THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN EUROPE AND ONTOLOGICAL (IN)SECURITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW ZEALAND-EUROPE RELATIONS

Cameron Grigg and Ayca Arkilic

Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Corresponding author email: ayca.arkilic@vuw.ac.nz

Abstract

The rise of far-right parties across Europe has changed national and supranational politics across the continent, challenging democratic norms and mainstream political culture. Meanwhile, countries around the world – including New Zealand – consider how this trend may affect them. This article uses ontological security as its primary analytical tool. It argues that the far-right is rising in Europe because European Union integration, economic inequality and rapid socio-cultural change (demand conditions) have created ontological insecurity in Europe that far-right parties exacerbate and exploit through favourable electoral systems, strategic nativist ideology and the mutually reinforcing dynamic of charismatic party leaders and the media (supply conditions). The far-right blames non-European migrants, ethnic minorities, and the political establishment for ontological insecurity and re-interprets collective memory to promote a return to a culturally homogenous past society with themselves as leaders. This article concludes by considering the implications of this development for European democracy and the future of New Zealand's relations with the European continent. In particular, we argue that if the European far-right gains greater prominence through electoral authority, its adoption of nativist ideology will likely conflict with New Zealand's ongoing commitment to human rights and the values of tolerance and acceptance, as it, too, seeks its own ontological security. The concern, therefore, for the future of New Zealand-European relations from an ontological security perspective is that the ascent of the far-right in Europe will cause and create a 'clash of values'.

Keywords: Far-right, Europe, ontological security, nativism, New Zealand

Introduction

The far-right started to show electoral gains in Europe as early as the 1980s,[1] building on the neo-fascist organisations of the 1940s and 1950s and the right-wing populism of the 1950s and 1960s.[2] Yet, it has enjoyed even greater electoral success in recent years, with multiple significant victories that have changed Europe's political landscape.[3] Parties across the European political spectrum now face genuine electoral competition from an entrenched far-right, whose voters view them as an attractive alternative to the previously dominant Christian Democrat and Conservative blocs.[4] In 2024 alone, Austria's Freedom Party, Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD) and France's National Rally all had victories in national and local elections.[5] In the June 2024 European Parliament elections, too, far-right parties won roughly a quarter of the vote, furthering their earlier electoral gains in 2014 and 2019.[6] This article first explains the reasons behind the rise of far-right parties in Europe. It then looks at the impact of this trend on democracy in Europe and on the future of Aotearoa New Zealand's (hereafter New Zealand) foreign relations with European countries and the European Union (EU).

---

[1] Terri Givens, *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[2] Andreu Barnils, "Cas Mudde: 'The far right is normalized,'" CCCB Lab, July 18, 2023, https://lab.cccb.org/en/cas-mudde-the-far-right-is-normalised/

[3] European Parliament, "Home | 2024 European Election Results | European Union | European Parliament," European Parliament, July 23, 2024, https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/index.html; Hanne Cokelaere and Aitor Harnandez-Morales. "Election analysis reveals right-wing surge across Europe," Politico, May 20, 2025. https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-also-won-sunday-election-europe-romania-portugal-poland/; Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, "Introduction: How the Far Right Came into Being," in *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2017), 1–52, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv24w63mn.3.

[4] Trevor J. Allen, "Exit to the Right? Comparing Far Right Voters and Abstainers in Western Europe," *Electoral Studies* 50 (December 2017): 103–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.09.012.

[5] Richard Wike, Moira Fagan, and Laura Clancy, "Global Elections in 2024: What We Learned in a Year of Political Disruption," Pew Research Center, December 11, 2024.

[6] Cas Mudde, "The 2024 EU Elections: Far Right at the Polls," *Journal of Democracy* 35, no. 4 (October 2024): 121–134.

Many attribute the far-right's worldwide appeal to general trends of global politics, with some arguing that the world is generally becoming more normatively conservative.[7] Others take a more pragmatic stance, claiming that depressed economic conditions, rampant inflation, geopolitical and migrant crises, as well as political alienation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, have created an environment that has contributed to the growing success of far-right parties.[8] The year 2024 saw sitting governments around the world, whether on the left or on the right, lose their legislative majorities and executive offices.[9] In this sense, far-right success represents more of an indictment of mainstream politics than it does an endorsement of the people and policies that drive far-right movements.[10] While these parties are not always able to become a part of coalition governments,[11] as in the case of Austria, their overall success in Europe is worth exploring. Recent polling suggests that far-right parties are now the most popular parties in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and are surging in popularity in Romania and Poland.[12]

[7] Katharina Buchholz, "Worldwide Value Shift?," Statista Daily Data (Statista, November 7, 2024), https://www.statista.com/chart/33431/turning-more-conservative-progressive/.

[8] Janakee Chavda, "Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People around the World Are Critical of How It's Working," Pew Research Center, February 28, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/#many-don-t-think-political-parties-represent-them.

[9] David Rising, Jill Lawless, and Nicholas Riccardi, "The 'Super Year' of Elections Has Been Super Bad for Incumbents as Voters Punish Them in Droves," AP News, November 17, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/global-elections-2024-incumbents-defeated-c80fbd4e667de86fe08aac025b333f95.

[10] Attila Mráz, "Are Far-Right Ballots Protest Votes?," Green European Journal, 2024, https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/are-far-right-ballots-protest-votes/.

[11] Wouter Van Der Brug, Meindert Fennema, and Jean Tillie, "Why Some Anti-Immigrant Parties Fail and Others Succeed," *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 5 (June 2005): 537–73, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414004273928.

[12] Alexander Smith, "Far-Right Populists Top Polls in Germany, France and Britain for the First Time," NBC News, August 13, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/world/europe/far-right-populists-top-polls-germany-france-britain-first-time-rcna224706; Hanne Cokelaere and Aitor Harnandez-Morales. "Election analysis reveals right-wing surge across Europe."

There is ongoing academic debate about the meaning of "far-right", and a consensus definition remains elusive.[13] Even among scholars of European politics, determining common characteristics is not as straightforward as one may suspect; in recent years, the terms "radical right", "far-right" and "populist radical right" have been used interchangeably.[14] In this study, we define far-right parties as those characterised by their nativism, which rejects 'alien' persons and ideas from their conception of the nation state,[15] and assumes that the nation should only be composed of those who are native to it.[16] This means that the most important individual-level predictor of a vote for the far-right is one's opinions on immigration and immigrants, which often come with Islamophobic ideology and arguments for harsher treatment of immigrants and refugees.[17] Cas Mudde notes that another important feature of these parties is their authoritarianism, in the sense that commitment to law and order, as well as concerns about security, crime, and terrorism, are essential considerations for voters.[18] According to Mudde, nativism has been the dominant force in far-right success following three crises: the 9/11 attacks executed by Al-Qaeda, the 2008 global recession that promoted economic nationalism and welfare chauvinism, and the European refugee crisis of 2015.[19]

European far-right parties' voter base is now very diverse, including the young, women, LGBTQ people, and white-collar workers. This represents a stark contrast to the violent militants of the 1940s or caucasian blue-collar workers of the 1980s. What today's voters share in

[13] Jasper Muis and Tim Immerzeel, "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe," *Current Sociology* 65, no. 6 (July 14, 2017): 909–30.

[14] Jasper Muis and Tim Immerzeel, "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe."

[15] Cas Mudde (2007) as cited in Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Andrea Pirro, "The far right as social movement," *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (2019), p. 447.

[16] Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[17] Nicholas Bichay, "Converging to the mean? Moderating ideologies of far-right and far-left parties in government," *Party Politics* (2025), https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688251339632

[18] Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*.

[19] Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

common is their position against immigration, multicultural societies, and feelings about cultural backlash.[20]

This article uses ontological security (OS) as an analytical tool for understanding the far-right's success in Europe. OS refers to the sense of stability, continuity and predictability that individuals, groups and states seek in their identities and relationships with others.[21] Using this as the article's theoretical underpinning, we then argue that whilst so-called demand and supply conditions explain the far-right's rise, its recent successes are also evidence of a significant challenge to Europe's OS. The far-right is rising in Europe because EU integration, economic inequality and perceived rapid socio-cultural change (demand conditions) have created ontological insecurity in Europe that far-right parties exacerbate and exploit through favourable electoral systems, strategic ideological positioning and the mutually reinforcing dynamic of charismatic party leaders and the media (supply conditions). In line with nativist, racist ideology, the far-right instrumentally constructs these insecurities to create "us versus them' divisions and attract votes. It blames migrants (or other ethnic minorities in the case of post-communist states) and the political establishment for European ontological insecurity and deploys a glorified re-interpretation of collective memory to promote a return to a culturally homogenous past society with themselves as leaders.[22] This article concludes by considering the potential effects of the

---

[20] Andre Barnils, "Cas Mudde: 'The far right is normalized,'" CCCB Lab, July 18, 2023, https://lab.cccb.org/en/cas-mudde-the-far-right-is-normalised/

[21] Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (July 11, 2016): 3–11, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653162.

[22] Dalya Soffer, "The Use of Collective Memory in the Populist Messaging of Marine Le Pen," *Journal of European Studies* 52, no. 1 (February 17, 2022): 69–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/00472441211072619; Helga K. Hallgrimsdottir, Ari Finnsson, and Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, "Austerity Talk and Crisis Narratives: Memory Politics, Xenophobia, and Citizenship in the European Union," *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (March 13, 2020), https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00014.

rise of the far-right on democracy in Europe and on New Zealand's future relationship with
Europe.

Ontological Security: A Theory of Identity

OS is a subset of the constructivist tradition of international relations. It has experienced a
resurgence of interest in recent years as scholars seek more nuanced insights into political
phenomena that realism or constructivism alone cannot provide.[23] OS refers to the security of
self and identity that political actors enjoy through the continuity, predictability and
completeness of their external relationships, self-narratives and identity.[24] Within this
framework, identity is a product of direct political action and the actor's relative position in the
anarchic arena of nation-states. For example, a state's self-appointed identity as just, moral or
benevolent may be reinforced by positive actions that support this perception, such as supporting
allies against 'unjust' military aggressors or receiving refugees in times of global crises.[25]
Similarly, since these actions may improve the state's relative position among its peers in a
material – or even subjectively moral – sense, identity is created and reinforced through a state's
interactions with the international system and its various state and non-state actors.[26]

If these relationships and self-narratives experience sufficient external shock or
uncertainty, actors become (or act as though they are) ontologically insecure as they grapple with
their perceived loss of agency, forming different relationships and constructing new self-

---

[23] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European
Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346.
[24] Brent J. Steele, "Introduction," in *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*
(New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–26.
[25] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma, 341–70.
[26] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma, 341–70.

narratives.[27] In times of particular trouble and shock, this can spiral into anxiety, paralysis or violence.[28] For example, Pan and Korolev found that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated China and Australia's deteriorating relationship as both states sought OS during unprecedented uncertainty.[29] In this way, Australia's increasingly confrontational policy towards China and China's retaliatory nationalism were underpinned by each state's rigid self-narratives and their respective desires to maintain or improve their position in the global system.

The value of OS is its simultaneous acceptance of realism's reverence for material power and the acknowledgment that outcomes often depend on how that power is wielded socially.[30] In this way, OS can also be used to gain insight into the behaviours of actors across all levels of politics. At the individual level in particular, OS is intrinsically connected to temporal continuity and change. As citizens engage in self-reflective conversations with their collective memory, they instrumentalise the past to validate policies, positions, and their sense of how their nation should be and function.[31] They do this by drawing parallels between the past and present to evidence why the present is normatively 'better' or 'worse' than before. This may strengthen or challenge individual OS, depending on how the past is used and remembered. Actors may then justify perspectives and policies that attempt to either bring the state closer to or further from its collective past, depending on how the nation's identity is remembered in the collective

---

[27] Catarine Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics," 3–11.

[28] Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics," 3–11.

[29] Guangyi Pan and Alexander Korolev, "The Struggle for Certainty: Ontological Security, the Rise of Nationalism, and Australia-China Tensions after COVID-19," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 26, no. 1 (January 5, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09710-7.

[30] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," 341–70.

[31] Kathrin Bachleitner, "Ontological Security as Temporal Security? The Role of 'Significant Historical Others' in World Politics," *International Relations* 37, no. 1 (September 9, 2021): 25–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178211045624.

consciousness.[32] In particular, OS helps analyse how "the divisionary politics of populism is fostered by narratives of crisis and insecurity surrounding the imagined Self that gives shape to 'the people' that populism claims to represent", as well as how political parties and their leaders have been "propped up by a discourse that antagonises established political elites on behalf of a reified, and homogenised people."[33]

Drawing from the relevant scholarship on Europe, Bello and Torner look at the claims of the Italian and Spanish far-right parties in 2022 and 2023 to show "how discourses of ontological securities are presented as threats posed by alterities to national majorities".[34] For the Italian and Spanish far-right, they argue, scapegoating of the alterities (in this case, political and cultural enemies, such as the US liberal system, religious minorities, the EU and migrants) is linked to securitisation, and allows the far-right to thrive.[35] Kaunert et al. similarly examine how far-right parties within Europe have exploited the 2015 refugee crisis to trigger fear and insecurity, which have in turn shaped the European identity crisis.[36] Terrorism has also often been manipulated as an existential threat and influenced how European leaders have positioned themselves in Europe's understanding of the 'self' and of 'others'.[37] In these ways, the far-right constructs both Europe's enemies (ethnic minorities, non-European migrants and EU elites) to ontologically

---

[32] Kathrin Bachleitner, "Ontological Security as Temporal Security? The Role of 'Significant Historical Others' in World Politics," 25–47.

[33] Brent J. Steele and Alexandra Homolar, *Ontological Insecurities and the Politics of Contemporary Populism* (New York: Routledge, 2023), p. 1.

[34] Valeria Bello, and Andreu Torner, "The paradox of ontological security in far-right narratives and the securitization of identified alterities: the cases of Spain and Italy," *International Politics* (2025), https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00652-y, p. 1.

[35] Valeria Bello, and Andreu Torner, "The paradox of ontological security in far-right narratives and the securitization of identified alterities: the cases of Spain and Italy."

[36] Christian Kaunert, Joana de Deus Pereira, and Mike Edwards. "Thick Europe, ontological security and parochial Europe: the re-emergence of far-right extremism and terrorism after the refugee crisis of 2015." In *Transforming Europe Through Crises*, 42–61. New York: Routledge, 2022.

[37] Joana de Deus Pereira and Christian Kaunert, 'The high representative's role in EU countering terrorism: policy entrepreneurship and thick, thin and global Europe', European Politics and Society 23, no .1, 2020, 1–21. doi: 10.1080/23745118.2020.1842695.

distance Europeans from their sense of identity, but also a hypothetical, culturally homogenous ideal alternative society where these issues are absent. This combination provides the space for nativist political ideology to flourish, as voters perceive non-European migrants or ethnic minorities as reasons for their recent relative decline.

Demand Conditions: Creating Ontological Insecurity

We argue that structural demand conditions have created ontological insecurity in Europe that the far-right exploits. Some of these conditions are genuine grievances that engender far-right support, such as EU integration,[38] economic inequality,[39] and perceived rapid socio-cultural change brought on by non-European immigration.[40] Far-right politicians then suggest a nativist explanation where the loss of the 'homogeneous' and 'pure' society can be attributed to the combination of these issues.

The first demand condition that has created an ontologically insecure Europe is EU integration. Vasilopoulou and Zur argue that European integration is one of the most salient issues for far-right voters.[41] This is because the existence and scope of the EU as a supranational polity has caused significant division between supporters and sceptics, who often view the issue as a zero-sum problem.[42] Political figures in favour of the EU, such as French President Emmanuel Macron, consider greater integration to be integral to Europe's success in the future

---

[38] Sofia Vasilopoulou and Roi Zur, "Electoral Competition, the EU Issue and Far-Right Success in Western Europe," *Political Behavior* 46 (December 16, 2022): 565–85, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09841-y.
[39] Jana Lipps and Dominik Schraff, "Regional Inequality and Institutional Trust in Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 60, no. 4 (December 11, 2020): 892–913, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12430.
[40] Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," *Annual Review of Political Science* 19, no. 1 (May 11, 2016): 477–97, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042814-012441.
[41] Sofia Vasilopoulou and Roi Zur, "Electoral Competition, the EU Issue and Far-Right Success in Western Europe," *Political Behavior* 46 (December 16, 2022): 565–85, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09841-y.
[42] Sofia Vasilopoulou and Roi Zur, "Electoral Competition, the EU Issue and Far-Right Success in Western Europe," 565–85.

multipolar system.[43] Conversely, Eurosceptics advocate the complete dismantling of the

European project and the 'reclaiming' of national sovereignty and governance by the purely

European nation state.[44] This dichotomy has proved very useful for the far-right, who suggest a

different conception of Europe and approaches to European cooperation.[45] That said, other

scholars caution that while most far-right parties tend to criticise the EU or European integration,

they are not always 'anti-European' or against all forms of European cooperation.[46]

The distance between these differing perspectives on integration is felt most strongly at

the level of the individual European voter. Deepening integration fosters a greater collective

conscience and a sense of a 'common Europe' for Europeans who are able to participate in the

European project.[47] These Europeans have the means to exploit and benefit from the EU's free

movement of goods, services, capital and people to further advance their social and economic

opportunities. However, those with more limited perceived – or actual – economic and political

opportunities (especially when compared to previous generations) are more likely to develop the

ethno-nationalist, exclusionist identities that foster far-right support generally and nativism

specifically.[48] These citizens view integration as culturally and economically beneficial to

---

[43] Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," 477–97.

[44] Patrick Bijsmans, "The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press," *Journal of European Integration* 43, no. 3 (March 30, 2020): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1740698.

[45] Vasilopoulou and Zur, "Electoral Competition, the EU Issue and Far-Right Success in Western Europe," 565–585.

[46] Stijn van Kessel, "Populism, the far right and EU integration: beyond simple dichotomies," *Journal of European Integration* 47, no. 1 (2025): 127–133.

[47] Alina Polyakova and Neil Fligstein, "Is European Integration Causing Europe to Become More Nationalist? Evidence from the 2007–9 Financial Crisis," *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 1 (September 18, 2015): 60–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1080286.

[48] Alina Polyakova and Neil Fligstein, "Is European Integration Causing Europe to Become More Nationalist? Evidence from the 2007–9 Financial Crisis," 60–83.

'outgroups' – most commonly non-European migrants or ethnic minorities – at the expense of European natives.[49]

This resentment has a destabilising effect on the way that these Europeans view themselves and the European identity, as they perceive the foreign (usually Muslim) 'other' to be disproportionately benefiting from the societies that their ethnically European forebears created. In protest of these perceived inequalities, some communities respond by endorsing an "alt-Europe" identity characterised by xenophobic, exclusionary ideals that prefer national sovereignty over integration to protect ethno-Christian European civilisation.[50] Spurred by the increasing atomisation of insular modern communities, these 'underprivileged natives' hold the EU responsible for the unfair distribution of resources to elites and predominantly Muslim migrants, which is where nativism and ideology coalesce.[51] In this way, European integration provides an easy explanation for the perceived preference by political elites of non-European migrants, shocking European OS and creating an opportunity for a nativist, exclusionary ideology to emerge in response.

This ontological insecurity is exacerbated by increasing economic inequality across the European continent, but more importantly, regional inequalities among social groups within the same country or area. Amidst poor global economic performance in recent years, income inequality has posed significant challenges for states across Europe. As of 2021, the top 10% of households received over 35% of European income, whereas the bottom 50% received only

[49] Edina Szöcsik and Alina Polyakova, "Euroscepticism and the Electoral Success of the Far Right: The Role of the Strategic Interaction between Center and Far Right," *European Political Science* 18 (May 2, 2018): 400–420, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-018-0162-y.

[50] Richard McMahon, "Is Alt-Europe Possible? Populist Radical Right Counternarratives of European Integration," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 1 (May 4, 2021): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1919865.

[51] Michael Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity," *Government and Opposition* 35, no. 2 (April 2000): 170–88, https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00022.

19%.[52] Regional differences are similarly substantial, with the top 10% of eastern Europeans earning nearly 40% of the income, compared to only 17% for the bottom half. This is essential context given Lipps and Schraff's recent findings that economically depressed European regions and sub-national areas have less trust in both national and EU institutions.[53] In this way, economic inequality operates as a proxy for general political distrust as disenfranchised Europeans attempt to rationalise actual or perceived reductions in wealth and living standards. This improves the appeal of the far-right for relatively poor Europeans, who believe that their relative decline is benefiting non-European migrants at their expense, and for whom distrust in political institutions becomes a core electoral issue.[54]

Studies on labour market insecurity and relative deprivation support this analysis, also showing thatfar-right parties within the same country or region appeal to voters in the lower middle of the income distribution and who perceive themselves to have lagged in terms of social status and relative income when compared to previous generations. This is the demographic that once saw itself as belonging to the wealthy middle class and whose status, both at the global and national level, has declined in a relative sense. This represents a further distancing from the past that exacerbates the insecurity that these voters feel because of integration.[55] The perceived preference for non-European 'outgroups', combined with the relative decline of the middle class, further promotes the belief that Europe, on its current trajectory, is departing from its core ethno-European identity. As this permeates among these relatively poor Europeans, it becomes only too

[52] Theresa Neef and Alice Sodano, "Inequality Trends in Europe" (World Inequality Lab, 2022), https://wid.world/document/inequality-trends-in-europe-world-inequality-lab-issue-brief-2022-04/.
[53] Jana Lipps and Dominik Schraff, "Regional Inequality and Institutional Trust in Europe," 892–913.
[54] Trevor J. Allen, "Exit to the Right? Comparing Far Right Voters and Abstainers in Western Europe, 103–15.
[55] Noam Gidron, and Peter A. Hall, "The politics of social status: Economic and cultural roots of the populist right," *British Journal of Sociology*, 68, no. 1 (2019): 57–84.

easy for nativist ideology to take hold as these citizens search for a return to a 'simpler' time when competition over resources with 'outgroups' was of no concern.

These feelings of frustration and resentment are closely linked to perceptions of relative deprivation, particularly in rural areas (such as in Britain) that have experienced de-industrialisation. In these areas, especially, migrants, as well as racial and religious minorities, often become scapegoats when competition for welfare or other government benefits becomes tense. Far-right leaders then criticise the political elites or the 'establishment' using undeserving beneficiary rhetoric.[56] In terms of domestic economic disparities, scholars note that core EU member states experience much greater inter-regional economic disparities than peripheral EU member states, meaning that Europeans in such core states feel the relative decline (and resulting ontological insecurity) more strongly than Europeans generally.[57]

This electoral response is by no means unusual. Sub-national 'ingroups' compete with 'outgroups' over the distribution of scarce resources in various contexts.[58] Since these distributions are inevitably unequal, competing groups develop mutual prejudices that create division and antagonism.[59] As noted above, native European 'ingroups' believe that they are competing with migrant or ethnic minority 'outgroups' over the distribution of limited resources like employment, housing and welfare support.[60] This competition is a novel experience for these Europeans, as they believe that previous generations had an easier, more secure and predictable

[56] Dominik Schraff, and Jonas Pontusson, "Falling behind whom? Economic geographies of right-wing populism in Europe," *Journal of European Public Policy* 31, no. 6 (2024): 1591–1619.

[57] Dominik Schraff, and Jonas Pontusson, "Falling behind whom? Economic geographies of right-wing populism in Europe," 1591–1619.

[58] Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," 477–97.

[59] Inge Hendriks, Marcel Lubbers, and Peer Scheepers, "Individual Change in Rejection of Equal Opportunities for Foreigners among Adolescents and Young Adults in Switzerland: Testing Realistic Conflict Theory from a Dynamic Perspective," *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 2 (February 7, 2024): e0296883, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296883.

[60] Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," 477–97.

trajectory in life, without such competition. This sense of unfairness perpetuates ontological

insecurity as these Europeans seek to remove competition, simplify their lives and improve their

position by adopting nativist ideology that seeks to exclude non-European (primarily Muslim)

migrants to their own perceived benefit.

As some non-European immigrants obtain equal political agency to ethnic European

'ingroups' through citizenship and voting rights, their share of the electorate increases and

improves their ability to support policies that allocate scarce resources in a self-interested way.[61]

This fosters a further sense of resentment and frustration among disenfranchised ethnic

Europeans, who perceive the increasing relative position of migrants as diverting resources away

from themselves, so creating the perspective that immigrant 'outgroups' represent not only a net

social cost, but one which is occurring at the expense of 'real' ethnic Europeans. This dynamic is

perhaps most notable in the German context, where support for AfD has steadily increased in

recent years. Having won the majority of seats in the 2024 state election in Thuringia,[62] AfD

secured an historic 20.6% of the vote in the 2025 federal election, becoming the second-largest

party in the Bundestag and arguably the most influential far-right party in Europe.[63] In addition

to anti-immigration and Eurosceptic attitudes,[64] welfare chauvinism is another important

contributor to AfD's success.[65] This perspective fosters the belief that migrant 'outgroups' are

favoured by the 'elites' in mainstream politics, thereby widening the gap that native Germans

[61] Rafaela M. Dancygier, "A Theory of Immigrant Conflict," in *Immigration and Conflict in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 21–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511762734.002.

[62] Wahlen Thüringen, "Wahlen Im Freistaat Thüringen," Wahlen im Freistaat Thüringen, 2024, https://wahlen.thueringen.de/datenbank/wahl1/wahl.asp?wahlart=LW&wJahr=2024&zeigeErg=Landhttps://wahlen.thueringen.de/datenbank/wahl1/wahl.asp?wahlart=LW&wJahr=2024&zeigeErg=Land.

[63] The Federal Returning Officer, "Bundestag Election 2025," The Federal Returning Officer, 2025, https://bundeswahlleiterin.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2025/ergebnisse/bund-99.html;

[64] Kai Arzheimer, "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?," *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (January 28, 2015): 535–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1004230.

[65] Michael Hüther and Matthias Diermeier, "Perception and Reality—Economic Inequality as a Driver of Populism?," *Analyse & Kritik* 41, no. 2 (November 1, 2019): 337–58, https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2019-0021.

feel from their collective past, where such 'outgroups' posed no competition. This furthers German ontological insecurity and increases the likelihood of developing sympathies for the anti-immigration, nativist policies offered by AfD.

The final demand condition that entrenches and underpins European ontological insecurity is perceived rapid socio-cultural change. In 2015, Europe received 1.3 million asylum applications, the majority of which came from Muslim-majority countries. This was an increase from 269,000 in 2010 andwas fueled by the 2015 refugee crisis.[66] This has been a particular point of consternation among far-right movements, who view the differing cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic identities that Muslim migrants bring as threatening not only Europe's economic middle class but also the fabric of its socio-cultural identity. This is because individuals both tend to prefer association with people who share common group characteristics, such as religion, race, language and culture, and view their own groups as superior to others.[67] Since these groups seek to positively distinguish themselves from those they deem inferior, negative perceptions of non-conforming 'outgroups' arise. This further creates inter-group tension, resulting in prejudices that promote ontological instability and, in the case of ethnic-Europeans, nativist reactions.[68]

Recent research on Switzerland and other European countries shows that these differing identity characteristics have created a new electoral cleavage within European countries.[69] It is perhaps unsurprising to students of global politics that the 'new left' and 'far-right' now exist on

---

[66] Pew Research Center, "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015," Pew Research Center, August 2, 2016, http://pewrsr.ch/2asMQLh.
[67] Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," 477–97.
[68] Simon Bornschier et al., "How 'Us' and 'Them' Relates to Voting Behavior—Social Structure, Social Identities, and Electoral Choice," *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 12 (March 7, 2021): 2087–2122, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997504.
[69] Simon Bornschier et al., "How 'Us' and 'Them' Relates to Voting Behavior—Social Structure, Social Identities, and Electoral Choice," 2087–2122.

directly opposing ends of the cultural divide on issues like multiculturalism, social theory, and immigration. However, the Swiss example shows that one can not only predict party preference based on objective traits like formal education, cultural background and relative socioeconomic status, but on subjective traits as well. In particular, one's perception of their relative deprivation and perceived loss of status compared with the past also drives voting behaviours. In this way, collective identities are not only politically instrumentalised but are diametrically opposed to those of other groups in reality, creating a socio-cultural divide based on differing attitudes towards one's own social position and that of other groups.[70] For those intermediately educated, lower-middle-class native Europeans who form part of the lower working class, the gulf between how they perceive themselves and how they perceive non-European 'others' creates resentment and invites nostalgia for a past age of cultural homogeneity.[71]

In this way, multicultural modern European societies break the continuity established by the past, shocking collective self-narratives and accentuating feelings of uncertainty for the future. This reduces European OS and increases individuals' propensity for far-right support as the adoption of anti-immigrant, pro-nativist ideologies presents easy fixes to the political, economic and social problems that this article discusses. Other studies from Europe make similar arguments. For example, Dinas et al.[72] and Gessler et al.[73] found that even short-term exposure to Syrian refugees led to a surge in support for far-right parties in Greece and Hungary. Similarly,

---

[70] Simon Bornschier et al., "How 'Us' and 'Them' Relates to Voting Behavior—Social Structure, Social Identities, and Electoral Choice," 2087–2122.

[71] Eelco Harteveld and Eefje Steenvoorden, "The Appeal of Nostalgia: The Influence of Societal Pessimism on Support for Populist Radical Right Parties," *West European Politics* 41, no. 1 (June 21, 2017): 28–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1334138.

[72] Elias Dinas, Konstantinos Matakos, Dimitrios Xefteris, and Dominik Hangartner."Waking up the golden dawn: does exposure to the refugee crisis increase support for extreme-right parties?," *Political Analysis* 20, no. 2 (2019): 244–54.

[73] Theresa Gessler, Gergő Tóth, and Johannes Wachs, "No country for asylum seekers? How short-term exposure to refugees influences attitudes and voting behavior in Hungary," *Political Behavior* 44, no. 4 (2022): 1813–41.

Halla et al.[74] argued that a larger local migrant presence in Austria was associated with a higher far-right vote, sharpening 'us versus them' fault lines. In these ways, perceived rapid socio-cultural change is the symptom that many far-right voters are responding to as they seek a restored sense of stability within their European homelands.

Supply Conditions: Exploiting Ontological Insecurity

This section argues that supply conditions exploit and exacerbate the ontological insecurity created by the demand conditions described in the previous section. In particular, two interrelated dynamics form the supply side of this article's argument. The first is a nation's electoral system and how the far-right's nativist political ideology fits within it. The second is how charismatic leadership is portrayed in the media.[75]

An important supply condition is how a nation-state's electoral system suppresses or promotes parties' political opportunity. Proportional electoral systems tend to be friendlier to newer, smaller parties since they require far less of the total vote to gain seats in the legislature and often allow such parties to form coalition governments with larger, more established ones.[76] In contrast, majoritarian systems like Britain's first past the post system are often seen to suppress smaller movements because they require parties to win seats outright. This may incentivise the electorate to vote strategically for the largest parties, not because voters necessarily support their policy positions, but because it is believed that third-party votes will make no practical difference to the election's outcome.[77]

---

[74] Martin Halla, Alexander F. Wagner, and Josef Zweimüller, "Immigration and voting for the far right," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 15, vol. 6 (2017): 1341–85.

[75] Jasper Muis and Tim Immerzeel, "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe," 909–30.

[76] Tim Bale, "Elections, Voting and Referendums - Systems, Turnout, Preferences and Unpredictability," in *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*, 4th ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 187–223.

[77] Tim Bale, "Elections, Voting and Referendums - Systems, Turnout, Preferences and Unpredictability," 187–223.

Given that 93% of European democracies deploy some form of proportional representation[78] and that far-right parties – especially in western Europe – tend to begin their political lives as smaller, fringe movements, the European far-right enjoys this structural advantage, facilitating its rise. As left and right-wing moderates converge on issues like immigration,[79] they are viewed as more or less the same by economically and socially depressed native Europeans as moderates adopt broadly similar policies that prefer the 'winners' of globalisation and non-European migrants to native Europeans.[80] This presents a significant opportunity for the far-right, who distinguish themselves by constructing a compelling populist narrative that pits themselves in opposition to established political elites who they claim favour non-European, ethnic minority 'out-groups'. In this sense, far-right parties deploy their nativist ideology in a way that exploits voters' ontological insecurity to increase their likelihood of success.

The far-right takes early ownership of issues like non-European immigration, and national sovereignty and identity in the media, raising their political exposure and the salience of these issues to the electorate, especially if moderates respond with hostility, dismissiveness or disdain.[81] Since the far-right 'owns' these issues, at least at the outset, they can perpetuate uncontested 'crisis narratives' about the position and fate of European society while simultaneously positioning themselves as the only actors capable of solving Europe's

---

[78] Michela Palese, "Which European Countries Use Proportional Representation?," Electoral Reform Society (Electoral Reform Society, December 26, 2018), https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/which-european-countries-use-proportional-representation/.

[79] Sheri Berman and Hans Kundnani, "The Cost of Convergence," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 1 (2021): 22–36, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0013.

[80] Jasper Muis and Tim Immerzeel, "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe," 909–30.

[81] Matt Golder, "Far Right Parties in Europe," 477–97; Linda Bos, Wouter van der Brug, and Claes de Vreese, "Media Coverage of Right-Wing Populist Leaders," *Communications* 35, no. 2 (January 2010): 141–63, https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.2010.008.

immigration, cultural and economic problems.[82] They do this by promoting nativist ideology, which exploits feelings that non-European (and predominantly Muslim) migrants disproportionally and unfairly benefit from Europe's successes at their expense, and are preferred by 'elite' politicians. In this way, the far-right presents seemingly simple, 'logical' solutions to Europe's problems, exploiting proportional electoral systems to argue that their desired change is politically feasible. This raises the tension of the social discourse between the far-right and centrist parties, exacerbating European ontological insecurity by accentuating nations' socio-cultural divides.

This process is expedited by the intelligent strategy of the far-right parties themselves, the most notable component of which is nativist political ideology. Professionally organised far-right parties that combine protectionist economics, welfare chauvinism and cultural authoritarianism tend to succeed electorally.[83] Along with general nativist sentiment and the securitisation of immigration issues, these far-right parties present an easily cognisable diagnosis of Europe's cultural and economic problems that identifies integration, non-European (predominantly Muslim) immigration, and 'elite' politicians as fundamental causes.[84] Crisis narratives told by the far-right about issues such as climate change and COVID-19,[85] perpetuate this more basic, pre-existing fear and anxiety that many Europeans experience, ontologically distancing them

---

[82] Helga K. Hallgrimsdottir, Ari Finnsson, and Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, "Austerity Talk and Crisis Narratives: Memory Politics, Xenophobia, and Citizenship in the European Union."

[83] Jasper Muis and Tim Immerzeel, "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe," 909–30.

[84] Özgür Ünal Eriş and Selcen Öner, "Securitization of Migration and the Rising Influence of Populist Radical Right Parties in European Politics," *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 21, no. 1 (September 24, 2021): 161–93, https://doi.org/10.32450/aacd.995924; Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, "What Is New and What Is Nationalist about Europe's New Nationalism? Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Europe," *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 2 (April 2019): 409–34, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12515; Ayca Arkilic, *Diaspora Diplomacy: The Politics of Turkish Emigration to Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

[85] Bernhard Forchtner and Özgür Özvatan, "De/Legitimising Europe through the Performance of Crises the Far-Right Alternative for Germany on 'Climate Hysteria' and 'Corona Hysteria,'" *Journal of Language and Politics* 21, no. 2 (2022): 208–32.

further from Europe's past.[86] For many Europeans, this nativist, anti-immigration narrative is readily accepted as they compare their feelings of present insecurity with the relative prosperity and stability that their forebears enjoyed without the competition from non-European migrant 'outgroups'. This allows the far-right to position themselves as restorers of OS by reinstating the nativist European ethno-cultural homogeneity that occupies voters' collective memory.[87] This construction exploits voters' genuine grievances by 'logically' narrating recent history, offering the disillusioned OS through the electoral success of the far-right.

The other component of the far-right's supply is the charisma and political communication via the media of far-right leaders themselves, particularly compared with their political rivals. Although political communication scholars debate the extent to which personality drives votes,[88] there is a consensus that charisma and personality are important factors in populist electoral success.[89] This is because populist leaders gain "charismatic authority" through an adept ability to relay easily understandable, 'logical' or 'common sense' narratives about the causes and likely consequences of society's problems.[90] This creates an emotional bond between the leader and their followers, which increases the electorate's likelihood of supporting that leader. Using these rhetorical tools, the far-right's nativist, exclusionary messaging becomes further normalised as voters perceive leaders to be trusted figures of authority who exemplify an

---

[86] Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners, and Jennifer Mitzen, "Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security: 'Ontological (In)Security in the European Union,'" *European Security* 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 249–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1497977.

[87] Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen, "Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security: 'Ontological (In)Security in the European Union," 249–65.

[88] Adrian Favero, "Charisma in Right-Wing Populism: Comparing the View of the Leader and Followers within the Swiss People's Party," *Swiss Political Science Review* 28, no. 3 (March 22, 2022): 477–95, https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12510.

[89] Favero, "Charisma in Right-Wing Populism: Comparing the View of the Leader and Followers within the Swiss People's Party," 477–95.

[90] Favero, "Charisma in Right-Wing Populism: Comparing the View of the Leader and Followers within the Swiss People's Party," 477–95.

essentialised 'real European'.[91] This implicitly connects voters to Europe's imagined glorified

past, symbolising the continuity that provides them greater OS.

Victor Orbán in Hungary, Marine Le Pen in France, and Nigel Farage in the United

Kingdom are all charismatic leaders with unique political brands that enable them to garner close

personal affection from their followers while promoting exclusionary, nativist messaging. In

particular, these leaders are masters of performance and the media, expertly crafting their public

image in a way that simultaneously projects competence, authenticity and the ideal European

leader. Nigel Farage, for example, is simultaneously articulate and well-presented in media

interviews, but also blunt and humanly imperfect, often shown smoking cigarettes or enjoying

pints of beer with constituents.[92] This branding sits in stark contrast to Farage's mainstream

political rivals, who, from Liz Truss[93] and Rishi Sunak,[94] to current Prime Minister Sir Keir

Starmer[95] and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves,[96] have all been described – often by

Farage himself – as markedly boring political figures who have sold the country out to non-

Europeans.[97]

---

[91] Rin Kimura, "The Farage Effect: Populism's Influence on Britain's Political Landscape," *Respublica* 7, no. 1 (2025): 108–12.

[92] Ruth Wodak, "Performance and the Media: The Politics of Charisma," 125–51.

[93] Tom Peck, "A Deadly Dull First PMQs with Wooden Liz Truss – and the Equally Stale Keir Starmer," The Independent, September 7, 2022, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/liz-truss-keir-starmer-pmqs-energy-bills-b2161749.html.

[94] Rachel Wearmouth, "Rishi Sunak, like Keir Starmer, Sees the Strength in Being Boring," New Statesman, December 20, 2022, https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk-politics/2022/12/rishi-sunak-keir-starmer-strength-being-boring.

[95] Tim Ross and Jonathan Lemire, "The Politics of Boring: Why Starmer Won — and Why Biden Probably Won't," Politico, July 7, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-boring-keir-starmer-joe-biden-united-kingdom-america-election/.

[96] Decca Aitkenhead and James Meikle, "Rachel Reeves Tells of Humiliation at 'Boring, Snoring' Newsnight Jibe," The Guardian (The Guardian, September 13, 2013), https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/sep/14/rachel-reeves-boring-newsnight.

[97] Amy Gibbons and Jack Maidment, "Nigel Farage: Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer Are so Boring, No One Will Bother to Vote," The Telegraph, May 14, 2024, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/14/nigel-farage-rishi-sunak-starmer-boring-general-election/; Denis Cohen, "Between Strategy and Protest: How Policy Demand, Political Dissatisfaction and Strategic Incentives Matter for Far-Right Voting," *Political Science Research and Methods* 8, no. 4 (June 10, 2019): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2019.21.

The effect of this branding and rhetoric, particularly when compared to mainstream political figures in Europe, implicitly crystallises the ontological insecurity that Europeans feel whilst promoting an alternative direction for Europe that appeals to many voters. The strategic mixture of authenticity and competence reinforces the perspective that mainstream politics is out of touch and concerned more with 'outgroups' than with native Europeans, and that the far-right is both technically more competent and more in tune with the 'common' ethnically European voter. In the context of increasing issue convergence between centrist parties on both sides of the aisle, this creates a sense of hopeless rebellion among sympathetic Europeans who, at least in part, view the far-right as a protest vote against the failures of mainstream politics.[98] "If mainstream parties are the same anyway, what do I have to lose?", voters ask themselves. "At least I *like* this person. At least I am *like* this person". As such, the effects of charisma and political communication are not causes of ontological insecurity, but are means to both exploit the underlying dissatisfaction that disenfranchised Europeans live with and personify the alternative vision that the far-right has for Europe. In this way, the far-right addresses Europe's ontological insecurity head-on by suggesting an alternative direction that many Europeans now resonate with.

The Consequences of the Rise of the Far-Right for Democracy in Europe

Having observed the increasing speed and scope of the far-right's rise across the European continent, many question how this rise may change the nature of European democracy – for

---

[98] Wouter Van der Brug, Meindert Fennema, and Jean Tillie, "Anti-Immigrant Parties in Europe: Ideological or Protest Vote?," *European Journal of Political Research* 37, no. 1 (January 2000): 77–102, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00505.

better or for worse. One may argue that, in some cases, far-right parties consolidate power, remove checks and balances, and restrict media freedoms to streamline the promulgation of their nativist agendas.[99] This is particularly true in post-communist liberal democracies like Poland and Hungary, where PiS and Fidesz, respectively, have each taken measures to that effect.[100] In others, it is the exclusionary policies themselves that undermine the liberal norms intrinsic to European democracy.[101] For example, support for far-right politician Geert Wilders has resulted in a more polarised Dutch society, reducing the 'wholeness' of their substantive democracy.[102] A rising far-right could exacerbate these effects, resulting in less liberal, more polarised democracies that operate in an untransparent, unrestrained, and authoritarian manner.

Others identify the far-right's corrective potential and argue that its ability to undermine democracy is limited. Muddle and Kaltwasser have noted that far-right parties give voice to the disillusioned amid significant socio-political change by increasing the opportunities for voters to genuinely engage with democracy.[103] Muis and Immerzeel argue that far-right parties do not actually impact the positioning of others on issues other than migration and integration, suggesting that they have limited capacity to normalise their positions politically.[104] In these

[99] Michael Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary," *Slavic Review* 80, no. 3 (2021): 585–607, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-review/article/democratic-backsliding-in-poland-and-hungary/8B1C30919DC33C0BC2A66A26BFEE9553.

[100] Michael Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary," 585–607.

[101] Martin Schain, Patrick Hossay, and Aristide Zolberg, "Democracy in Peril?," in *In Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 301–13.

[101] Michael Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary," *Slavic Review* 80, no. 3 (2021): 585–607, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-review/article/democratic-backsliding-in-poland-and-hungary/8B1C30919DC33C0BC2A66A26BFEE9553.

[102] Bruno Castanho Silva, "Populist Radical Right Parties and Mass Polarization in the Netherlands," *European Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (March 21, 2017): 219–44, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755773917000066.

[103] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism in Europe and the Americas : Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge U.A.: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[104] Muis and Immerzeel, "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe," 909–30.

ways, the far-right – perhaps paradoxically – invites greater participation and inclusion in European democracy than the previous 'status quo'.

Notwithstanding, this article suggests that the future of European democracy depends not on the far-right, but on democracy itself. Understanding that the far-right's ability to exploit ontological insecurity by using simplified nativist ideology to 'solve' the problems of the disenfranchised reveals that the movement's bigoted attitudes are symptoms rather than the disease. Voters are generally not intrinsically motivated by bigotry but view the far-right's nativist policies and rhetoric as rationally capable of restoring their OS.[105] This means that the future of European democracy depends on mainstream politics' ability to recognise the genuine grievances that motivate far-right voters and address them not through disdain or ostracisation but with respect and genuine delivery that more fairly distributes the benefits of integration, and promotes an inclusive vision of Europe's future.[106] We claim that this may restore European OS in a way that may render far-right ideology unpalatable and unattractive to voters.

The Consequences of the Rise of the European Far-Right for New Zealand: An OS Perspective

Although those of us in New Zealand may feel the geographical distance from the far-right in Europe, the developments discussed in this article nevertheless raise the question of how New Zealand's future relations with Europe may be impacted. This article argues that, should the

---

[105] Wouter Van der Brug, Meindert Fennema, and Jean Tillie, "Anti-Immigrant Parties in Europe: Ideological or Protest Vote?," 77–102.

[106] Damien McGuinness and Laura Gozzi, "AfD Victory in Thuringia: Scholz Urges 'Firewall' to Keep out Far Right," Bbc.com (BBC News, September 2, 2024), https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd05pdmzgp5o.

European far-right become increasingly influential, its adoption of nativist ideology will likely

conflict with New Zealand's ongoing promotion of human rights and the values of tolerance and

acceptance that underpin its own OS. This may create a 'clash of values' that shakes the

longstanding values-based cooperation that has so far supported the relationship. However,

unlike with other global partners expressing far-right tendencies, the diversity of policy positions

among European far-right parties makes it more difficult to assess the implications of this rise on

European-New Zealand relations. In some cases, opportunities for cooperation may exist, while

in others, greater friction may emerge. Much will depend on the extent and scope of the far-

right's fortunes, the specific parties and polities that drive this success, and New Zealand's

eventual response.

In the post-war period, Europe and New Zealand have enjoyed amicable, productive

relations despite their geographic distance. They are broadly culturally similar, share a political

and philosophical lineage, and have been generally aligned on issues of security, the rule of law,

and free trade.[107] Indeed, while New Zealand and Europe clearly operate on different scales

economically, politically and demographically, Scicluna views these commonalities as beneficial

to the relationship as each party's respective roles in relation to each other are clear.[108] This

alignment has developed and formalised incrementally over the years,[109] culminating in the 2007

Joint Declaration on Relations and Cooperation between New Zealand and the EU, which

established common goals, principles and values for the relationship, and the more recently

---

[107] Nicole Scicluna, "The European Union in Australia and New Zealand," in *The European Union in the Asia-Pacific* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 200–217, https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526131867.00021.
[108] Nicole Scicluna, "The European Union in Australia and New Zealand," 200–217.
[109] Anastasia Victorovna Kolmakova, "Development of the Relations between New Zealand and the European Union at the Turn of the XXI Century," *International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2016): 133–40, https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/10535.

signed comprehensive New Zealand-EU Free Trade Agreement.[110] Indeed, two primary goals of

the Joint Declaration committed each party to the "respect for human rights and fundamental

freedoms, within their own societies and internationally" and for the parties to "foster mutual

knowledge and understanding between their peoples and of their cultures."[111]

For New Zealand's part, its global position is centred around a foreign policy where it is

recognised as a 'good' global citizen that supports progressive values and the norms of free trade,

the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law, and international

cooperation.[112] To cite recent examples, Sir John Key's National-led governments viewed

deepening trade relationships with regional partners through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (now

the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) as a key policy

imperative,[113] whereas Dame Jacinda Ardern's Labour-led governments preferred a focus on

South Pacific cooperation.[114]

Fundamentally, the reason for this consistency across ideologically different governments

is that the reality of New Zealand's size and trade economy means that it simply cannot afford to

limit its export market by taking hostile positions toward foreign partners, even when it may

prefer to do so. In many ways, Robert Muldoon's quip that "our foreign policy is trade" rings

---

[110] European Union, "The European Union and New Zealand: 2007 Joint Declaration on Relations and Cooperation," September 21, 2007, https://www.treaties.mfat.govt.nz/search/arrangement/389/710; "New Zealand-European Union Free Trade Agreement" (2023).
[111] European Union, "The European Union and New Zealand: 2007 Joint Declaration on Relations and Cooperation."
[112] László Szöllősi-Cira, "New Zealand as a Global Policy Actor," in *New Zealand's Global Responsibility: a Small State's Leading Role in Establishing Progressive Ideas 2* (Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2022), 85–138.
[113] Pattrick Smellie, "Concluding TPP Govt's Top Trade Priority, Says Key ," NBR , July 11, 2018, https://www.nbr.co.nz/concluding-tpp-govts-top-trade-priority-says-key/.
[114] Anna Powles, "Identity, National Security and Influence: The Pacific Reset and Shaping New Zealand's Relations with the Pacific Islands," *Development Bulletin* 82 (2021): 32–36, https://hdl.handle.net/10179/16193.

strikingly true.[115] In this sense, New Zealand's belief that it is a 'good' global actor that is eager to trade with the world, and that this reputation will make the world want to trade with it, is a belief that is fundamental to its OS and has been reinforced in the collective national psyche through New Zealand's longstanding behaviour and relationships.

This is why the rise of Europe's far-right presents uncertainty for the future of the continent's relationship with its antipodean partner. As this article has argued, the European far-right – in all their incantations across the continent – promote a nativist, exclusionary ideology as a means of resolving the ontological insecurity that many Europeans feel in the midst of integration, widening economic inequality and socio-cultural change. This sits in stark contrast to New Zealand's OS, which relies increasingly on inclusion, tolerance and acceptance to consolidate its national identity and understand itself.[116] The concern, therefore, for the future of New Zealand-European relations from an OS perspective is that the ascent of the far-right in Europe will create a 'clash of values', where the partners' respective pursuits of diverging ideological ideals, policies, and societies will make relations more difficult. This may have negative implications for New Zealand and ultimately destabilise New Zealand's OS as it finds itself in partnership with Europeans who prefer protectionism over free trade or nativist scapegoating over the protection of human rights.

However, whilst images of European trade protectionism and cultural authoritarianism may come to the minds of observers, the reality of an increasingly powerful European far-right may be more complicated. This is because Europe engages with the world in multiple forms –

---

[115] Patrick Köllner, "Australia and New Zealand Recalibrate Their China Policies: Convergence and Divergence," *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 3 (November 7, 2019): 1–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1683598.
[116] Paul Perry and Polly Yeung, "Keeping Keeping New Zealand in the World Values Survey, 1985-2019," *Aotearoa New Zealand Journal of Social Issues* 1 (October 13, 2021): 16, https://doi.org/10.24135/anzjsi.v1i.52.

including at the level of the nation state and supranationally through the EU. At the national level, the diversity of Europe's experiences with integration, economic inequality and non-European migration means that there is no coherent approach among the far-right as to how to most effectively restore European or national OS.[117] As it pertains to trade and economic policy, Marine Le Pen of France advocates "intelligent protectionism" that would tax the hiring of foreign workers and nationalise agricultural policy to protect French primary industry.[118] Rather paradoxically, other far-right European parties, chief among them being AfD, support reduced regulation and the role of the state, and promote market-led policies that treat domestic and foreign companies equally.[119] For an export-driven economy keen to diversify its market, these business-friendly, rules-based positions of AfD may actually promote New Zealand's economic interests and encourage collaboration between New Zealand and European partners. If New Zealand can accept that its own OS is built on fundamentally different foundations than Europe's far-right, it may be well-positioned to act pragmatically and deepen economic relations with its European partners.

What, then, about the non-economic issues? Although trade is clearly very important to New Zealand and its relationship with Europe, New Zealand also tends to promote progressive values and positions in areas such as human rights, democracy, and the rules-based international system.[120] These positions, such as the increasing integration of migrants into New Zealand and

[117] Philip Rathgeb, "United in Diversity: The Economic Policy Platforms of the EU's Far Right," *Intereconomics* 59, no. 2 (March 1, 2024): 66–69, https://doi.org/10.2478/ie-2024-0015.

[118] Taryn M. Blecher, "Cloaking the Front National: Marine Le Pen, Femininity, and the Evolution of a 'New' European Far-Right," *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union* 2024 (2024): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.5642/urceu.tpye2136.

[119] Alternative für Deutschland, "Manifesto for Germany," 2017, https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf.

[120] László Szöllősi-Cira, "New Zealand as a Global Policy Actor," 85–138.

promoting New Zealand as a champion of free trade amid rising protectionism,[121] offer New

Zealand OS as it perceives itself as a good and righteous global actor relative to others.[122]

Conversely, the western European far-right tends to view similar issues differently as it argues

for significantly reduced immigration and even withdrawing from the European Convention on

Human Rights to allow it to progress its nativist agenda.[123] In eastern Europe, too, democratic

backsliding in nations once revered as post-communist successes, such as Poland and Hungary,

threatens Europe's broad adherence to liberal-democratic norms and institutions.[124] In both

cases, the risk of clashing values between New Zealand and far-right European partners is

heightened and may frustrate global collaboration in non-trade, less functional, normative areas

like climate change. Here, the European far-right and New Zealand understand themselves very

differently.

Of course, much will depend on the future success of European far-right parties, and

many predict that the movement will continue to rise.[125] Considering this future in the context of

European-New Zealand relations through an OS lens emphasises that the global trend towards

pragmatic and issue-specific engagement will dominate the future relationship.[126] In the present

---

[121] Jamie Ensor, "Government Announces New Visa to Allow Migrants' Parents to Visit New Zealand for up to 10 Years," NZ Herald (The New Zealand Herald, June 8, 2025), https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/government-announces-new-visa-to-allow-migrants-parents-to-visit-nz-for-up-to-10-years/HWPXUQIEDZBYVNHAWGJBQZGUYY/; Jamie Ensor, "Christopher Luxon Promotes NZ as 'Champion for Free Trade' as He Heads to UK amid Global Uncertainty," NZ Herald (The New Zealand Herald, April 18, 2025), https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/christopher-luxon-promotes-new-zealand-as-champion-of-free-trade-as-he-heads-to-united-kingdom-amid-global-uncertainty/2T2ZENBZTFEOLD23E6GL7YT2RQ/.
[122] László Szöllősi-Cira, "New Zealand as a Global Policy Actor," 85–138.
[123] Alternative für Deutschland, "Manifesto for Germany" 2017; Alix Culbertson, "Nigel Farage Has a New 'Leave' Campaign - Here's How It Could Work and How It Might Impact You," Sky News (Sky, August 26, 2025), https://news.sky.com/story/nigel-farage-has-another-leave-campaign-how-would-it-work-and-how-might-you-be-impacted-13418933.
[124] Michael Bernhard, "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary," 585–607.
[125] Ian Bremmer, "Why Europe Can't Tame the Far Right," Time.com (Time, July 11, 2025), https://time.com/7301526/europe-far-right-momentum/.
[126] Charis Vlados, Dimos Chatzinikolaou, and Badar Alam Iqbal, "New Globalization and Multipolarity: A Critical Review and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Case," *Journal of Economic Integration* 37, no. 3 (2022): 458–83, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27158034.

case, as certain far-right-led European nations and New Zealand converge on functional issues like trade, whilst diverging on normative areas like human rights, the future is likely to become complex and require skilful diplomacy to manage. As a small, rule-taking nation that relies on foreign markets for its prosperity, New Zealand will increasingly need to balance its economic realities with its desire to take principled stances on issues that it considers essential to its national identity. Most crucially, the relationships, interactions and self-narratives that have afforded New Zealand OS in the post-war period may be challenged, a reality that New Zealand will need to accept to ensure its position among its peers.

Conclusion

This article argued that demand conditions create ontological insecurity for Europeans, which the far-right exploits and exacerbates through supply conditions. Crisis narratives blame migrants, integration, and elites for popular disenfranchisement, and portray the far-right as the most competent political actors to resolve European ontological insecurity through the deployment of nativist policies that prefer ethnic-European 'in-groups' to non-European (often majority Muslim) 'out-groups'. This article then noted that whilst there are clear negative and less clear positive implications of the rising far-right, OS reveals that the response of democracy itself, and not the far-right in isolation, will determine the future of European democracy. Finally, the article considered the influence of Europe's far-right on the future of New Zealand's relationship with Europe and identified both areas of greater future collaboration and of heightened risks, as these partners are likely to become normatively less aligned if the far-right continues to gain ground.

This analysis reveals five key insights. First, far-right voters are not intrinsically motivated by bigotry but by rational concerns for security and may even view far-right parties

not as ideal but as relatively better than the alternatives. The exclusionary, nativist policy positions that the far-right adopts and that voters are drawn to are perceived to maintain Europe's continuity with its past, offering an easy fix to Europe's ontological insecurity and functional problems. Second, the combination of mainstream issue convergence and the lack of political talent among established parties helps charismatic far-right figures appeal to the 'common' voter who lacks trust in more moderate options and who views far-right leaders as examples of the 'good' European. Third, though structural and pragmatic conditions facilitate the far-right's rise, an OS analysis shows that perceived threats to collective identity are a more fundamental explanation for the movement's success. Finally, strong democracies will view the challenges of the far-right as an opportunity for democratic improvement. Economic delivery and the promotion of a hopeful, inclusive vision of Europe's future, devoid of nativist scapegoating – as opposed to simple moral righteousness – is the key to restoring OS in Europe.

Bibliography

Aitkenhead, Decca, and James Meikle. "Rachel Reeves Tells of Humiliation at 'Boring, Snoring' Newsnight Jibe." The Guardian. The Guardian, September 13, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/sep/14/rachel-reeves-boring-newsnight.

Allen, Trevor J. "Exit to the Right? Comparing Far Right Voters and Abstainers in Western Europe." *Electoral Studies* 50 (December 2017): 103–15. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.09.012.

Alternative für Deutschland, "Manifesto for Germany," 2017, https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf.

Anievas, Alexander, and Richard Saull. "The Far-Right in World Politics/World Politics in the Far-Right." *Globalizations* 20, no. 5 (February 28, 2022): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2022.2035061.

Arkilic, Ayca. *Diaspora Diplomacy: The Politics of Turkish Emigration to Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022.

Arzheimer, Kai. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (January 28, 2015): 535–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1004230.

Bachleitner, Kathrin. "Ontological Security as Temporal Security? The Role of 'Significant Historical Others' in World Politics." *International Relations* 37, no. 1 (September 9, 2021): 25–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178211045624.

Bale, Tim. "Elections, Voting and Referendums - Systems, Turnout, Preferences and Unpredictability." In *European Politics: A Comparative Introduction*, 4th ed., 187–223. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

Barnils, Andreu. "Cas Mudde: 'The far right is normalized,'" CCCB Lab (July 18, 2023). https://lab.cccb.org/en/cas-mudde-the-far-right-is-normalised/

Bello, Valeria, and Andreu Torner, "The paradox of ontological security in far-right narratives and the securitization of identified alterities: the cases of Spain and Italy." *International Politics* (2025), https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00652-y

Berman, Sheri, and Hans Kundnani. "The Cost of Convergence." *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 1 (2021): 22–36. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0013.

Bernhard, Michael. "Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary." *Slavic Review* 80, no. 3 (2021): 585–607. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-

review/article/democratic-backsliding-in-poland-and-hungary/8B1C30919DC33C0BC2A66A26BFEE9553.

Bichay, Nicholas. "Converging to the mean? Moderating ideologies of far-right and far-left parties in government," *Party Politics* (2025). https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688251339632

Bijsmans, Patrick. "The Eurozone Crisis and Euroscepticism in the European Press." *Journal of European Integration* 43, no. 3 (March 30, 2020): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1740698.

Blecher, Taryn M. "Cloaking the Front National: Marine Le Pen, Femininity, and the Evolution of a 'New' European Far-Right," *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union* 2024 (2024): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.5642/urceu.tpye2136.

Bornschier, Simon, Silja Häusermann, Delia Zollinger, and Céline Colombo. "How 'Us' and 'Them' Relates to Voting Behavior—Social Structure, Social Identities, and Electoral Choice." *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 12 (March 7, 2021): 001041402199750. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997504.

Bos, Linda, Wouter van der Brug, and Claes de Vreese. "Media Coverage of Right-Wing Populist Leaders." *Communications* 35, no. 2 (January 2010): 141–63. https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.2010.008.

Bremmer, Ian. "Why Europe Can't Tame the Far Right." Time.com (Time, July 11, 2025), https://time.com/7301526/europe-far-right-momentum/.

Buchholz, Katharina. "Worldwide Value Shift?" Statista Daily Data. Statista, November 7, 2024. https://www.statista.com/chart/33431/turning-more-conservative-progressive/.

Camus, Jean-Yves, and Nicolas Lebourg. "Introduction: How the Far Right Came into Being." In *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, 1–52. Harvard University Press, 2017. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv24w63mn.3.

Castaldo, Antonino. "Back to Competitive Authoritarianism? Democratic Backsliding in Vučić's Serbia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 10 (October 6, 2020): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1817860.

Castanho Silva, Bruno. "Populist Radical Right Parties and Mass Polarization in the Netherlands." *European Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (March 21, 2017): 219–44. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755773917000066.

Chavda, Janakee. "Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People around the World Are Critical of How It's Working." Pew Research Center, February 28, 2024. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-

popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/#many-don-t-think-political-parties-represent-them.

Cohen, Denis. "Between Strategy and Protest: How Policy Demand, Political Dissatisfaction and Strategic Incentives Matter for Far-Right Voting." *Political Science Research and Methods* 8, no. 4 (June 10, 2019): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2019.21.

Cokelaere, Hanne, and Aitor Harnandez-Morales. "Election analysis reveals right-wing surge across Europe." Politico, May 20, 2025. https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-also-won-sunday-election-europe-romania-portugal-poland/.

Culbertson, Alix. "Nigel Farage Has a New 'Leave' Campaign - Here's How It Could Work and How It Might Impact You." Sky News (Sky, August 26, 2025), https://news.sky.com/story/nigel-farage-has-another-leave-campaign-how-would-it-work-and-how-might-you-be-impacted-13418933.

Cunningham, Kevin, Simon Hix, Susi Dennison, and Imogen Learmonth. "A Sharp Right Turn: A Forecast for the 2024 European Parliament Elections." European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), January 23, 2024. https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/#policy-implications.

Dancygier, Rafaela M. "A Theory of Immigrant Conflict." In *Immigration and Conflict in Europe*, 21–58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511762734.002.

de Deus Pereira, Joana, and Christian Kaunert. "The high representative's role in EU countering terrorism: policy entrepreneurship and thick, thin and global Europe." *European Politics and Society* 23, no .1 (2020), 1–21. doi: 10.1080/23745118.2020.1842695.

Dinas, Elias, Konstantinos Matakos, Dimitrios Xefteris, and Dominik Hangartner."Waking up the golden dawn: does exposure to the refugee crisis increase support for extreme-right parties?" *Political Analysis* 20, no. 2 (2019): 244-54.

Donovan, Todd. "Misclassifying Parties as Radical Right / Right Wing Populist: A Comparative Analysis of New Zealand First." *Political Science* 72, no. 1 (May 3, 2020): 58–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/00323187.2020.1855992.

Dudar, Vasyl. "The Right-Wing Radical Vision of a Multipolar World: Specifics of Anti-Globalist Rhetoric of Leaders of Contemporary Right-Wing Politicians in the EU and the United States." *Foreign Affairs* 34, no. 5 (September 20, 2024): 35–47. https://doi.org/10.46493/2663-2675.34(5).2024.35.

Ensor, Jamie. "Christopher Luxon Promotes NZ as 'Champion for Free Trade' as He Heads to UK amid Global Uncertainty," NZ Herald (The New Zealand Herald, April 18, 2025), https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/christopher-luxon-promotes-new-zealand-as-

champion-of-free-trade-as-he-heads-to-united-kingdom-amid-global-uncertainty/2T2ZENBZTFEOLD23E6GL7YT2RQ/.

——— "Government Announces New Visa to Allow Migrants' Parents to Visit New Zealand for up to 10 Years," NZ Herald (The New Zealand Herald, June 8, 2025), https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/government-announces-new-visa-to-allow-migrants-parents-to-visit-nz-for-up-to-10-years/HWPXUQIEDZBYVNHAWGJBQZGUYY/.

European Parliament. "Home | 2024 European Election Results | European Union | European Parliament." European Parliament, July 23, 2024. https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/index.html.

European Union. "The European Union and New Zealand: 2007 Joint Declaration on Relations and Cooperation," September 21, 2007. https://www.treaties.mfat.govt.nz/search/arrangement/389/710.

Favero, Adrian. "Charisma in Right-Wing Populism: Comparing the View of the Leader and Followers within the Swiss People's Party." *Swiss Political Science Review* 28, no. 3 (March 22, 2022). https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12510.

Forchtner, Bernhard, and Özgür Özvatan. "De/Legitimising EUrope through the Performance of Crises the Far-Right Alternative for Germany on 'Climate Hysteria' and 'Corona Hysteria.'" *Journal of Language and Politics* 21, no. 2 (2022): 208–32.

Gattinara, Pietro Castelli, and Andrea Pirro. "The far right as social movement." *European Societies* 21, no. 4 (2019), 447–462.

Gessler, Theresa, Gergő Tóth, and Johannes Wachs. "No country for asylum seekers? How short-term exposure to refugees influences attitudes and voting behavior in Hungary." *Political Behavior* 44, no. 4 (2022): 1813–41.

Geva, Dorit, and Felipe G Santos. "Europe's Far-Right Educational Projects and Their Vision for the International Order." *International Affairs* 97, no. 5 (September 2021): 1395–1414. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab112.

Gibbons, Amy, and Jack Maidment. "Nigel Farage: Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer Are so Boring, No One Will Bother to Vote." The Telegraph, May 14, 2024. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/05/14/nigel-farage-rishi-sunak-starmer-boring-general-election/.

Gidron, Noam, and Peter A. Hall. "The politics of social status: Economic and cultural roots of the populist right." *British Journal of Sociology*, 68, no. 1 (2017): 57–84.

Givens, Terri. *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Golder, Matt. "Far Right Parties in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19, no. 1 (May 11, 2016): 477–97. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042814-012441.

Guhl, Jakob, Milo Comerford, and Elise Thomas. "In the Shadow of Christchurch: International Lessons from New Zealand's Extreme Far-Right." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 14, no. 6 (July 9, 2021). https://ctc.westpoint.edu/in-the-shadow-of-christchurch-international-lessons-from-new-zealands-extreme-far-right/.

Halikiopoulou, Daphne, and Tim Vlandas. "What Is New and What Is Nationalist about Europe's New Nationalism? Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Europe." *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 2 (April 2019): 409–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12515.

Halla, Martin, Alexander F. Wagner, and Josef Zweimüller. "Immigration and voting for the far right," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 15, vol. 6 (2017): 1341–85.

Hallgrimsdottir, Helga K., Ari Finnsson, and Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly. "Austerity Talk and Crisis Narratives: Memory Politics, Xenophobia, and Citizenship in the European Union." *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (March 13, 2020). https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00014.

Harteveld, Eelco, and Eefje Steenvoorden. "The Appeal of Nostalgia: The Influence of Societal Pessimism on Support for Populist Radical Right Parties." *West European Politics* 41, no. 1 (June 21, 2017): 28–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1334138.

Hendriks, Inge, Marcel Lubbers, and Peer Scheepers. "Individual Change in Rejection of Equal Opportunities for Foreigners among Adolescents and Young Adults in Switzerland: Testing Realistic Conflict Theory from a Dynamic Perspective." *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 2 (February 7, 2024): e0296883. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296883.

Hobbs, Carla, Susi Dennison, and Mats Engström. "Winds of Change: The EU's Green Agenda after the European Parliament Election." European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), May 23, 2024. https://ecfr.eu/publication/winds-of-change-the-eus-green-agenda-after-the-european-parliament-election/.

Hüther, Michael, and Matthias Diermeier. "Perception and Reality—Economic Inequality as a Driver of Populism?" *Analyse & Kritik* 41, no. 2 (November 1, 2019): 337–58. https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2019-0021.

Jones, Hon. Shane. "Government to Reverse Oil and Gas Exploration Ban ." The Beehive, June 9, 2024. https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/government-reverse-oil-and-gas-exploration-ban.

Jones, Natalie. "Aotearoa New Zealand and International Organizations." In *International Law in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Thomson Reuters, 2021. https://ssrn.com/abstract=4013134.

Kaunert, Christian, Joana de Deus Pereira, and Mike Edwards. "Thick Europe, ontological security and parochial Europe: the re-emergence of far-right extremism and terrorism after the refugee crisis of 2015." In *Transforming Europe Through Crises*, 42–61. New York: Routledge, 2022.

Kimura, Rin. "The Farage Effect: Populism's Influence on Britain's Political Landscape." *Respublica* 7, no. 1 (2025): 108–12.

Kinnvall, Catarina, Ian Manners, and Jennifer Mitzen. "Introduction to 2018 Special Issue of European Security: 'Ontological (In)Security in the European Union.'" *European Security* 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 249–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1497977.

Kinnvall, Catarina, and Jennifer Mitzen. "An Introduction to the Special Issue: Ontological Securities in World Politics." *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (July 11, 2016): 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653162.

Köllner, Patrick. "Australia and New Zealand Recalibrate Their China Policies: Convergence and Divergence." *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 3 (November 7, 2019): 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1683598.

Kolmakova, Anastasia Victorovna. "Development of the Relations between New Zealand and the European Union at the Turn of the XXI Century." *International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2016): 133–40. https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/10535.

Lipps, Jana, and Dominik Schraff. "Regional Inequality and Institutional Trust in Europe." *European Journal of Political Research* 60, no. 4 (December 11, 2020): 892–913. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12430.

Lowe, David. "Christchurch Terrorist Attack, the Far-Right and Social Media: What Can We Learn?" *The New Jurist*, 2019. https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/5822/1/ChristchurchTerroristAttackAM-LOWE.pdf.

Macduff, Keiller. "Ex-National MP Bashes Green's Visa-Free Pacific Travel Petition, despite Endorsing Cause." RNZ, March 8, 2025. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/544214/ex-national-mp-bashes-green-s-visa-free-pacific-travel-petition-despite-endorsing-cause.

McGuinness, Damien, and Laura Gozzi. "AfD Victory in Thuringia: Scholz Urges 'Firewall' to Keep out Far Right." Bbc.com. BBC News, September 2, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd05pdmzgp5o.

McMahon, Richard. "Is Alt-Europe Possible? Populist Radical Right Counternarratives of European Integration." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 1 (May 4, 2021): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1919865.

Minkenberg, Michael. "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity." *Government and Opposition* 35, no. 2 (April 2000): 170–88. https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00022.

Mitzen, Jennifer. "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346.

Mráz, Attila. "Are Far-Right Ballots Protest Votes?" Green European Journal, 2024. https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/are-far-right-ballots-protest-votes/.

Mudde, Cas. "The 2024 EU Elections: Far Right at the Polls," *Journal of Democracy* 35, no. 4 (October 2024): 121–134.

——— *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity, 2019.

——— *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge U.A.: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Muis, Jasper, and Tim Immerzeel. "Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe." *Current Sociology* 65, no. 6 (July 14, 2017): 909–30.

Neef, Theresa, and Alice Sodano. "Inequality Trends in Europe." World Inequality Lab, 2022. https://wid.world/document/inequality-trends-in-europe-world-inequality-lab-issue-brief-2022-04/.

New Zealand-European Union Free Trade Agreement, Article 27.3 § (2023).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). "OECD Economic Surveys New Zealand." The OECD, May 2024. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/05/oecd-economic-surveys-new-zealand-2024_42678d02/603809f2-en.pdf.

Palese, Michela. "Which European Countries Use Proportional Representation?" Electoral Reform Society. Electoral Reform Society, December 26, 2018. https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/which-european-countries-use-proportional-representation/.

Pan, Guangyi, and Alexander Korolev. "The Struggle for Certainty: Ontological Security, the Rise of Nationalism, and Australia-China Tensions after COVID-19." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 26, no. 1 (January 5, 2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09710-7.

Passey, Emma, and Edgar Burns. "The Contested Shift to a Bicultural Understanding of Place Heritage in Aotearoa New Zealand." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 29, no. 9 (July 5, 2023): 988–1003. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2231911.

Peck, Tom. "A Deadly Dull First PMQs with Wooden Liz Truss – and the Equally Stale Keir Starmer." The Independent, September 7, 2022. https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/liz-truss-keir-starmer-pmqs-energy-bills-b2161749.html.

Perry, Paul, and Polly Yeung. "Keeping New Zealand in the World Values Survey, 1985-2019." *Aotearoa New Zealand Journal of Social Issues* 1 (October 13, 2021): 16,

Pew Research Center. "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015." Pew Research Center, August 2, 2016. http://pewrsr.ch/2asMQLh.

Polyakova, Alina, and Neil Fligstein. "Is European Integration Causing Europe to Become More Nationalist? Evidence from the 2007–9 Financial Crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 1 (September 18, 2015): 60–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1080286.

Powles, Anna. "Identity, National Security and Influence: The Pacific Reset and Shaping New Zealand's Relations with the Pacific Islands." *Development Bulletin* 82 (2021): 32–36. https://hdl.handle.net/10179/16193.

Radio New Zealand. "Green Party Asks Christopher Luxon to Condemn 'Racist' Rhetoric by Shane Jones and Winston Peters." NZ Herald, January 29, 2025. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/green-party-asks-christopher-luxon-to-condemn-racist-rhetoric-by-shane-jones-and-winston-peters/23INDHXB65FIHBA45DPJKFQUSU/.

——— "NZ Green Party Calls for Visa-Free Travel for 'Pacific Whānau.'" RNZ, March 8, 2025. https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/544145/nz-green-party-calls-for-visa-free-travel-for-pacific-whanau.

Rathgeb, Philip. "United in Diversity: The Economic Policy Platforms of the EU's Far Right." *Intereconomics* 59, no. 2 (March 1, 2024): 66–69. https://doi.org/10.2478/ie-2024-0015.

Rising, David, Jill Lawless, and Nicholas Riccardi. "The 'Super Year' of Elections Has Been Super Bad for Incumbents as Voters Punish Them in Droves." AP News, November 17, 2024. https://apnews.com/article/global-elections-2024-incumbents-defeated-c80fbd4e667de86fe08aac025b333f95.

Ross, Tim, and Jonathan Lemire. "The Politics of Boring: Why Starmer Won — and Why Biden Probably Won't." Politico, July 7, 2024. https://www.politico.eu/article/politics-boring-keir-starmer-joe-biden-united-kingdom-america-election/.

Schain, Martin, Patrick Hossay, and Aristide Zolberg. "Democracy in Peril?" In *In Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe*, 301–13. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Schraff, Dominik, and Jonas Pontusson. "Falling behind whom? Economic geographies of right-wing populism in Europe." *Journal of European Public Policy* 31, no. 6 (2024): 1591–1619.

Scicluna, Nicole. "The European Union in Australia and New Zealand." In *The European Union in the Asia-Pacific*, 200–217. Manchester University Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526131867.00021.

Separa, Lenis Aislinn C. "Cultural Adaptation Experiences of People in New Zealand." *The Review of Communication* 24, no. 2 (February 28, 2024): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2024.2313238.

Smellie, Pattrick. "Concluding TPP Govt's Top Trade Priority, Says Key." NBR July 11, 2018, https://www.nbr.co.nz/concluding-tpp-govts-top-trade-priority-says-key/.

Smith, Alexander. "Far-Right Populists Top Polls in Germany, France and Britain for the First Time." NBC News, August 13, 2025. https://www.nbcnews.com/world/europe/far-right-populists-top-polls-germany-france-britain-first-time-rcna224706.

Smith, Anneke. "NZ First Refuses to Back Down over 'Xenophobic' Comments." RNZ, January 29, 2025. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/540319/nz-first-refuses-to-back-down-over-xenophobic-comments.

Soffer, Dalya. "The Use of Collective Memory in the Populist Messaging of Marine Le Pen." *Journal of European Studies* 52, no. 1 (February 17, 2022): 69–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472441211072619.

Stats NZ. "New Zealand Net Migration Rate down from Peak." Stats NZ, September 11, 2024. https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/new-zealand-net-migration-rate-down-from-peak.

Steele, Brent J. "Introduction." In *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*, 1–26. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Steele, Brent J., and Alexandra Homolar. *Ontological Insecurities and the Politics of Contemporary Populism*. New York: Routledge, 2023.

Steff, Reuben, and Francesca Dodd-Parr. "Examining the Immanent Dilemma of Small States in the Asia-Pacific: The Strategic Triangle between New Zealand, the US and China." *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 1 (January 15, 2018): 90–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2017.1417324.

Stephens, Meghan, and Fergus Cleveland. "Analytical Note 24/10: Exploring Trends in Income Inequality in New Zealand (2007–2023)." The New Zealand Treasury, December 2024. https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2024-12/an24-10.pdf.

Szöcsik, Edina, and Alina Polyakova. "Euroscepticism and the Electoral Success of the Far Right: The Role of the Strategic Interaction between Center and Far Right." *European Political Science* 18 (May 2, 2018): 400–420. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-018-0162-y.

Szöllősi-Cira, László. "New Zealand as a Global Policy Actor," in *New Zealand's Global Responsibility a Small State's Leading Role in Establishing Progressive Ideas2* (Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2022), 85–138.

The Federal Returning Officer. "Bundestag Election 2025." The Federal Returning Officer, 2025. https://bundeswahlleiterin.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2025/ergebnisse/bund-99.html.

Ünal Eriş, Özgür, and Selcen Öner. "Securitization of Migration and the Rising Influence of Populist Radical Right Parties in European Politics." *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi* 21, no. 1 (September 24, 2021): 161–93. https://doi.org/10.32450/aacd.995924.

Van Der Brug, Wouter, Meindert Fennema, and Jean Tillie. "Why Some Anti-Immigrant Parties Fail and Others Succeed." *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 5 (June 2005): 537–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414004273928.

——— "Anti-Immigrant Parties in Europe: Ideological or Protest Vote?" *European Journal of Political Research* 37, no. 1 (January 2000): 77–102. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00505.

Van Kessel, Steijn. "Populism, the far right and EU integration: beyond simple dichotomies." *Journal of European* Integration 47, no. 1 (2025): 127–133.

Vasilopoulou, Sofia, and Roi Zur. "Electoral Competition, the EU Issue and Far-Right Success in Western Europe." *Political Behavior* 46 (December 16, 2022): 565–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09841-y.

Vlados, Charis, Dimos Chatzinikolaou, and Badar Alam Iqbal. "New Globalization and Multipolarity: A Critical Review and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Case." *Journal of Economic Integration* 37, no. 3 (2022): 458–83. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27158034.

Wahlen Thüringen. "Wahlen Im Freistaat Thüringen." Wahlen im Freistaat Thüringen, 2024. https://wahlen.thueringen.de/datenbank/wahl1/wahl.asp?wahlart=LW&wJahr=2024&zeigeErg=Landhttps://wahlen.thueringen.de/datenbank/wahl1/wahl.asp?wahlart=LW&wJahr=2024&zeigeErg=Land.

Wearmouth, Rachel. "Rishi Sunak, like Keir Starmer, Sees the Strength in Being Boring." New Statesman, December 20, 2022. https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk-politics/2022/12/rishi-sunak-keir-starmer-strength-being-boring.

Wike, Richard, Moira Fagan, and Laura Clancy. "Global Elections in 2024: What We Learned in a Year of Political Disruption." Pew Research Center, December 11, 2024. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/12/11/global-elections-in-2024-what-we-learned-in-a-year-of-political-disruption/.

Wodak, Ruth. "Performance and the Media: The Politics of Charisma." In *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, 125–51. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015.

Yılmaz, Ferruh. "Right-Wing Hegemony and Immigration: How the Populist Far-Right Achieved Hegemony through the Immigration Debate in Europe." *Current Sociology* 60, no. 3 (May 2012): 368–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392111426192.

Acknowledgements

Author bios

Cameron Grigg is a solicitor at Chapman Tripp in Wellington. Prior to joining the firm, Cameron studied law at King's College London and graduated with an LLB/BA from Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington. His interests are in law and international politics with a focus on New Zealand, China and Europe. The present article is adapted from a paper for which Cameron won the Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington 1st place European Union prize in 2024.

Ayca Arkilic is a Senior Lecturer in Political Science and International Relations at Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington. She is the author of *Diaspora Diplomacy: The Politics of Turkish Emigration to Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2022) and the co-editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Turkey's Diasporas* (2024). She serves as associate editor of *Mediterranean Politics* and sits on the editorial board of *Diaspora Affairs*. She is the recipient of the 2025 Royal Society of New Zealand Early Career Research Excellence Award for Social Sciences.