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Capitalizing on Fear: The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Movements in Western Europe

“Only a new force can stop Strache” – this was the slogan used by the recently founded NEOS party (*Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum/The New Austria and Liberal Forum*) in the local elections in Vienna on 11 October 2015. Heinz-Christian Strache is the charismatic leader of the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ*), a strong political figure and the first challenger to pose a serious threat to the incumbent Social Democratic mayor, Dr Michael Häupl. Up to that point, Häupl had a strong grip on the Viennese electorate, and Vienna has been a stronghold of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ*). The SPÖ had enjoyed an unbroken majority in the city since 1945 – an absolute majority with two exceptions. Yet, for the first time, a victory for the far right seemed possible. Eventually, in light of some polls placing the FPÖ ahead, Häupl’s campaign also decided to focus on promoting “stopping Strache” as the main incentive to vote for the SPÖ. In the hope that most people would in fact oppose Strache’s campaign of “agitation”, the city of Vienna released a video calling on people not to “let others decide for them”.

The Rise of the Far Right

Most analysts agree that the main driving force behind the surprising rise of the far right in Austria is without a doubt the so-called “refugee crisis”. The FPÖ drew on existing scaremongering images of the Muslim other, conveniently attaching them to the now visible streams of refugees to project an image of a Vienna under siege and a population in dire need of protection. In typical populist style, they would emphatically declare their uniqueness in daring to speak up for “the people” – as in their slogan “because we take your worries seriously” – and challenging out-of-touch elites. The FPÖ is not the only organization to profit from the movement of significant numbers of people into the European Union, a phenomenon which, by all accounts, has been poorly managed. The FPÖ is also not the only group to profit from an atmosphere of fear – fear of crime, fear of terrorism, and a diffuse feeling of unease, which is often attributed to the high proportion of unemployed young men among the migrants, or questions of religion or security. Indeed, all Europe’s far-right parties have jumped on this bandwagon as a means of obtaining quick and easy electoral capital.

Strache has repeatedly called for Austria to build a border fence between Austria and Hungary, patrolled by the army, to throttle the flow of refugees – particularly Muslim refugees.¹ According to the FPÖ leader, the refugee crisis is an opportunity for terrorists and criminals to come into the country; he stated that “we have a Christian culture, and we want to keep a Christian culture for our children”.² Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) gave a speech in parliament in September 2015 protesting against allowing refugees into the country. He called the crisis an “Islamic asylum tsunami” and labeled the refugees “testosterone bombs” who “threaten our girls”.³ In August 2015, a spokesman for the Slovakian interior ministry told the *Wall Street Journal*: “In Slovakia, we don’t have mosques [...] we only want to choose the Christians.”⁴ The Hungarian prime minister and leader of the right-wing Fidesz party Viktor Orbán wrote an op-ed for Germany’s *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper in September 2015: “We shouldn’t forget that the people who are coming here grew up in a different religion and represent a completely different culture. Most are not Christian, but Muslim [...] That is an important question, because Europe and European culture have Christian roots.”⁵ During a speech in September 2015 addressed to members of France’s *Front National* (FN), leader Marine Le Pen accused Germany of opening its borders to refugees to exploit them for cheap labour. Le Pen also warned of the dangers of Islamization in Europe as a result of this crisis.⁶ These leaders deploy similar rhetoric that ominously refers to the potential decline of Christian values and culture across Europe if refugees are to be allowed in.

Capitalizing on the refugee crisis soon paid off. In terms of elections, the Danish People’s Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF) were the second largest party after the 18 June 2015 national election with 21.1 per cent of the vote (compared to 12.3 per cent in 2011) giving them 37 seats out of 179.⁷ The party has a tough line on immigration and promised to campaign for tighter

1 Cf. Michael Shields/Shadia Nasralla, *Austrian far right leader blames U.S., NATO for migrant crisis*, Reuters, 5 September 2015, at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/05/us-europe-migrants-austria-strache-idUSKCN0R50HP20150905>.

2 Cited in: Ishaan Tharoor, *Europe’s refugee crisis strengthens far-right parties*, in: *The Washington Post*, 13 October 2015, at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/13/europes-refugee-crisis-strengthens-far-right-parties>.

3 Ibid.

4 Anton Troianovski/Margit Feher, *Migration Crisis Pits EU’s East Against West*, in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 August 2015, at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/migration-crisis-pits-eus-east-against-west-1439957453>.

5 Cited in: Rick Noack, *Muslims threaten Europe’s Christian identity, Hungary’s leader says*, in: *The Washington Post*, 3 September 2015, at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/03/muslims-threaten-europes-christian-identity-hungarys-leader-says>.

6 Cf. Steven Erlanger/Alison Smale, *Migrant Influx May Give Europe’s Far Right a Lift*, in: *The New York Times*, 7 September 2015, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/world/europe/right-wing-european-parties-may-benefit-from-migrant-crisis.html>.

7 Cf. *Statistics Denmark*, at: <http://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik>.

border controls to ensure fewer migrants enter the country.⁸ In both national elections in Greece in 2015, the extreme-right Golden Dawn (*Chrysi Avyi*) party was the third largest party, with seven per cent of the vote in September 2015 (compared to 6.3 per cent in January 2015).⁹ In an analysis of the September 2015 election, it was reported that Golden Dawn targeted areas of Greece that had been most affected by the refugee crisis – such as Lesbos. Preliminary data suggested that Golden Dawn was losing influence in the working-class neighbourhoods of large cities, but making up the votes from such areas. By insinuating that the refugees were “invading” Greece, Golden Dawn was able to ignite fear and increase its support there.¹⁰

Opinion polls indicate that far-right parties have made strong gains in other countries, too. In Sweden, the far-right Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD) are currently ahead of the two largest parties with support of about 25 per cent, after they won a record 12.9 per cent of the vote in the 2014 election.¹¹ In September 2015, the French polling company Odoxa found that “Marine Le Pen’s far right-wing National Front party would sweep local elections in France’s northern region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais were they held today”.¹² The *Front National* enjoyed almost 40 per cent support in a region that has high rates of unemployment, and, due to its proximity to the English Channel, Nord-Pas-de-Calais has long been feeling the effects of the refugee crisis.

The rise in support for far-right parties is, however, not a symptom of recent years. Indeed, they have been on the rise ever since the 1990s (see Table 1 below).

8 Cf. David Crouch/Lars Eriksen, Danish People’s party leader demands border crackdown after election success, in: *The Guardian*, 19 June 2015, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/19/danish-peoples-party-dahl-border-controls-election>.

9 Cf. Alberto Nardelli, Greece election result: the key numbers, in: *The Guardian*, 20 September 2015, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/20/greece-election-result-the-key-numbers>.

10 Cf. Yiannis Baboulias, The EU’s woeful response to the refugee crisis has revived Golden Dawn, in: *The Guardian*, 21 September 2015, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/21/eu-refugee-crisis-golden-dawn-greek-neo-nazi-europe>.

11 Cf. Erlanger/Smale, cited above (Note 6).

12 Jess McHugh, Far-Right-Wing National Front Party Gains Popularity, As Marine Le Pen Takes the Lead Amid Refugee Crisis, in: *International Business Times*, 20 September 2015, at: <http://www.ibtimes.com/far-right-wing-national-front-party-gains-popularity-marine-le-pen-takes-lead-amid-2105288>.

Table 1 Far-Right Electoral Gains (National Elections)

Country Party	Year Percentage of vote (ranking)					
<i>Austria</i> FPÖ ¹³	2013 20.5% (3)	2008 17.5% (3)	2006 11% (4)	2002 10% (3)	1999 26.9% (2)	1994 22.5% (3)
<i>Denmark</i> DPP ¹⁴	2015 21.1% (2)	2011 12.3% (3)	2007 13.9% (3)	2005 13.3% (3)	2001 12% (3)	1998 7.4% (5)
<i>Greece</i> Golden Dawn ¹⁵	Sept 2015 7% (3)	Jan 2015 6.3% (3)	2012 7% (6)			
<i>Hungary</i> JOBBIK Fidesz ¹⁶	2014 20.2% (3) 44.9% (1)	2010 16.7% (3) 52.7% (1)	2006 2.2% (5) 42% (2)	2002 n/a 41.1% (2)	1998 n/a 28.2% (1)	1994 n/a 7% (6)
<i>Netherlands</i> PVV ¹⁷	2012 5.9% (5)	2010 15.5% (3)	2006 10.1% (3)			
<i>Sweden</i> SD ¹⁸	2014 12.8% (8)	2010 5.7% (6)	2006 2.9% (8)	2002 1.4% (8)	1998 0.4% (8)	
<i>UK</i> UKIP ¹⁹	2015 12.6% (3)	2010 3.2% (4)	2005 2.3% (4)	2001 1.5% (5)	1997 0.3% (11)	

13 Cf. Bundesministerium für Inneres [Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior], *Stimmenstärkste Partei pro Bundesland* [Party with Largest Share of Vote by State], at: <http://wahl13.bmi.gv.at>; Manuel Álvarez-Rivera, Election Resources on the Internet: *Federal Elections in Austria – Elections to the Nationalrat (National Council)*, at: <http://www.electionresources.org/at>.

14 Cf. Manuel Álvarez-Rivera, Election Resources on the Internet: *Elections to the Danish Folketing – Results Lookup*, at: <http://www.electionresources.org/dk>.

15 Cf. Manuel Álvarez-Rivera, Election Resources on the Internet: *Elections to the Hellenic Parliament (Vouli)*, at: <http://www.electionresources.org/gr>.

16 Cf. Manuel Álvarez-Rivera, Election Resources on the Internet: *Elections to the Hungarian National Assembly*, at: <http://www.electionresources.org/hu>.

17 Cf. Kiesraad [Electoral Council], *Databank Verkiezingsuitslagen* (Database of Election Results), at: <http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/Na1918/Verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx?VerkiezingsTypeId=1>.

18 Cf. Statistics Sweden, *Historical statistics of elections 1910-2014*, at: http://www.scb.se/en/_/Finding-statistics/Statistics-by-subject-area/Democracy/General-elections/General-elections-results/Aktuell-Pong/12275/Historical-statistics-of-election-results/32065.

19 Cf. BBC News, *How UKIP became a British political force*, 3 May 2013, at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22396689>; The Guardian, *UK 2015 general election results in full*, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2015/may/07/live-uk-election-results-in-full>.

Hate Crime

Tagging along in the wake of the broader spirit of anxiety and sheer opposition to a large number of Muslim refugees flowing into Europe are right-wing extremism and hate crime. There are no official statistics available regarding hate crime and the refugee crisis. However, there have been a number of reports that imply that hate crime has risen as a result of the crisis. Notably, in Germany right-wing extremists have attacked refugee homes. In the first half of the 2015, the German Interior Ministry registered 173 such attacks.²⁰ In August 2015, the New York Times reported that while hate crimes increased in Europe in general – particularly targeting Roma and asylum seekers – there was evidence of a far higher rate of increase in mass demonstrations and arson attacks in Germany.²¹ The reaction to refugees in Hungary has also been hostile from far-right groups. For example, the *Betyársereg* (Outlaw's Army) is a paramilitary extreme-right Hungarian group that has been particularly active during the crisis. This group have verbally and physically attacked refugees in Hungary.²²

Here again, in spite of occasional peaks (such as the attacks on asylum seekers in Germany in the 1990s), hate crimes have shown a generally tendency to increase. Accurate information on hate crime is difficult to ascertain due to under-reporting and the different ways states record these types of incidents (if at all). From the information provided by the Organization for a Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for 2009-2013, hate crime appears to have stayed at similar levels in countries such as Germany and Denmark – with the number of reported hate crimes in Germany significantly higher than in Denmark. In the UK, levels of hate crime have been relatively constant, but rose by 18 per cent in 2013-2014. Similarly, in Sweden, hate crime peaked in 2014. In the Netherlands, the picture is not as clear as there is no data available for 2010-2012, however, hate crime increased by 63 per cent when one compares the available data for 2009 and 2013. In Austria and France, the tendency is not so clear cut. In France, for instance, recorded hate crime peaked in 2012, but decreased the following year by 25 per cent. In Austria, recorded hate crime rose in 2010, followed by a decrease by 41 per cent in 2011, and a steady rise until 2013. Information from Hungary also

20 Cf. Wenzel Michalski, *Dispatches: Alarming Attacks Against Refugees in Germany*, Human Rights Watch, 28 August 2015, at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/28/dispatches-alarming-attacks-against-refugees-germany>.

21 Cf. Melissa Eddy, Violent Backlash Against Migrants in Germany as Asylum-Seekers Pour In, *The New York Times*, 13 August 2015, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/europe/germany-migrants-attacks-asylum-seekers-backlash.html>.

22 Cf. Balint J6sa, *Hate Crime Stories: State empowered hate crimes against refugees in Hungary*, No Hate Speech Movement, 20 July 2015, at: <http://blog.nohatespeechmovement.org/hate-crime-stories-state-empowered-hate-crimes-against-refugees-in-hungary>; Editorial Board, *Hungary's Xenophobia, Europe's Crisis*, BloombergView, 2 September 2015, at: <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-09-02/hungary-s-xenophobia-europe-s-crisis>.

shows a steady rise over the years.²³ Looking at more detailed reports, such as one by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which recorded incidents of anti-Semitism in Europe over ten years (2002-2012), shows that anti-Semitism incidents steadily rose in Sweden and the Netherlands. Levels tended to remain steady in Belgium, Spain, Ireland, and Slovakia, with no significant peaks. In the UK, France, and Germany, such incidents gradually decreased over the years. In the Czech Republic and Finland, anti-Semitic incidents peaked in 2009 and fell back down between 2010 and 2012. However, incidents in Finland are generally lower than in Slovakia. As part of the report, around 90 per cent of European Jews were surveyed on their perceptions of anti-Semitism; 66 per cent of respondents believed that anti-Semitism was on the rise in Europe.²⁴ In recent police figures from the UK, the number of hate crimes against Muslims in London alone has risen by over 70 per cent, with women who wear the veil being the most susceptible to attack.²⁵

Roots of the Rise

As effective as it has been in creating a surge in support for far-right parties in opinion polls and electoral results, the refugee crisis is not the only factor responsible for the rise of the far right. As we have seen, recent gains confirm and reinforce a tendency that has been observable for several years. A series of issues have been successfully exploited by the far right over the last decade or so, including immigration or “foreigners” more generally, and anti-EU sentiment. Some authors go as far as to note that “without the irritant of immigration and asylum-seekers, West European right-wing extremism would probably have remained a *quantité négligeable*, a concern of only a small number of eccentrics and racist cranks and not a threat to Western European democracy.”²⁶ But there are also deeper, structural causes at work, relating to the particular socio-economic situation of certain social strata, broader political and social developments within European states, and the skill and professionalization of far-right parties themselves.²⁷ The “losers” of globalization – the lower income classes threatened by unemployment and international competition – make up the core electorate of the far right. It is with this electorate that slogans such as “foreigners take away your jobs” go down

23 Cf. OSCE ODIHR, *Hate Crime Reporting*, at: <http://hatecrime.osce.org>.

24 Cf. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Antisemitism: Summary overview of the situation in the European Union 2002-2012*, Vienna 2013.

25 Cf. Hate crimes against Muslims soar in London, in: *The Guardian*, 7 September, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/07/hate-crimes-against-muslims-soar-london-islamophobia>.

26 Peter H. Merkl, Introduction, in: Peter H. Merkl/Leonard Weinberg (eds.), *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, London 2003, pp. 1-19, here p. 7.

27 Matthijs Rooduijn, The rise of the populist radical right in Western Europe, in: *European View* 14/2015, pp. 3-11.

well. But such groups, which are otherwise typically the target of left-wing parties, are not the only ones to be successfully lured away from mainstream parties. Across the political spectrum, individuals respond positively to prejudice related to the “other”, which more recently has become the “Muslim other”.

The second bundle of explanations concerning developments in the political system focuses on increased electoral volatility and the fact that mainstream right-wing and left-wing parties have recently tended to converge. Populist parties in general, not just those of a right-wing orientation, fill the gap left by this ideological convergence and portray themselves as the only alternative to the obsolete and fossilized political establishment. In most countries, this development has tended to favour the right, as the left-wing alternative is either too weak, or has already been co-opted into the mainstream political establishment and may even be represented in government – as in the case of the Greens.

Third, far-right parties have successfully worked on their image and message to, at least officially, distance themselves from any form of Neo-Nazism, fascism, and other types of “brown” past. Every now and then, the press uncovers yet another faux pas – such as Strache’s “Kühnen salute” (a three-finger salute popularized by the German Neo-Nazi Michael Kühnen), or party members shoot themselves in the foot by making politically incorrect remarks. In general, however, care is always taken to uphold the appearance of a clean break with the past and to avoid politically compromising vocabulary. Conveniently enough, efforts to promote political correctness and related legislation have remained somewhat fixated on the slightly dated image of Neo-Nazis as primarily anti-Semitic. In today’s Europe, the far right can spread essentially the same attitudes with regard to Muslims as they once did concerning Jews and remain unpunished simply because, as it were, Neo-Nazism is anti-Semitic, and thus only anti-Semitism gets punished. The far right’s rhetorical skill goes even further, however, as the dividing line they draw between the acceptable and the unwanted no longer runs along lines of religion, ethnicity, or race, but is now based on culture: Turks, Muslims, or Roma do not necessarily need to be sent away, as long as they adapt to the mainstream culture, work hard, avoid building mosques, and, more generally, integrate.

Theories of the Far Right

These rather empirical and *prima facie* explanations fit well into more established patterns of explaining the rising support for the extreme right in Western Europe, skilfully summarised by Roger Eatwell as demand-side and

supply-side theories.²⁸ The “demand-side” refers to the factors that make individuals more likely to support such parties, while the “supply-side” alludes to the strategy of the far-right actors.

Demand-Side Theories

The first of these is the *single-issue thesis*, which implies that the popularity of far-right parties increases when there are major concerns regarding immigration amongst the electorate, especially in relation to issues of unemployment and the perceived scarcity of resources. However, a detailed look at historical statistics shows that far-right success does not necessarily correlate with new waves of immigration. Thus, Eatwell states that the immigration issue “appears to be one of perception more than reality”.²⁹

The *protest thesis* is the idea that disillusionment with mainstream parties has helped to conjure up support for far-right parties. There are limitations to this approach however, as although voters are likely to protest against the establishment, rational choice certainly also plays a role, and ideological affinity is very important in regards to informing choices.³⁰

The *social breakdown thesis* relates the emergence of the extreme right to the sociological idea of anomie – a breakdown of social bonds in modern societies that produces feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. As traditional structures break down, individuals look towards groups that appear to offer them a chance of belonging. Groups, such as the far right, that champion traditional values, the family, and nationalism are especially attractive to individuals who have never experienced a secure social milieu. This theory is based on studies that have found a connection between high levels of social isolation and voting for far-right parties. However, other evidence suggests that there is a high rate of associational membership in far-right groups, whereby members often join through familial ties.³¹

The (*reverse*) *post-material thesis* is – as its name suggests – modelled on the post-material thesis used in the 1970s and 1980s by sociologists to explain the shift in Western societies from traditional class and economic interests towards more concern for issues such as the environment, emancipation, and feminism. In the 1990s, modifications to this theory were made to help explain the rise in popularity of the far right, as it was increasingly becoming clear that post-materialism had a limited appeal; namely, it was principally popular within sections of society that were young and educated. In fact, many alienated individuals favoured the *reverse* ideals and looked towards parties that promoted conservative values and economic growth through rewarding working people. While it is evident that many far-right parties in

28 Cf. Roger Eatwell, Ten Theories of the Extreme Right, in: Merkl/Weinberg, cited above (Note 26), pp. 47-73.

29 Ibid., pp. 49-51, p. 50.

30 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

31 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 52-54.

Europe have adopted these features of the “Anglo-American New Right”, parties such as the “Flemish Interest” (*Vlaams Belang*, VB) in Belgium and the *Front National* in France do in fact have an anti-materialist philosophy and give political issues priority over economic concerns.³²

The *economic-interest thesis* makes the traditional connection between far-right voters and relative deprivation, also including those who are likely to feel the negative economic effects of globalization. The correlation between socioeconomic interest and far-right voting remains unclear, however there is evidence that socioeconomic problems in combination with fears of immigrants being treated more favourably can boost support for the far right.³³

Supply-Side Theories

The *political opportunity structure (POS) thesis* focuses on two sets of political factors: how the mainstream parties may help or obstruct a far-right party, and how a state’s institutional structure can affect smaller parties. Extremist parties are likely to gain support when voters are unable to differentiate clearly between the mainstream parties as they move towards the centre and neglect or converge on issues which are of large concern to the electorate.³⁴ At the institutional level, proportional representation can give opportunities to smaller parties, such as in France and the Scandinavian countries. While Germany has a five per cent election threshold that makes it hard for smaller parties to be represented at state level, the federal system allows smaller parties to be more successful locally.³⁵

While the POS theory ignores the impact of the media, the *mediatization thesis* stresses its power. The media is generally hostile to the far right and often plays a role in delegitimizing the far right electorally. Nonetheless, there have been examples where parts of the media have explicitly supported the far right. Additionally, the media can indirectly aid the far right by focusing on divisive issues such as immigration or by stressing personality or character, which aids far-right parties that tend to be leader-driven. The power of the media to influence the electoral success of the far right is hard to measure, however extensive coverage – both positive and negative – of a party does undoubtedly provide the far right with exposure.³⁶

According to the *national traditions thesis*, the success of far-right parties lies in their ability to depict themselves as a “legitimate part of the national tradition” and thus distance themselves from Nazism and fascism.³⁷ Far-right populist parties are careful to construct a legitimate discourse on

32 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 54-56.

33 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

34 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 58.

35 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

36 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 60-62.

37 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 62.

immigration and the failure of integration. Eatwell emphasises that while national traditions are effective, they are more facilitating factors than causal ones.³⁸

The *programmatic thesis* links content of the party programme to support. Political campaigning in general has become increasingly centred around particular issues, and far-right parties are often successful in exploiting these issues by making them central components of their party programme to attract support. Further, there is an idea that far-right parties use a “winning formula” that involves combining authoritarian anti-immigration politics and free market economics.³⁹

The *charismatic leader thesis* – is centred on leadership traits as well as audience receptivity. Voters are generally attracted to leaders who are able to deliver messages in a simplified and emotive form. A charismatic leader also has the potential to make a party look powerful, which is important for smaller parties. Like the other explanations, however, one cannot attribute far-right support solely to the charisma of a leader.⁴⁰

Populism – between Extremism and Democracy

Right-wing populism is a delicate issue to handle and a tough choice from a normative point of view. Populism has been defined as “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”.⁴¹ The people are portrayed as the majority, the man on the street, the “little people”, who are at the same time homogeneous and diverse, since they represent various social classes; and they are people who “work hard”. All these qualities in effect support the idea of legitimacy, which thus “gives substance to the populist argument”.⁴² Importantly, populism is not bound to a specific ideological content, but rather refers to “a political style, demagoguery, or an electoral strategy”.⁴³ That said, scholars have noted the increasing number of common themes propagated by right-wing and left-wing populism. An important difference between the two, however, which then also spills over to “extremism” of either colour, is the stance to-

38 Cf. *ibid.*, pp.62-63.

39 Cf. *ibid.*, pp.63-65.

40 Cf. *ibid.*, pp.65-67.

41 Cas Mudde/Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Populism and (liberal) democracy: a framework for analysis, in Cas Mudde/Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds), *Populism in Europe and the Americas. Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge 2012, pp. 1-26, p. 8 (emphasis in the original).

42 Jérôme Jamin, Two different realities. Notes on populism and the extreme right, in: Andrea Mammone/Emmanuel Godin/Brian Jenkins (eds), *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*, Abingdon 2013, pp. 38-52, p. 41.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

wards equality. The far right will always endeavour to create boundaries that separate a community of “us” from “them”.

Right-wing extremism has very often been defined in a rather empirical way, by listing various types of attitudes (anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, etc.) and even personality characteristics, such as authoritarianism. Theoretically, a clear-cut differentiation can be made between this and right-wing populism, which “only” attacks the corrupt elites and otherwise tends to support (non-extremist) conservative positions. In reality, the dividing lines are rather porous, as far-right ideas have recently moved to the centre of political discourse, so that representing “the wishes of the people” can in fact display distinct far-right features. For example, more often than not, the critique voiced against the elites has to do with their lax stance on immigration and integration. In an extreme case, Anders Breivik explained that he had to help save Norway from a Muslim invasion and that the Labour Party had to “pay the price” for “letting down Norway and the Norwegian people”.⁴⁴

Right-wing populism might appear as less “bad” than extremism since, as mentioned earlier, it avoids judgements based on race, as well as the use of violence to further its purposes. Indeed, and this is an argument that far-right leaders often put forward, its rise has been within and with the help of the democratic system – a system that it, paradoxically, aims to undermine. “One should be allowed to say what one thinks” – we often hear; or, “real democracy does not censor opinions”. Indeed, in a paradoxical way, far-right parties play the “freedom of speech” and the “power to the people” cards to legitimize the expression of their, in reality, deeply undemocratic opinions. At the same time, for good measure, they would openly distance themselves from “extremists” and from violence. This is not just a tactical move that allows them to remain on the legal side of things, but also seeks to attract the sympathy of the mainstream, and of its core constituency, which seems to lay a high value on structure, law, and order. Generally, the relationship between populism and democracy has been characterized as follows: “Populism is essentially democratic [...] but it is ambivalent towards *liberal* democracy”.⁴⁵ On the one hand, populism is in favour of popular sovereignty and majority rule, yet, on the other, it clashes with the protection of minority rights inherent to liberal democracy.

While never laid bare and thus far little explored, interlinkages between the legal and the illegal (i.e. extremist) sides of the far right emerge time and again. Studies looking into far-right parties hardly ever glance at this side of their activity, concerned as they are with the workings of the legal political system. Case studies of right-wing extremist and terrorist violence, on the other hand, regularly note en passant that individuals were either mentored, financed, or at some point involved with certain political parties. Life stories

44 Simon Parkin, *Death by Video Game. Tales of Obsession from the Virtual Front Line*, London 2015, p. 127.

45 Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser, cited above (Note 41), p. 16 (emphasis in the original).

of individuals involved in right-wing extremism and terrorism also indicate how initial contacts with the far-right ideology and the subsequent deepening of involvement with it are facilitated by the fact that some of their ideas were shared by many representatives of the mainstream, or indeed discussed “down the pub”. Authors such as Peter H. Merkl differentiate between subcultures, social movements, and political parties, defining subcultures as broader and more diffuse social milieus that produce basic right-wing attitudes. Finally, not unlike their counterparts at the other end of the political spectrum, various segments of the far right will gather together around certain issue clusters – as in the case of the Pegida movement (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes/Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident*).

The FPÖ missed out on victory by a few percentage points. To his credit, Mayor Häupl’s final statements before the election expressed a positive view of refugees rather than stressing messages targeted to his comrades. He thus ran the risk of alienating even more blue-collar voters. The risk paid off and Vienna could breathe again, at least for the time being. Interestingly, and going somewhat against the predictions of most theories, 13 per cent of FPÖ voters were graduates.⁴⁶ In their case, it was neither economic tribulations, nor mere fear of foreigners that motivated them to vote for the far right. Indeed, some individuals who were interviewed revealed either their long-standing loyalty to the party, or the fact that they actually agree with the majority of the values and ideas proclaimed by the FPÖ, be it the conservative image of the family or a structured approach to the refugee question. While these findings are in no way broad enough to support any kind of definitive conclusion, they do warrant at least a question mark with regard to the positioning of far-right parties on the mainstream-extreme spectrum. As already indicated in the title, far-right parties are usually categorized as (among other things) “populist”, meaning that they stand for what people want. Yet closer analysis frequently reveals their “extremist” nature, the kinds of outrageous, oftentimes outright undemocratic ideas and general distaste for everything foreign. Both mainstream politics and academics might have to face the highly uncomfortable situation whereby this is what “the people” actually want.

46 Köksal Baltacı, Die untypischen Wähler der FPÖ [The Atypical Voters of the FPÖ], in: *Die Presse*, 17 October, at: <http://diepresse.com/home/4846143/Die-untypischen-Waehler-der-FPO>.