

László Vértesy

# Factors Behind the Rise of National Radical Parties

- economic, social and political aspects

Gazdaságelemző Intézet  
Institute of Economic Analysis  
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# Factors Behind the Rise of National Radical Parties

## - economic, social and political aspects

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The political landscape of the last two decades has witnessed a significant transformation in the programmatic agenda of national radical parties, as observed through comparative analyses. National radical parties, also known as populist radical right (PRR) parties, have emerged as a significant political force in many Western democracies in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> These parties often advocate for nativist, protectionist, and anti-establishment policies, and they have been linked to various economic and social issues.

The radical and populist evolution is explored in depth by examining studies conducted by prominent German think tanks – the left-wing Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2016)<sup>2</sup> and the right-wing Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2014).<sup>3</sup> These studies delve into the success trajectories of European national radical parties.

An intriguing pattern emerges when scrutinising the electoral triumphs of national radical parties, revealing a common thread woven through their discourse. Research consistently underscores the pivotal role played by the rejection of immigration as the most potent motivating factor among their diverse voter base. Whether hailing from lower or middle-class backgrounds, the younger or older generations, these voters find common ground in their opposition to immigration.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Muis, J., & Immerzeel, T. (2017). Causes and consequences of the rise of populist radical right parties and movements in Europe. *Current Sociology*, 65(6), 909-930.

Rooduijn, M. (2015). The rise of the populist radical right in Western Europe. *European view*, 14(1), 3-11.

<sup>2</sup> Greven, Thomas (2016): The Rise of Right- wing Populism in Europe and the United States - the Comparative Perspective, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

<sup>3</sup> Gabrow Krasten & Florian Hartleb (2014): Exposing the Demagogues, Right- wing and National Populist Parties in Europe

<sup>4</sup> Afonso, A., & Rennwald, L. (2018). Social class and the changing welfare state agenda of radical right parties in Europe. *Welfare democracies and party politics: Explaining electoral dynamics in times of changing welfare capitalism*, 171.

As a political trend, national radicalism has proven popular and successful. In several countries, it is harnessed adeptly by various parties, particularly when amalgamated with populism. The frequent emphasis on individual problems and challenges, coupled with a strong stance against immigration, has wielded significant political influence, mirroring the successes witnessed in Central European examples.

Given the heterogeneous composition of their electoral base, national radical parties strategically focus on critical topics to maintain their political momentum. Anti-immigration rhetoric and safeguarding border protection consistently rank among the most crucial themes. Concurrently, attention is directed towards preserving national cultural values. Economic issues such as wages, minimum wage, and labour unions serve a dual purpose—critiquing the European Union and functioning as central elements of the welfare state and economic policy. Moreover, in the ongoing battle against corruption, international political and power centres remain emphasised, highlighting leaders' detachment and insensitivity to social problems.

This examination extends beyond the ideological transformation and delves into the core election topics that have catapulted national radical parties into the limelight. These parties strategically highlight issues such as the preservation of national culture, rejection of the elite, advocacy for direct democracy, and tactical approaches to counteract their success. Understanding these key election topics is essential for comprehending the resonance of radical national parties among diverse voter demographics.

As the influence of national radical parties continues to grow, the question arises: Are these movements on a trajectory towards deradicalisation or adaptation within the political spectrum? This exploration seeks to shed light on the mechanisms through which national radical parties either undergo a process of deradicalisation or adapt their strategies to sustain their political ascendancy.

To provide a comprehensive view, this analysis incorporates an international outlook, specifically focusing on two practical examples – the Czech Republic and Austria. These case studies offer insights into the contextual factors and strategies that shape the success or challenges faced by national radical parties in distinct political landscapes.

It is important to note that the success and perception of political parties can vary widely, and the classification of a party as "successful" or "radical" can be subjective. In this intricate web of political dynamics, the success of

national radical parties is intricately tied to their ability to resonate with a diverse electorate by addressing issues ranging from immigration to economic concerns and corruption. This analysis seeks to explore the multifaceted reasons behind the triumph of national radical parties, unravelling the complex tapestry of their political strategies and societal resonance.

### Radical vs Populist Parties

Aspect	Radical Parties	Populist Parties
<b>Ideological Focus</b>	Often driven by nationalist or extreme views	Appeals to popular sentiments, anti-establishment
<b>Key Policy Areas</b>	Anti-immigration, nationalism, protectionism	Varied, but often includes economic populism, anti-elitism
<b>Leadership Style</b>	Charismatic leaders, strong central figures	Charismatic leaders, often anti-establishment
<b>Economic Policies</b>	Protectionist, anti-globalisation, state intervention	Populist economic policies, focus on job creation
<b>Social Policies</b>	Conservative, anti-immigration, national identity	Varied, may include social welfare programs
<b>Approach to Institutions</b>	Skeptical of international institutions, emphasis on national sovereignty	Critique of existing political institutions, anti-establishment
<b>Target Demographics</b>	Often appeals to a specific national identity	Broad appeal across socio-economic demographics
<b>Communication Style</b>	Emphasis on clear, bold messaging	Connects with common people, often uses simple language
<b>Relationship with Mainstream Politics</b>	Tends to be on the fringes of political spectrum	Seeks to challenge or disrupt mainstream politics
<b>International Relations</b>	May adopt isolationist or nationalist foreign policies	Varied, but often emphasises national interests
<b>Election Strategy</b>	Mobilises a dedicated base, may use divisive rhetoric	Appeals to a broad spectrum, often relies on emotional appeal
<b>Popularity Dynamics</b>	May experience rapid rises and falls, strong polarisation	Can gain quick popularity, faces challenges in sustaining support

Source: own compilation

# 1. Changed party programs

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As political ideologies adapt to the challenges and aspirations of the present, the alterations in party programs serve as key indicators of the strategies employed by political entities to address and resonate with the concerns of their constituents. Both research studies concluded that these parties had changed their programs in three main elements in the last 20 years.<sup>5</sup> The tri-lecta of anti-immigration, EU reform, and a welfare-centric economic agenda encapsulates the contours of this transformative journey, reflecting changes in policy orientation and a response to the evolving socio-political landscape.

## 1.1. Anti-immigration

**Anti-immigration instead of anti-semitism.** Radicalism in the literature on Western European parties is primarily the radicalism of xenophobic slogans.<sup>6</sup> Several parties of this type, such as the Austrian Party for Freedom or the French National Front, have had close links with Nazi organisations in the past. They have spectacularly severed links with these, one of the most essential elements of which was the abandonment of anti-Semitism. This was done by the Western European parties in the early 2000s at the latest and is still taking place in the Central and Eastern European parties. Anti-Semitism has been replaced by a much stronger emphasis on immigration, especially the rejection of immigration from outside Europe, but also, in some cases, from the new Member States.

The French National Front in **France**, led by Marine Le Pen, has been known for its solid anti-immigration stance. While it has faced criticism for alleged xenophobia and anti-Islamic sentiments, it has sought to distance itself from anti-Semitism and has attempted to broaden its appeal beyond its historical far-right roots. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party has gained traction in **German** politics with an anti-immigration and Eurosceptic platform. While it has faced criticism for alleged ties to right-wing extremism, it positions itself as a party that addresses concerns about immigration

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<sup>5</sup> Mudde, C. (2015). Populist radical right parties in Europe today. *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas: History and recent trends*, 295-307.

Akkerman, T., De Lange, S. L., & Rooduijn, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: Into the mainstream?*. Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> Rév István (2010): „Nem lehetünk a politikától szabadok”. Rádai Eszter interjúja Rév Istvánnal. in *Élet és Irodalom* 2010. április 9. <http://www.es.hu/?view=doc;25623>



and cultural identity. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) has been successful in **Switzerland** with a strong anti-immigration stance. It has gained electoral support by advocating for stricter immigration policies and has often used populist rhetoric on these issues. The Party for Freedom (PVV) in the **Netherlands**, led by Geert Wilders, has gained popularity with an anti-immigration platform. It focuses on issues related to Islam and immigration, advocating for stricter immigration controls and policies. There is a strong anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiment, which is often opposed to cooperation with precisely Jewish organisations. There is also an ethnocentric national (nationalist) character, which also reinforces anti-immigrant sentiment and gives specific content to the desire for national rebirth.

## 1.2. EU reform

**Reforming the European Union instead of rejecting it altogether.** Most national radical parties in the 1980s campaigned to leave the EU. However, the complete rejection of the EU has been almost entirely dropped from the agenda, mainly due to the uncertainty of the Brexit referendum. National radical parties' opposition to the EU varies widely and depends to a large extent on the level of opposition to the EU among the population of the country concerned. Nevertheless, they rarely support leaving the EU any more.<sup>7</sup> Instead, leaving the eurozone appears to be a priority for AfD, National Front or Italian League, or stopping further EU enlargement. Also important is the rejection of the Brussels elite, which is branded as wasteful, overly bureaucratic and anti-national. In their view, this elite has become completely detached from ordinary people and no longer represents their interests. On the contrary, there is a need to strengthen national sovereignty in certain areas while simultaneously recognising the need for strong common European border protection.

## 1.3. Welfare economic policy

**A growing acceptance of welfare measures is replacing economic free-market policies and the rejection of the welfare state.** Many national rad-

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<sup>7</sup> Falkner, G., & Plattner, G. (2018). Populist radical right parties and EU policies: How coherent are their claims?. *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper No. RSCAS*, 38.

ical parties in Western Europe in the 1980s promoted strongly liberal economic policies, with a key element being the roll-back of welfare state social measures and tax cuts. With the emergence of anti-immigration, this increasingly meant banning immigrants' access to social welfare.<sup>8</sup>

There has been a shift in political sentiment, particularly in developed nations, away from radical parties and economic free-market policies and towards a greater acceptance of welfare measures. This shift has been driven by a number of factors, including:

<b>Growing economic inequality</b>	The gap between the rich and the poor has been widening in many countries for decades, and this has led to a growing sense of dissatisfaction among many people. Welfare measures are seen as a way to address this inequality and provide a safety net for those who are struggling.
<b>Rise of globalisation</b>	Globalisation has led to a decline in manufacturing jobs in many developed countries, putting a strain on the social safety net. Welfare measures are seen as a way to compensate for these job losses and provide basic support for those left behind.
<b>Changing nature of work</b>	The economy is becoming increasingly polarised, with the creation of both high-paying and low-paying jobs. This has made it more difficult for people to get by independently, leading to a greater demand for welfare measures.
<b>Aging population</b>	The population of many developed countries is ageing rapidly, which is putting pressure on government budgets. Welfare measures, such as providing healthcare and pensions, are often seen as a way to address the needs of an aging population.

Source: own compilation

As a result of these factors, there has been a growing acceptance of welfare measures in recent years. Even in countries that have traditionally been more sceptical of government intervention, there is now a greater willingness to provide a safety net for those who need it. This shift in sentiment has been reflected in the policies of many governments, which have been investing more in welfare programs. However, it is essential to note that there

<sup>8</sup> Röth, L., Afonso, A., & Spies, D. C. (2018). The impact of populist radical right parties on socio-economic policies. *European Political Science Review*, 10(3), 325-350.

Otjes, S., Ivaldi, G., Jupskås, A. R., & Mazzoleni, O. (2018). It's not economic interventionism, stupid! reassessing the political economy of radical right-wing populist parties. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 24(3), 270-290.

is still a strong debate about the role of the welfare state. Some people believe that welfare measures are necessary to ensure a fair and equitable society, while others argue that they stifle economic growth and create dependency. This debate is likely to continue for many years to come.

National radical parties typically advocate for economic policies that they believe will benefit the working class and the national economy. These policies may include:

- **Protectionism:** often support tariffs and other trade barriers that they believe will protect domestic industries and jobs.
- **Renationalisation:** support the renationalisation of industries that have been privatised, or the nationalisation of new industries.
- **Tax cuts for the wealthy:** support tax cuts for businesses and the wealthy, arguing that this will stimulate economic growth.<sup>9</sup>
- **Austerity:** support austerity measures, such as cuts to government spending and welfare programs, in an effort to reduce the national debt.

The **economic impact** of national radical parties is a complex issue that has been debated. Some studies have found that these parties have a positive impact on the economy, while others have found that they have a negative impact.

Among their **positive impacts**, national radical parties may revitalise the economy by implementing policies that boost economic growth and job creation. They attract investment from businesses and foreign investors by creating a more business-friendly environment. Even improve public services by reducing waste and corruption in government.

On the other hand, there are **negative impacts**. National radical parties may increase inequality by cutting taxes for the wealthy and reducing welfare programs. Their policy may cause economic stagnation by implementing protectionist policies that stifle competition and innovation. They may contribute to social unrest by scapegoating certain groups, such as immigrants or minorities.

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<sup>9</sup> Jupskås, A. R., Ivarsflaten, E., Kalsnes, B., & Aalberg, T. (2016). Norway: Populism from anti-tax movement to government party. In *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 54-67). Routledge.

As one of the most crucial voter bases of these parties has increasingly become the rural working class, liberal economic policies have been eclipsed, and a strong critique of globalism has emerged, often characteristic of New Left parties such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Increasingly, they want economic protectionism and social benefits for the underprivileged, while at the same time, in many cases, tax cuts continue to be seen, which they want to achieve by removing subsidies for immigrants.

## 2. Main election topics

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If we examine the electoral successes of the national radical parties, we can also see the themes discussed above in most cases. Many researchers support that **the strongest causality with voters of national radical parties is the rejection of immigration**. Its voters may be lower-class or middle-class, young or members of the older generation, but **what unites them most is their opposition to immigration**. For example, Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, a professor at Bergen University, looked at seven Western European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway and Switzerland) and found that although the social background of their core voters often differs, in all cases, the rejection of immigration is the best indicator of the propensity to vote for a national radical party.<sup>10</sup> The same conclusion was reached by Cas Mudde, a professor at the University of Georgia, who studied the then 25 EU Member States.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1. National culture

Based on this, Daniel Oesch, a professor at the University of Lausanne, puts forward **two hypotheses**.<sup>12</sup> In his opinion, the voters of the national radical parties **can be anti-immigration for economic and cultural reasons**. Economically, they may oppose immigration because they are afraid that immigrants will lose their jobs and lower their wages. Culturally, they can be anti-immigration because they fear their own national identity and culture. In his research, he concludes that cultural reasons are more important. Similar research was carried out by John Malone at St. Lecturer at John's University. In a pan-European research,<sup>13</sup> they asked the voters of the national radical parties two questions. One was that immigrants are bad for a country's economy, while the second is that they undermine that country's culture. Although

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<sup>10</sup> Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth (2008): What unites right-wing populists in Western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful cases. *Comparative Political Studies* 41( 1): 3-23

<sup>11</sup> Mudde, Cas (2007): *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge University Press

<sup>12</sup> Oesch, Daniel (2008) : Explaining Workers ' Support for Right- Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Evidence from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway, and Switzerland, *International Political Science Review*, Vol 29, Issue 3, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Malone, John (2014): *Examining the Rise of Right Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*

they agreed with both questions, the voters of these parties chose the undermining of culture in greater proportion, indicating that **the reasons for opposition to immigration are still primarily cultural**.

## 2.2. Elite rejection

In addition to anti-immigration, one of the most relevant campaign topics is **the rejection of the international or the country's national or non-national elites**. There is a strong parallel between them and us. This parallel is increasingly being applied to the Brussels elites as well. Especially the national radical parties that get into government increasingly use their anti-elite and us-them dichotomy to discredit the Brussels elites. They usually point to the intertwining between traditional parties and the fact that there is less and less difference between the programs of the left and right parties. The impotence of the traditional parties also explains the increase in immigration. Another essential element in the condemnation of the elites is anti-corruption, the roll-up and presentation of the corruption cases of the traditional parties.

Here are some examples of successful radical parties that have gained power by appealing to anti-elite sentiment:

- **National Front (FN) in France:** The FN rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, capitalising on growing dissatisfaction with the perceived elitism of the mainstream political establishment. The party's anti-immigration and anti-globalisation rhetoric resonated with a large segment of the French population, particularly those who felt their national identity and culture were threatened.
- **Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy:** The M5S emerged in the early 2010s as a protest movement against political corruption and economic inequality. The party's anti-establishment rhetoric and its use of social media helped it to mobilise a large following, particularly among young and disillusioned voters.<sup>14</sup>
- **Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland:** The PiS won a landslide victory in the 2015 Polish parliamentary elections, partly due to its anti-elite message and promise to restore national pride and sovereignty. The party's populist rhetoric appealed to those who

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<sup>14</sup> Lanzone, L., & Woods, D. (2015). Riding the populist web: contextualizing the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy. *Politics and Governance*.

felt that Poland's traditional values were being eroded by globalisation and the European Union.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3. Direct democracy

It is interesting that, according to the literature, direct democracy, especially the **initiation of referendums**, is a useful tool for these parties. Direct democracy helps these parties not only mobilise their voters by increasing their internal cohesion and strengthening their collective identity but also transform the political agenda of the given country and determine the topic of public debates.<sup>16</sup> With this, they can exert continuous pressure on political decision-making processes.<sup>17</sup> This is also important because parties traditionally do not have national media, and the traditional media outlets are hostile towards them, so referendums can provide them with adequate media outlets. It is popular among young men who are at heart they harbour deep anger and hatred against what they consider to be foreign forces for the spoiled past, present and hopeless future.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jasiiecki, K. (2018). "Conservative modernization" and the rise of Law and Justice in Poland. In *New conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe* (pp. 130-153). Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> Immerzeel, T., & Pickup, M. (2015). Populist radical right parties mobilizing 'the people'? The role of populist radical right success in voter turnout. *Electoral Studies*, 40, 347-360.

<sup>17</sup> Leininger, A. (2015). Direct democracy in Europe: Potentials and pitfalls. *Global Policy*, 6, 17-27.

<sup>18</sup> Gerbaudo, P. (2014). Populism 2.0: Social media activism, the generic Internet user and interactive direct democracy. In *Social media, politics and the state* (pp. 67-87). Routledge.

### 3. Tactics to mitigate the success of national radical parties

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The rise of radical and populist parties is a challenge for democracies worldwide. There is no single solution to this problem, but there are a number of steps that can be taken to address it:

- **Address the underlying causes of discontent:** To reduce the appeal of radical and populist parties, it is important to address the factors contributing to their success. This includes addressing economic inequality, reducing political corruption, and managing the challenges of globalisation and immigration.
- **Promote inclusive and responsible political discourse:** Radical and populist parties often thrive in an environment of fear and division. It is important to promote inclusive and responsible political discourse that does not scapegoat or demonise minority groups.
- **Strengthen democratic institutions:** Strong democratic institutions are essential for resisting the rise of radical and populist parties. This includes ensuring that elections are free and fair, that the media is independent and diverse, and that the judiciary is impartial.

Examining the international literature, we can see that people's parties can basically have four tactics against populist-radical right-wing parties.<sup>19</sup> These are **exclusion, adaptation, tolerance and coalition**.

#### 3.1. Exclusion

In case of **exclusion**, the traditional parties try to marginalise these parties by completely pushing them out of public life. They usually draw a sharp line between themselves and the party they consider extremist, treat it as a taboo and boycott any cooperation or communication with that party. The extremist party is stigmatised and portrayed as an irresponsible force that is

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Goodwin (2011): *Right Response Understanding and Countering Populist Extremism in Europe*, Chatam House, London and Karsten Grabow & Florian Hartleb (2014): *Europe – No, Thanks? Study On The Rise Of Right- Wing And National Populist Parties In Europe*, Center for European Studies, Brussels



not worth dealing with and should not even be allowed to do since even communicating with them only provides legitimacy to what they otherwise say is illegitimate. According to studies, exclusion seemed to be a largely successful tactic until 2010, despite the fact that the Conservative People's Party in Denmark and the Christian Democratic Party in Switzerland failed to prevent the rise of national radical parties. Since then, however, examples previously thought to be successful have also proven short-lived. For example, the Polish Civic Platform successfully excluded the Law and Justice party led by Kaczyński for a while, but in 2015, the party finally won the elections, and the conservative Civic Platform began to take off. A similar thing happened to the Swedish Moderate Party, which lost the 2014 elections, although here, the left was primarily able to gain strength from the competition of right-wing parties. So it seems that in many cases, the exclusion only confirms to the voters of the radical parties that their party is truly unique and not part of the traditional establishment since the traditional parties unite against it. This only reinforces their sense of separateness and party identity.

Statistics show that the **success of the exclusion** depends largely on the given country's electoral system; it does not really work in proportional electoral systems, while it works better in majority one-round systems. Here, the traditional parties can argue reasonably that the vote cast for the national radical parties is lost in the system therefore it is not worth voting for them as a lost vote. An excellent example of this is the case of the United Kingdom, where traditionally, national radical parties have not been able to achieve serious electoral success. For a while, UKIP seemed to be an exception to this, which received the most votes among the British parties in the 2014 European Parliament vote. However, this party was also unable to succeed in general elections and lost a significant part of its voters in the last parliamentary elections.

### 3.2. Adaptation

In the **adaptation process**, the traditional right-wing parties are adopting elements from the programme of the national radical parties. This can only happen on a rhetorical level, so the parties' programs and government operations change little in reality; they only try to regain their lost former supporters or gain new ones as a communication strategy. However, changes in the practical party program and government measures can also happen when the traditional parties take over the programs of the national radical

parties and implement them. This is usually only partially done by highlighting the more feasible elements or "diluting" the proposals so that a wider audience can accept them. In the 2000s, this also did not seem like a successful tactic. For a long time, the Christian Democrats in Austria have shown little success with the populist rhetoric adopted from the Austrian Freedom Party, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy also tried unsuccessfully in 2012 to adopt the anti-immigration and Eurosceptic programs and rhetoric of Marine Le Pen.

On the other hand, in recent years, mainly due to the migrant crisis, this tactic seems to be more and more successful. This is well illustrated by numerous elections held in Western Europe in 2017. In the **United Kingdom**, the Conservative Party is adept at taking a complete stand in favour of Brexit. It became the most crucial party of Eurosceptics against UKIP in the June 2017 snap election. In **the Netherlands**, the People's Party led by Mark Rutte successfully adopted elements of Geert Wilders during the campaign from the national radical Dutch Freedom Party led by Wilders. For example, Rutte deliberately made the issue of national identity an integral part of the campaign and tightened his party's views on immigration. During the campaign, he repeatedly told immigrants who do not want to integrate that if they do not like the country, they can leave. The ban on wearing headscarves also stirred up much dust. In **Austria**, the Austrian People's Party led by Sebastian Kurz also followed a similar path, adopting anti-immigration elements from the Austrian Freedom Party. Restrictions on immigration and political Islam thus became the most important topics of the campaign. So, it seems adaptation has become the most successful tool for traditional parties against radical national parties in recent years.

### 3.3.Toleration

The third tactic is **toleration**, during which the traditional parties behave with the national radical parties as with any other opposition or rival party. In other words, in contrast to exclusion, they do not recognise their specialness; they do not confirm the ideas of their voters in this direction. Informal agreements and cooperation between traditional right-wing parties and national radical parties fit into the politics of tolerance.<sup>20</sup> In **Denmark**,

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<sup>20</sup> Verbeek, B., & Zaslove, A. (2015). The impact of populist radical right parties on foreign policy: the Northern League as a junior coalition partner in the Berlusconi Governments. *European Political Science Review*, 7(4), 525-546.

for example, the government of Vestre, a liberal centre-right party, depended for years on the informal support of the national radical People's Party in the parliament. However, experts believe tolerance is the least successful tactic against national radical parties. This enables the national radical parties to influence government measures in such a way that they do not take responsibility for the decisions. So, they can still freely criticise negative government measures in connection with the government's successful programs, and they can argue that the government is only implementing their program, that is, stealing their campaign themes. Thus, the national radical parties are not demystified during toleration and can maintain their legitimacy. They can continue to exploit the grievances of the losers of the political process, mobilising all those who are dissatisfied with the performance of the traditional parties.

We find only temporary successes for the tactic, which has had disastrous results for the traditional right-wing parties over time. In **Denmark**, the above-mentioned Vestre, for example, lost the government for the first time in 2011, and in 2015 they became only the third largest force after their former informal national radical supporter, the People's Party. In Belgium, the Flemish Christian Democrats, although they did not enter into an informal coalition with the national radicals, also used the tactic of tolerance towards them. Starting in 2010, however, the party went from being the country's largest party to only the fourth most important force and Belgian politics has since been dominated by the also Flemish but nationally radical New Flemish Alliance.

### 3.4. Coalition

Finally, the last possible tactic is the **coalition**, in which the traditional right-wing parties enter the elections in a formal coalition with the national radical parties or form a government after the elections. The logic behind this tactic is that sharing in power demystifies the national radical parties, showing that they actually have the same flaws as the other parties. In other words, this somehow takes away the credibility of the anti-elite of the national radical parties.

In addition, traditional parties have greater legitimacy, so they can more easily blame the problems and failures of the coalition on their smaller coalition partners, i.e. the national radical parties. In contrast, however, the coalition's successes are more likely to be reaped by the traditional parties.

Some argue that getting into the government, the fact that they have to represent the interests of wider strata, mitigates the radicalism of these parties and in time, they become traditional right-wing parties. Finally, getting into the government and gaining political power can bring to the surface the power conflicts and rivalries within the national radical parties.

Traditional patriarchs can easily exploit these conflicts by dividing or even liquidating the party. This is also confirmed by the fact that national radical parties often achieve serious success in a short period of time (1-2 years), so they do not yet have a strong enough party organisation and their membership fluctuates. According to expert opinions, coalition creation can be a successful tactic for traditional parties to curb national radical parties. The tactic seems particularly successful in Central and Eastern Europe. Michael Minkenberg, a professor at the University of Frankfurt, in his 2015 book on national radical parties in Eastern Europe, illustrates the tactic's success with three examples.<sup>21</sup> In **Poland**, in the second half of the 90s and the first half of the 2000s, the Polish Family League was a party with a stable vote share of around 10 %. The party entered Jarosław in 2005, and in the 2007 parliamentary elections, after the fall of the government led by Kaczyński, they did not even manage to reach the 3 % of state support, and the party has not been able to achieve any significant results since then. The Slovak National Party followed a similar path in Slovakia. After participating in the government coalition between 2006 and 2010, they lost half of their votes and could barely get into the Slovak parliament, and they were finally kicked out in 2012.

The best-known example in **Austria** is the Austrian Freedom Party, which entered into a coalition with the Austrian People's Party in 1999. During the elections, the two parties achieved a roughly equal share of the vote at 27 %. The coalition finally failed in 2002, and the Freedom Party lost more than half of its voters during the early election, gaining only 10 %. In contrast, the support of its traditional right-wing coalition partner, the People's Party, increased to 42 %. The Freedom Party split in two but failed to regain strength for years. However, the case of the Freedom Party also clearly shows that coalition building seems to be a successful tactic only in the short term. In recent years, the party has once again become one of the defining factors of Austrian political life.

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Minkenberg (2015): *Transforming the Transformation ? The East European radical right in the political process*, Routledge, New York

In **Slovakia**, the National Party re-entered the parliament in 2016, while in Poland, Law and Justice embodied national radicalism.<sup>22</sup> It is clear that a coalition formed with traditional parties can weaken the performance of the national radical parties in the short term, but over time, these parties may come back even stronger. Furthermore, if the given party ceases to exist, another party with a similar ideology may take over its place over time.

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<sup>22</sup> Ágh, A. (2015). Radical party system changes in five East-Central European states: Euro-sceptic and populist parties on the move in the 2010s. *Baltic Journal of Political Science*, (4), 23-48.

## 4. Deradicalisation or adaptation?

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As we can see, according to the literature, adaptation seems to be the most successful tactic against national radical parties. In light of this, the question legitimately arises as to how, over the last 20-30 years, it has been observed that the traditional right-wing parties increasingly resemble the national radical parties; that is, political life and the party system are shifting more and more to the right. Or, on the other hand, is it possible to observe a gradual decline of national radical parties in Europe? In their 2017 study, professors <sup>23</sup>Markus Wagner and Thomas M Meyer of the University of Vienna investigated exactly this question. In their research, they examined the programs of about 68 parties in 17 Western European countries <sup>24</sup>between 1980 and 2014 and concluded that the national radical parties did not moderate during this period, and instead, a shift to the right can be observed in the political life of most Western European countries.

The research measures radicalisation along two axes, a liberal-authoritarian and an economic left and right scale. On the first axis, questions such as how strict and authoritarian the given party is in policing, immigrants and cultural issues such as gay marriage or abortion are examined. On the economic scale, traditional right- and left-wing issues, such as redistribution or the degree of state involvement, were examined, but economic measures against immigrants and other populist measures in social policy were also examined separately. On the liberal-authoritarian scale, they found that 40 of the 53 examined traditional parties had a clear shift to the right over the past 30 years. This means that in 10 of the 17 countries examined, the shift to the right is clear; in five (Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden), the picture is mixed because, in addition to the national radical parties, the extreme left has also strengthened, and only in Ireland and Portugal was no evidence found, that a shift to the right would be perceptible on the liberal authoritarian axis.

On the economic scale, the situation is no longer so clear; here, out of the 53 traditional parties examined, a shift to the right was observed in 'only' 31 parties. This means that in 8 countries, a clear shift to the right can be

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<sup>23</sup> Wagner, Markus & Thomas M. Meyer (2017): The Radical Right as Niche Parties? The Ideological Landscape of Party Systems in Western Europe, 1980–2014, *Political Studies* 2017, Vol. 65(1S) pp. 84–107

<sup>24</sup> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, United Kingdom

observed in economic matters; in six, there is no evidence of this, and in three (Austria, Italy and Portugal), the picture is mixed. Comparing the two axes, a clear shift to the right can be observed in the party systems of most European countries in the last 30 years. According to the research, the median of left-wing parties on the authoritarian and liberal scale is the same as the median of national radical parties from the 80s. This is clear evidence of the extent to which mainstream parties, even left-wing parties, have taken over the programs of national radical parties over the past 30 years.

In contrast, we found no objective evidence that national radical parties have moderated their programs over the past 30 years. Moreover, to continue to maintain their niche position, uniqueness and competitiveness against traditional parties, most of these parties have moved even further to the right. This can be clearly seen on both axes: on the authoritarian liberal axis, a clear shift to the right can be observed in 12 of the 15 parties examined, while on the economic axis, it is only 11 out of 15 parties. According to the authors, starting from the 1980s, these parties have been acting more and more strongly against immigrants and are taking an increasingly radical position on the issues of the liberal authoritarian axis. Interestingly, despite their shift to the right, the percentage of votes cast for them has been steadily increasing in recent years, so there is also a demand from voters for a shift to the right.

We also hypothesised that, due to the populism of the national radical parties, economic issues would eventually take a backseat to symbolic issues on the liberal authoritarian scale. If the programs of the national radical parties put more and more emphasis on "hard" economic issues and less on symbolic cultural issues, this could also show their moderation. On the other hand, if traditional parties were to strengthen symbolic issues compared to economic issues, it could indicate the advance of populism. Interestingly, although the programs of the traditional right-wing parties have clearly featured more prominently in the programs of the traditional right-wing parties in the past 30 years, symbolic issues examined on the authoritarian liberal scale have not caused economic issues to take a back seat. Moreover, in 38 of the 53 examined traditional parties, economic issues appear more prominently in the party programs.

**The traditional parties tried to maintain their differences from the national radical parties, considered populist, by prioritising economic issues.** At the same time, 6 of the 15 national radical parties examined also gradually began to place more emphasis on economic issues, so the tactic of putting economic issues to the fore can be observed in almost half of the

national radical parties, who tried to create a more professional and moderate image of themselves. Thus, in addition to the clear shift to the right, the advance of populism is not clear for the time being; instead, it is only typical of a part of the national radical parties. At the same time, the fact that the majority of the national radical parties still do not place more emphasis on challenging economic issues and prefer to politicise with symbolic issues clearly shows that the moderation of the national radical parties cannot be observed in this measure either.

In their 2016 book, professors from the University of Amsterdam draw similar conclusions from a different approach.<sup>25</sup> Their work examined 16 European governments or government coalitions in which national radical parties participated since 1990. They proposed that, once in government, the national radical parties would moderate and lose their radicalism. This was the assumption only because many previous studies have shown that a significant moderation can be shown on the part of the various far-left and green parties if they come to government. **Compared to the left-wing parties, however, in their research, they found that national radical parties are not characterised by moderation, even if they participate in the government.** Evidence of moderation was discovered only in the Danish People's Party case, but further radicalisation was observed in the case of other parties. While some parties were in government, they moderated their policies somewhat, but this disappeared as soon as the party became the opposition again. There was also an example where **the attempt at moderation split the party; for example, the Alliance for the Future of Austria led by Jörg Haider was separated from the Austrian Freedom Party to take a more moderate direction.** However, as the history of the Alliance for the Future of Austria clearly shows, the new, more moderate direction always failed in the elections. Therefore, most national radical parties have concluded that moderation is not politically rewarding, as there is a significant risk.

However, according to the authors, this does not mean that the national radical parties have not changed in the last 25 years. For example, moderation can be observed in their economic policy. The majority of these parties replaced, or at least softened, their originally libertarian, pro-free market, anti-government policies in order to gain a broader voter base. A left-wing turn can be identified in their economic policy, but further radicalism in other issues, such as the rejection of immigration or Euroscepticism. **The national**

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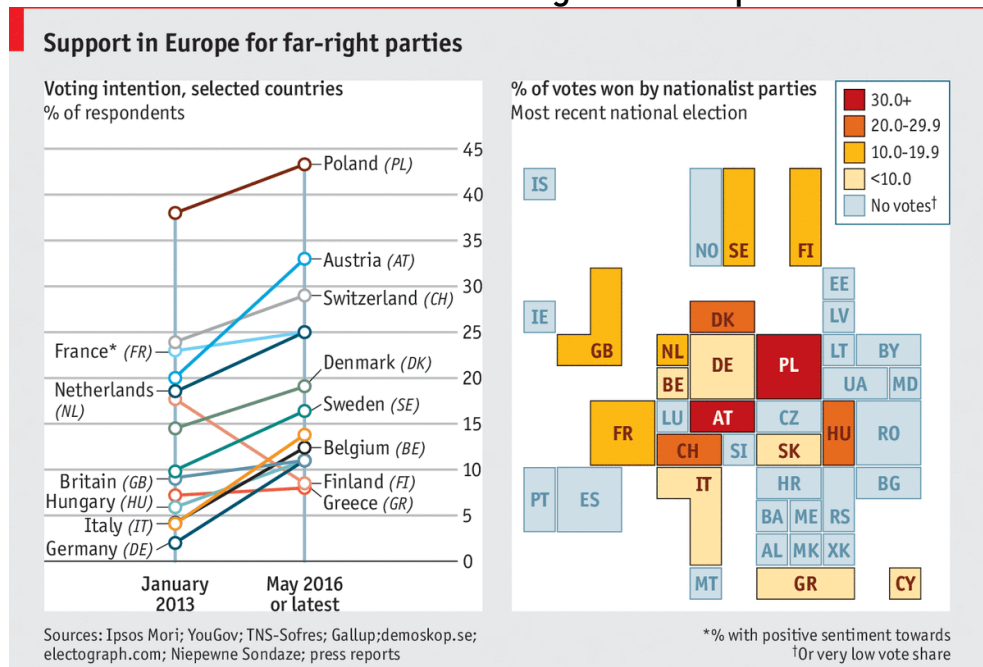
<sup>25</sup> Akkerman, T., de Lange, S.L. and Rooduijn, M. (2016): *Radical Right- Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe. Into the mainstream ?*, Routledge, New York



**radical parties have undergone significant professionalisation in the last two decades.** Due to this, they seem to have moderated, but this is mainly only true for their communication. **National radical parties have now learned how to distance themselves from far-right movements and Nazism properly.** In addition, they use a much more moderate tone and gestures in their statements. Their moderation is, therefore, partly a kind of communication strategy; however, when examining their programs, no moderation can be observed.

The European Union attitude surveys draw attention to the fact that since 2008, the distance between the median voters in the middle and the far-right voters has been getting smaller and smaller in most political issues. This is particularly true of Euroscepticism and immigration. According to their opinion, contrary to preliminary expectations, it is not extreme voters' moderation but the gradual radicalisation of the median moderate voters that can be observed in Western European countries.

## The rise of the far right in Europe



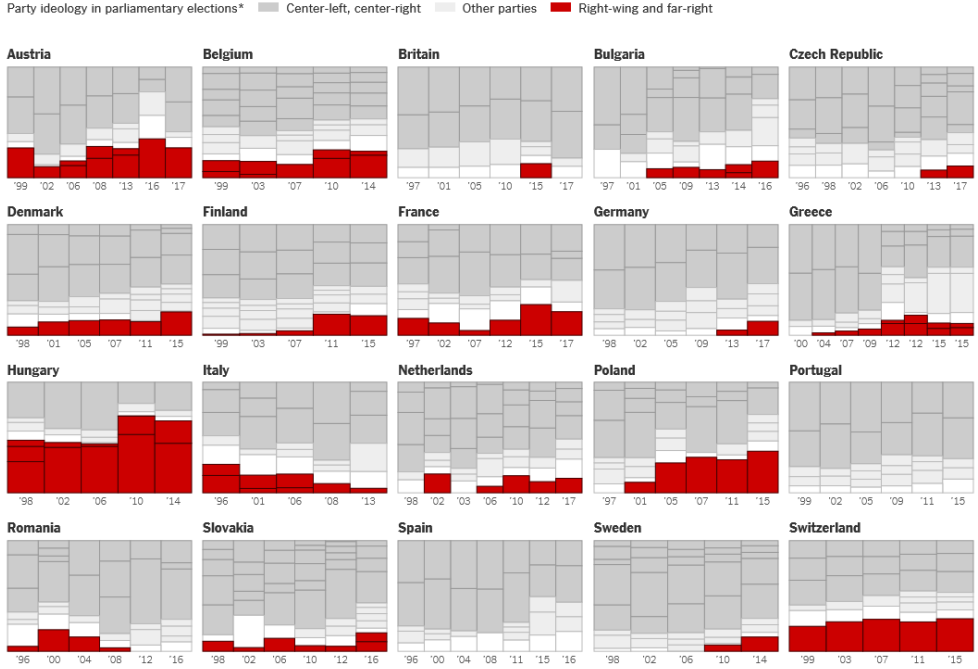
Economist.com

Source: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2016/05/24/the-rise-of-the-far-right-in-europe>

# 5. International outlook

The New York Times and Bloomberg's analysis of 22 EU countries at the end of 2017 also confirmed the gradual rise of national radical voters.<sup>26</sup> The decade-long election results show that **support for populist radical-right parties is higher than ever** in the last 30 years.

## Party ideology in parliamentary elections



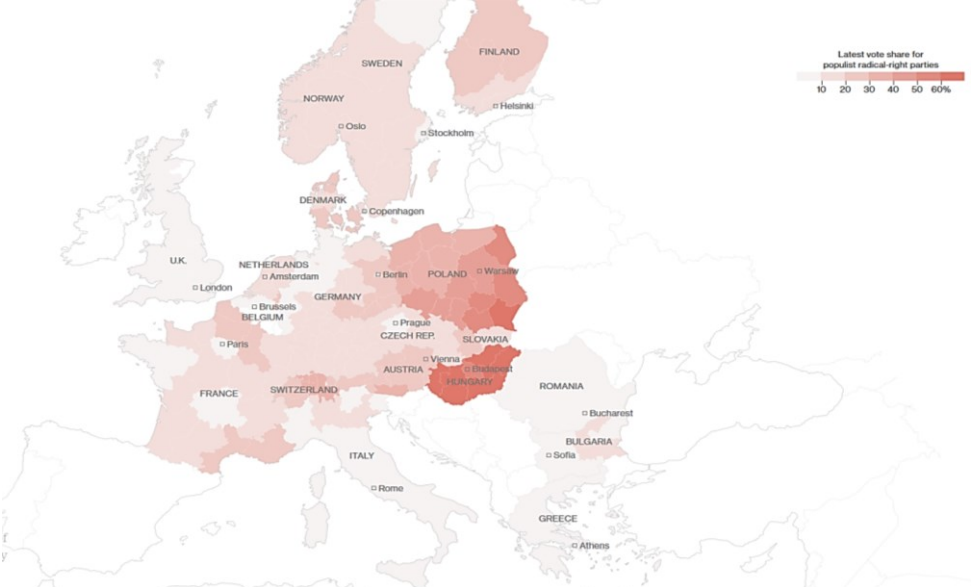
Source: Gregor Aisch, Adam Pearce and Bryant Rousseau: The New York Times (2017): How Far Is Europe Swinging to the Right?

In 2017, these parties achieved an average of 16 % in the last parliamentary elections in each country, 11 % more than a decade earlier. At the same time, the strengthening of national radicalism does not affect the continent's states equally. For example, the countries of the Iberian Peninsula were not affected at all, but in other Mediterranean countries, such as Italy and

<sup>26</sup> Andre Tartar (2017): How the Populist Right Is Redrawing the Map of Europe. Bloomberg, December 11, 2017 <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2017-europe-populist-right/>

Greece, the support of national radical parties remain(ed) minimal. Concerning the United Kingdom, however, attention is drawn to the fact that the weak electoral performance of the national radical UKIP is also because the conservative party took over the party's most crucial program points, somewhat becoming a national radical party itself in the process. In contrast, national radical parties are currently in power in Poland and Hungary. In the Scandinavian countries, especially Finland and Denmark, these parties enjoy more than 20 % support and sometimes even get into government. We can see the same in Austria and Switzerland, where national radical parties can also be important members of government coalitions. In addition to the above, it can be seen in France and the Netherlands that the national radical parties can achieve results of over 20 % in these countries. However, the coalition of the traditional parties has prevented the national radical parties from getting into government for the time being.

### Recent vote share for populist radical-right parties



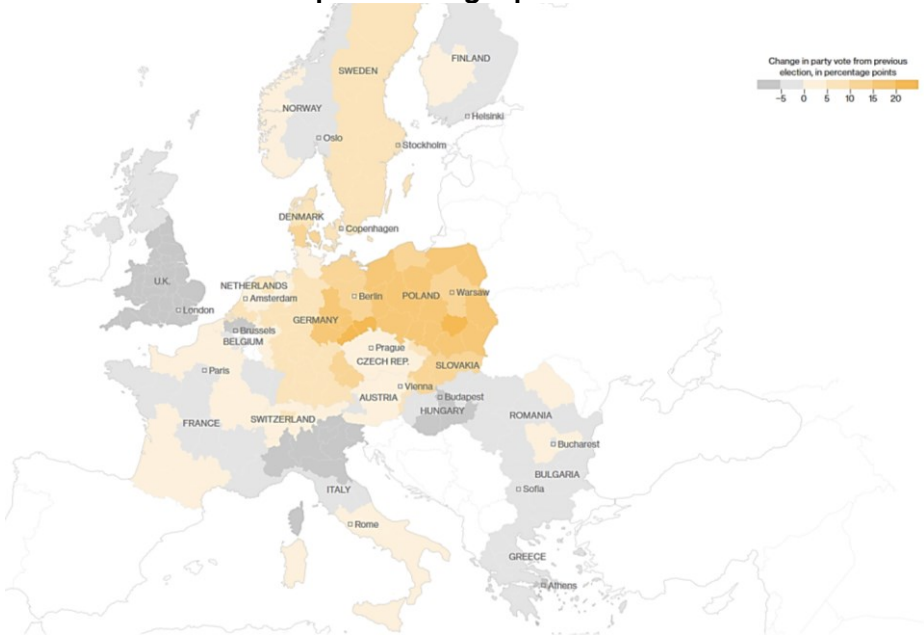
Source: Andre Tartar: How the Populist Right Is Redrawing the Map of Europe. Bloomberg, December 11, 2017

The analysis also examined in which countries the proportion of votes cast for national radical parties increased the most in the last decade. The share of votes cast for national radical parties increased the most in Poland and Germany, especially in East Germany, but the increase was also significant in the Netherlands, Denmark and Slovakia. On the other hand, the most

significant decrease can be observed in Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom, but in the latter case, we have already mentioned the real reasons for UKIP's weakening. There was also a significant decrease in Greece, Italy and Hungary. Finally, the authors also examined what could be behind the rise in popularity of national radical parties.

The regional breakdown clearly shows the highest correlation between anti-immigration and unemployment. So, overall, these parties tend to be successful in economically declining regions and regions with high immigration rates. Further growth is predicted for the national radical parties in the coming years. This is because, based on Eurobarometer surveys, anti-immigration is increasing in the European Union member states. The rejection of immigration is already around 50 % on average, but in the Central and Eastern European member states, for example, the rejection of immigration is over 70 %. In addition, about 40 % are sceptical about the future of the European Union and 20 % reject globalisation. It can be concluded that the national radical parties have the potential to grow, as they can appeal to a wide range of constituencies with their main messages.

### Changes in party votes compared to previous elections, in percentage points

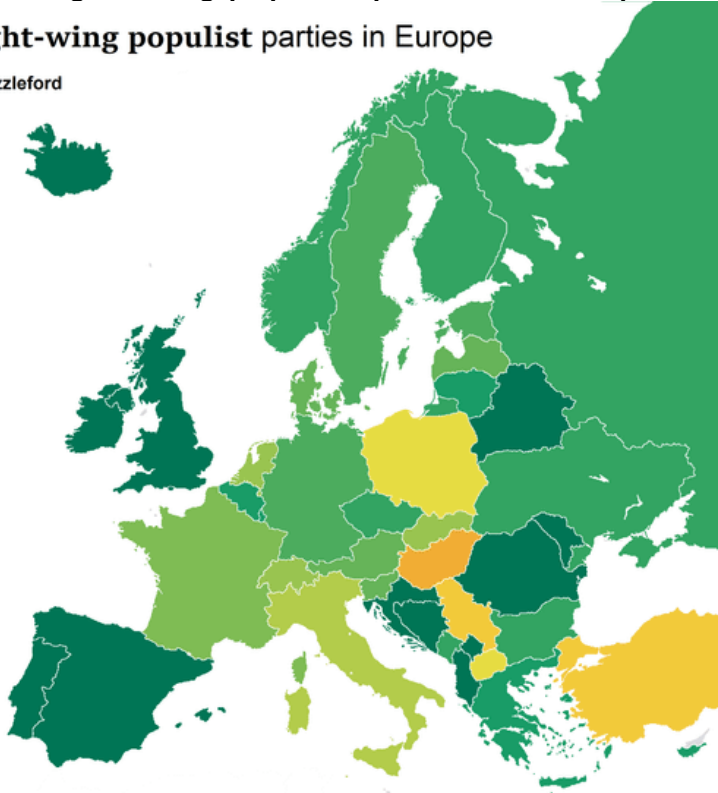
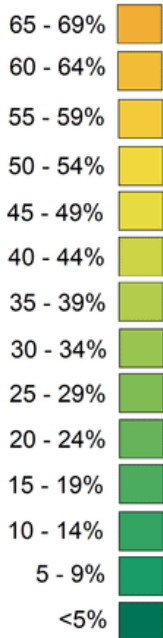


Source: Andre Tartar: How the Populist Right Is Redrawing the Map of Europe. Bloomberg, December 11, 2017

# Support for right-wing populist parties in Europe

Support for **right-wing populist** parties in Europe

(2018) map by bezzleford



## 6. Two practical examples

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Examining two recent European elections, the Czech and Austrian parliamentary elections, we can also see that the **most important campaign topics were immigration** and the relationship with the European Union.<sup>27</sup>

### 6.1. Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, according to preliminary surveys, the centre-right ANO led by former finance minister **Andrej Babiš** (Akce Nespokojených Občanů, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, but the abbreviation also means no in Czech) won the party. Babiš's main campaign theme was rejecting the EU quota policy and eliminating domestic political corruption. Babiš used to be more pro-EU, and as finance minister in 2013, he even supported the introduction of the euro.

At the same time, in this year's elections, he successfully recognised the Czech population's resentment towards specific EU policies. Although the Czech government has not officially rejected the EU's quota policy, **the country has not yet accepted sufficient immigrants**, so an infringement procedure was initiated against the country. Babiš took advantage of this during his campaign. It skilfully stated several times that he is not a Eurosceptic but that the **reform of the EU is necessary**. Tactically, he focused his criticism of the EU mainly on handling the migrant crisis, sharply rejecting the EU quota policy and strongly criticising Angela Merkel. According to his program, the EU did not prioritise good priorities by strengthening integration, external borders should be closed, and refugee camps should be set up in crisis zones.<sup>28</sup>

Even though there is a court case against Babiš for participating in corruption cases, he was also able to thematise the issue of corruption skillfully. He presented himself as the victim of the elite's smear campaign and argued that since he is considered one of the wealthiest people in the country, he

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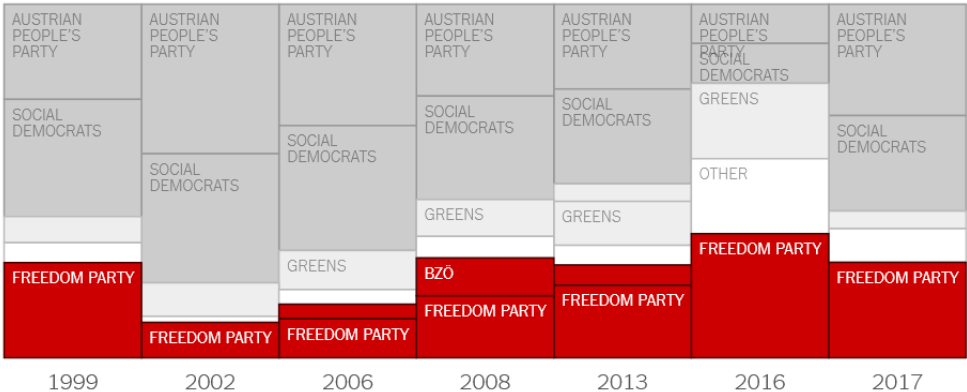
<sup>27</sup> Heinisch, R., & Saxonberg, S. (2017, October). Entrepreneurial populism and the radical centre: Examples from Austria and the Czech Republic. In *Political populism* (pp. 209-226). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.

<sup>28</sup> Havlík, V., & Voda, P. (2018). Cleavages, protest or voting for hope? The rise of centrist populist parties in the Czech Republic. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 24(2), 161-186.

could not be bribed. His electoral success shows that **he succeeded in diverting attention from his corruption cases.**

### 6.2.Austria

In Austria, although the national radical Freedom Party of Austria did not win the elections, the People's Party, which is considered a traditional right-wing party, however, during the campaign, the party strongly adopted themes from there. When the young foreign minister Sebastian **Kurz** became the head of the People's Party in May of this year, the party was only in third place in public opinion polls. Thus, under his leadership, **the party grew by more than 10 % over the period of 5 months.** He skillfully recognised that immigration is the most important topic in the country at the moment.<sup>29</sup>



Source: Gregor Aisch, Adam Pearce and Bryant Rousseau: The New York Times (2017): How Far Is Europe Swinging to the Right?

While in 2015, only 24 % of Austrians believed that the country's most important political challenge was the **management of immigration, this number jumped to 77 % at the beginning of 2017.** Kurz was able to recognise this tendency, although he had previously been relatively moderate. In 2012, he created an initiative called Islamic Dialogue, in which they wanted to create a European Islam and supported the idea that Muslims could learn in their own language and from their own imams and that halal meals

<sup>29</sup> Backes, U. (2018). The radical right in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, 1.

were provided in schools. Realising that the majority of the population does not support this, Kurz turned in a new direction.

Thus, during the campaign, he already campaigned **by strengthening border protection, reforming the asylum system**, deporting illegal immigrants, and cutting social benefits for immigrants. He was also fond of using the term **political Islam**, which he believed to be the greatest threat to Europe today. He also limited his **enemies of the EU to rejecting the quota** and migrant policy; otherwise, he made statements in favour of the EU. However, he accused Brussels of risking the future of the EU precisely by supporting and strengthening migration.



## Conclusions, suggestions

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The phenomenon of national radicalism has gained substantial traction and success in numerous countries, including within the political landscape of the speaker's own country. This political approach, often accompanied by populism, effectively addresses and highlights specific issues and challenges, with a notable focus on immigration in the context of Central Europe.

National radical parties have evolved over the past two decades, experiencing significant professionalisation. While their communication strategies have become more moderate, especially in distancing themselves from far-right movements and Nazism, a closer examination of their programs reveals a persistent lack of moderation. Proper communication has led to a more moderate public image, especially in distancing themselves from extreme ideologies, while their core ideologies may remain unchanged.

Ideologically, these parties defy easy categorisation within the traditional left-right political spectrum and have expanded their voter base from lower-middle-class rural entrepreneurs and intellectuals to include a growing presence among the working class and the poorest members of society.

The heterogeneous composition of the electoral camp suggests that specific key topics will continue to be prominent. Anti-immigration and border protection, framed within the context of preserving national cultural values, remain central themes. Additionally, the concept of adequate incomes, uniform minimal wages, and equality serves as both a critique of the European Union and a cornerstone of the welfare state and economic policy. This proposal aims to address economic inequalities, foster solidarity, and mitigate competition issues between small and large enterprises.

Moreover, the fight against corruption remains a pivotal aspect of these parties' platforms, emphasising the leaders' detachment and insensitivity to social problems. In navigating the complex landscape of national radicalism, it is crucial to recognise the subjective nature of classifying parties as "successful" or "radical," acknowledging the variability in public perception and party success. Overall, the interplay of communication strategies, evolving voter bases, and the nuanced ideological positioning of national radical parties adds complexity to their role in shaping political discourse and policy agendas.

Policymakers and voters should conduct thorough analyses of the policy programs of radical and populist parties to understand their actual positions and potential impacts. This goes beyond the surface-level communication strategies that may project a more moderate image. Promoting informed public discourse and civic education can help citizens critically evaluate political messages. Understanding the complexities of political ideologies and the potential consequences of supporting radical or populist movements is essential for a healthy democratic society.

Given the transnational nature of some populist and radical movements, international collaboration and dialogue among nations can help address common challenges. Shared strategies and coordinated efforts may be more effective in managing issues that these parties frequently highlight, such as immigration.

In navigating the political landscape shaped by radical and populist parties, a nuanced and well-informed approach is crucial to maintaining the health and stability of democratic institutions. Balancing the acknowledgment of legitimate concerns with a commitment to democratic values and inclusivity is key to addressing the complex challenges posed by these political movements.

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