underexplored role for social media and the internet to improve two-way communication between citizens and policymakers, and to empower citizens to give comments on important policies and legislation.

A whole-of-society approach must also include a commitment to uprooting prejudicial attitudes and fighting discrimination in the workplace, housing, education, and other key social areas by putting sufficient resources and political support behind antidiscrimination campaigns and programs. Governments should also take a strong stance against the upsurge in violence against immigrants, and doing so could in turn create a space for political leaders to thoughtfully engage with the narrative of “anti-political correctness” that is common in populist radical-right discourse and to distinguish it clearly from anti-social and violent acts.

#### D. Rebuild Economic Confidence

A crucial part of addressing the socioeconomic anxieties that have driven the success of radical-right populism is thinking creatively about how best to serve citizens who have benefited the least from globalization and modern economic transitions—namely due to the contraction of stable full-time employment in traditional sectors, slow economic and real wage growth, and a diminished welfare state. While there is no direct link between unemployment and voting for candidates with populist radical-right views, there is, notably, a relationship between support for such politicians and a lack of faith in the economy. Support for populist radical-right politicians and policies does not appear to increase sharply during periods of heightened unemployment, but rather within a decade of faith-shattering economic catastrophes such as the recession of 2008 and the oil crisis of the 1970s. This suggests that it is both the anxiety over, and not simply the experience of, economic insecurity that is relevant. To address this anxiety and disillusionment, governments may consider methods to boost economic confidence and resilience, such as:

- **Empowering trade unions to have genuine collective bargaining abilities.** For modern economies to remain competitive, there may be limits on how much resistive power trade unions should wield. However, they are crucial (and often the only capable) actors in lobbying for workers' rights and wages—which may be even more important as new and unregulated industries emerge with future shifts in the economy. Trade unions can also reinforce economic confidence by providing workers some insulation from market disruptions, such as through unemployment and retraining support.

<sup>97</sup> For example, even in countries with high levels of social trust, such as Denmark and Sweden, trust in politicians has fallen. In Denmark surveys reveal that trust in politicians plunged from 70 percent in 2007, to 60 percent in 2011, to 28 percent in 2015. In addition to the political elite, experts and institutions have also come under attack. During the Brexit campaign, UK justice secretary Michael Gove famously claimed that “people in this country have had enough of experts.” See Klaus Ulrik Mortensen, “Historisk få Danskere Stoler på Politikerne,” *Altinget*, June 8, 2015, [www.alinget.dk/artikel/historisk-faa-danskere-stoler-paa-politikerne](http://www.alinget.dk/artikel/historisk-faa-danskere-stoler-paa-politikerne); Anton Landehag, “Unga Saknar Förtroende för Partipolitiken,” *Ungdomsbarometern*, April 20, 2017, [www.ungdomsbarometern.se/unga-saknar-fortroende-for-partipolitiken/](http://www.ungdomsbarometern.se/unga-saknar-fortroende-for-partipolitiken/); Henry Mance, “Britain Has Had Enough of Experts, Says Gove,” *Financial Times*, July 3, 2016, [www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c](http://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c).



- ***Committing to providing welfare.*** In the wake of the latest recession, many governments in Europe pursued austerity policies that limited economic growth and diverted funding away from social institutions. Preserving access to welfare-state benefits can be a major component of some arguments against immigration, as seen during the Brexit Leave campaign.<sup>98</sup> Governments should recommit to funding welfare supports to blunt the argument that newcomers take benefits away from citizens, and to demonstrate solidarity with citizens in need.

Ultimately, radical-right populism is not a pathology of a political system gone awry but rather a manifestation of rapid and intense societal change, and a governance system that can appear out of touch and ineffective in addressing the public's genuine concerns. Therefore, it is key that policymakers find the right balance between thoughtful responses to legitimate concerns and knee-jerk changes to immigration policies or other short-term institutional adjustments that will only fuel the anxieties and divisive trends they are trying to remedy.

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*Radical-right populism is not a pathology of a political system gone awry but rather a manifestation of rapid and intense societal change.*

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98 Alessandro Pellegata, "The Causes of Brexit: Free Movement Concerns and Welfare Chauvinism," EuVisions, June 5, 2017, [www.euvisions.eu/movement-concerns-chauvinism/](http://www.euvisions.eu/movement-concerns-chauvinism/).



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