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## Examining the Rise of Right Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe

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*Examining the Rise of Right Wing Populist  
Parties in Western Europe*

AN HONORS THESIS  
College of St. Benedict|St. John's University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Distinction  
in the Department of Political Science

By  
Jack Malone

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the resurgence of right wing populist parties in Western Europe and seeks to resolve why they have been so successful over the past two decades. To answer this question, this thesis identifies the main factors contributing to the right wing's success, be they cultural, economic, or structural, and measures the relative importance of each factor through quantitative analysis. The dependent variable, a right wing populist party's proportional representation in its national parliament, is measured against various independent variables such as a country's economic figures, level of anti-immigration sentiment, and electoral systems. Though there is still more research to be done on the topic, the data presented in this thesis supports the conclusion that culturally motivated anti-immigration sentiment is the major underlying cause of right wing populism's newfound appeal, and that a country's electoral system must be based on proportional representation in order for a right wing populist party to translate this support into electoral success.

## I. Introduction

For the first time in history, a right wing populist party (RPP) is leading the polls for a European parliamentary election. According to the latest polls, the French right wing populist party Front National (FN) is projected to receive a plurality of the vote, with 23% of respondents saying that they will vote for FN in the European elections this May, while 34% said that they support the party's ideas<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, Front National just secured its best ever result in local elections, winning fourteen townships<sup>2</sup>. Even if Front National does not receive the most votes this spring, its ascension into the mainstream of European politics is already a symbolic victory in and of itself. Right wing populist parties were a fringe movement in Europe just twenty years ago, but today they have firmly established themselves in over half a dozen countries. The world is beginning to take notice of a development that political scientists have been studying for decades: A significant portion of the European electorate has become more sympathetic to the right wing cause.

Over the last thirty years, European right wing populist parties have made considerable electoral gains at the national, state, and local levels of government. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) is currently the most popular party in Switzerland,

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<sup>1</sup> "Européennes : le Front national en tête des intentions de vote" *le Parisien*. 26 January 2014

<sup>2</sup> Samuel, Henry "France's Front National claims biggest victory in history" *The Telegraph* 30 March 2014

controlling 26.6% of the seats in the National Council<sup>3</sup>. Right wing populist parties also currently have large parliamentary vote shares in Norway (16.3%)<sup>4</sup>, Belgium (7.8%)<sup>5</sup>, Denmark (13.5%)<sup>6</sup>, and Austria (20.5%)<sup>7</sup>. While it remains to be seen if the right wing populist movement will extend its influence into other European legislatures, its success has been too extensive and sustained to be written off as an anomaly. Clearly, there has been a dramatic shift in voting behavior, at the very least in these specific countries if not Western Europe as a whole.

This leads me to my primary research question: Why have right wing populist parties been so much more successful in national elections over the last twenty-five years? How exactly has the electorate changed that they now find right wing populism so much more appealing? Moreover, is it simply the electorate that has changed, or have right wing populist parties also significantly altered their platform in order to broaden their appeal? Using the right wing populist parties in Austria, Denmark, and France as case studies, I will attempt to identify the principal causes of this shift in voting behavior.

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<sup>3</sup> Dataset: Swiss Federal Election, 2011. *European Election Database*. Web 6 Nov. 2013

<sup>4</sup> Dataset: Norwegian Parliamentary Election, 2013. *European Election Database*. Web 6 Nov. 2013

<sup>5</sup> Dataset: Belgian Federal Election, 2011. *European Election Database*. Web 6 Nov. 2013

<sup>6</sup> Dataset: Danish General Election, 2011. *European Election Database*. Web 6 Nov. 2013

<sup>7</sup> Dataset: Austrian Legislative Election, 2013. *European Election Database*. Web 6 Nov. 2013

This shift in individual voting behavior is certainly a major component of right wing populism's success, but a country's electoral system is perhaps just as vital to the viability of a right wing populist party. Currently, right wing populist parties have only become major parties in countries that award seats in parliament based on proportional representation. I will try to discern if this disparity in representation is due to some inherent component of the proportional system that is beneficial to right wing populist parties. Relating to that question, I will also look at right wing populist parties in countries that do not have a proportional system, and I will try to determine if these electoral systems are currently preventing right wing populist parties from becoming viable on the national level.

The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate why right wing populist parties came into power, but I will also briefly examine how these parties have been able to influence national policy. For my secondary research question I will try to determine just how successful each major right wing populist party has been in implementing its agenda. I will look at what laws, particularly those relating to immigration, prominent right wing populist parties have been able to pass. Beyond their direct legislative accomplishments, I will also touch upon the impact right wing populist parties have had on the European political discourse; specifically, whether or not they have forced mainstream parties to shift to the right on any major issue.



## **II. Layout**

Beginning in Section III I will give a brief historical overview of right wing populist parties across Europe from the end of World War II to the present day. Next I will review the relevant scholarly literature on contemporary right wing populist parties in section IV, in which I will identify the most prominent theories as to why they have risen to greater prominence over the last twenty years; I will then form my hypotheses based on these theories.

I will devote one section each to my case studies of Austria, Denmark, and France, where I will examine each country's demographics, electoral history, economic variables, and relevant cultural factors. I will then conclude this thesis with two levels of comparative analysis; first by determining the most significant motives of right wing voters, and then by examining what effects, if any, a country's electoral system has on the success of right wing populist parties. Based on the data gathered by these two experiments, I will determine if a given hypothesis was strongly supported, seriously discredited, or if the data was inconclusive and requires further research. Additionally, I will rank the relative importance of each factor (economic, cultural, and structural) in facilitating the rise of right wing populism over the last twenty years.

## **III. Historical Overview**

In the years immediately following the Second World War, right wing populist parties virtually ceased to exist across Europe, as their brand had become toxic. Rightly

or wrongly, the majority of voters associated right wing parties with fascism and the Third Reich<sup>8</sup>. This label proved exceedingly difficult to discredit, and as a result right wing populist parties had little to no relevance in the European political landscape. From the 1950s to the 1980s, only a select few right wing populist parties broke the vote threshold needed to attain seats in parliament, and never was this success sustained for multiple terms<sup>9</sup>. The first signs of life for the movement came in France, when Front National received nearly 10% of the vote in the 1986 national election<sup>10</sup>. It was not long after that right wing populist parties started to gain seats in the national parliaments of Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and Norway.

Since the early nineties, right wing populist parties have become more popular in almost every country in Europe, but as of 2014 they only have widespread followings in Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, and France. Though the number of seats won has varied between elections, support for RPPs in these countries has remained relatively stable, with each party sans Front National consistently maintaining enough seats to qualify for the vote threshold in the national parliament.

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<sup>8</sup> Rydgren, Jens. 2005. "Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family". *European Journal of Political Research*. 44 (3): 413-437.

<sup>9</sup> Halla, Martin and Wagner, Alexander F. and Zweimüller, Josef, Immigration and Voting for the Extreme Right (October 25, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Dataset: European Election Database-France, 1986. *European Election Database*. Web 6 Nov. 2013

Election **results** of radical-right-wing parties (%) in selected EU member countries, national parliamentary elections (averages) and election to European Parliament (EP) 2009\*

Table 1

	1980– 1984	1985– 1989	1990– 1994	1995– 1999	2000– 2004	2005– 2009	EP 2009
Belgium (B)	1.1	1.7	6.6	19.9	13.8	14.0	10.1
Denmark (DK)	6.4	6.9	6.4	9.8	12.6	13.9	14.8
Germany Federal Republic (D)	0.2	0.6	2.3	3.3	1.0	2.1	1.7
France (F)	0.4	9.9	12.7	14.9	12.4	4.7	6.3
Great Britain (GB)	-.	0.6	0.9	-.	0.2	0.7	8.3
Italy (I)	6.8	5.9	17.8	15.7	4.3**	8.3**	10,2**
Norway (N)	4.5	8.4	6.0	15.3	14.7	22.5	--
Austria (A)	5.0	9.7	19.6	24.4	10.0	28.2	17.8
Sweden (S)	-.	-.	4.0	-.	1.5	3.0	3.3
Switzerland (CH)	3.8	6.3	10.9	9.3	1.3	30.0	--
<b>Average (Ø)</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>12.7</b>	

Figure 1.1. Taken from Langenbacher, Nora. 2011. *Is Europe on the "right" path? right-wing extremism and right-wing populism in Europe*. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Forum Berlin. p. 44

As the chart above demonstrates, right wing populist parties all across Europe have steadily increased their vote shares over the last thirty years. The average national vote share of RPPs has risen by nearly ten points. Moreover, even though right wing populism remains largely irrelevant in many countries, one can see that every RPP currently enjoys a higher vote share than it did in 1980-84. In a relatively short amount of time, right wing populist parties have gone from essentially non-existent in Europe to having double digit vote shares in five countries, even managing to attain a plurality of the vote in Switzerland and Austria (though the FPÖ is currently the country's third

largest party). The chart below demonstrates how RPPS have followed a similar trend in the European Parliament.

Percent Representation in European Parliament				
Year	FPÖ	UKIP	DF	VB
1994	27.5	1	X	7.8
1999	23.4	6.7	5.8	9.4
2004	6.3	16.1	6.8	14.3
2009	17.8	16.6	14.8	10.1

Figure 1.2. Created by author with data gathered from the European Election Database

Moreover, with Front National (23%), the Danish People’s Party(15%), and the Freedom Party of Austria (30%) all leading in the polls for the upcoming European Parliamentary elections, it would seem that support for right wing populism now seems to be as strong as it has ever been.

#### **IV. Literature Review**

In this section I will discuss the different approaches to defining right wing populism, as well as the most prominent theories as to why far right parties succeed in certain countries but not others.

##### *Definition/Terminology*

To form an accurate definition of right wing populism, one must understand its two base terms, “right wing” and “populist”. “Right wing” is best defined as an ideology that accepts or supports a system of social hierarchy or social inequality<sup>11</sup>. Right wing populist parties’ belief in a clear social hierarchy is most evident in their universal

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<sup>11</sup> Rodney P. Carlisle. *Encyclopedia of politics: the left and the right, Volume 2*. University of Michigan; Sage Reference, 2005. p.693, 721.

condemnation of immigrants and their claims that the state should not support them the same way it does “native” citizens. Hans Georg Betz, describes these parties as right wing because they “reject social equality and the integration of foreigners and other outsiders”<sup>12</sup>. Right wing populist parties, whether for cultural or economic reasons, all want to drastically limit immigration into their respective countries, if not entirely. Moreover, consistent with their belief in a social hierarchy, Betz also classifies right wing populist parties as having a neo-liberal economic philosophy. According to Betz, right wing populist parties tend to be highly critical of “high levels of taxation, or the bureaucratic state in general, and of welfare outlays” and advocate to remedy this with a “drastic curtailing of the role of the state in the economy and large-scale privatization of the public sector”<sup>13</sup>.

While “right wing” describes the fundamental component of these parties’ ideology, the term “populist” would best describe how they promote their ideas to the general public. According to Betz, a populist rhetoric is designed to “appeal to the allegedly superior common sense of the common people against the dominant cultural and political consensus”<sup>14</sup>. A populist party has a deliberately divisive and antagonistic message, often claiming to be on the side of the working class while demonizing the so-called “elites” of society who are working against their interests. In doing so, these

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<sup>12</sup> Betz, p. 413

<sup>13</sup> Betz, p. 418

<sup>14</sup> Betz, Hans Georg “The Two Faces of Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe”. *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 663-685

parties are exploiting the frustration of the general public for political gain<sup>15</sup>. These parties employ a populist approach in that they specifically cater to voters who have become “disenchanted with their individual life chances and the political system”<sup>16</sup> and are able effectively channel this anger into electoral support by creating scapegoats out of immigrants and the mainstream “elites” who control the parties in power.

Neither of the two terms “right wing” or “populist” by themselves adequately describes the parties in this family, and Betz stresses that it is the only by combining these two terms that one gets an accurate definition of right wing populist parties. Betz ultimately characterizes right wing populist parties as follows:

they are right-wing in their rejection of individual and social equality, in their opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups, and in their appeal to xenophobia, if not overt racism. They are populist in their instrumentalization of sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment and their appeal to the common man and his allegedly superior common sense <sup>17</sup>

In forming his own definition of right wing populism, Cas Mudde takes a slightly different approach from Betz. Mudde first differentiates between a “minimum definition” and a “maximum definition” of right wing populism<sup>18</sup>. To form a minimum definition, or a less extensive definition of a right wing populist party, Mudde believes that one must identify the “core concept” of right wing populism that is most essential

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<sup>15</sup> Betz, p. 415

<sup>16</sup> Merit, Susi. “The Danish People's Party, the Italian Northern League and the Austrian Freedom Party in a Comparative Perspective: Party Ideology and Electoral Support”. Phd Discertation

<sup>17</sup> Betz, Hans-George. *The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*. *Comparative Politics* , Vol. 25, No. 4 (Jul., 1993) , pp. 413-427. P. 415

<sup>18</sup> Mudde, Cass. 2007 p. 15.

to understanding its worldview. A shared belief in this “core concept” will be the factor which unites all right wing populist parties into the same party family.

For Mudde, identifying this core concept was not exceedingly difficult. He first considers the possibility that “nationalism” is the core concept that connects all far right populist parties. However, Mudde ultimately decides that nationalism is too broad of a term for the core concept. While it is certainly true that far right populist parties champion national pride, this is not something that is wholly unique to far right parties, as many liberal and moderate parties espouse similar, albeit less brash forms of nationalism<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the term “nationalist” is a good encapsulation of far right ideals in that it expresses pride for one’s homeland, but it is missing the other half of the equation; Far right parties are defined not just by their belief in “protecting their own” but equally so by their belief that “outsiders” are dangerous to the natural order of things.

It is for this reason that Mudde chooses “nativism” as the core concept of far right populist parties, as Mudde defines the term as “an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state”<sup>20</sup>. For Mudde, a political party should be considered a right wing populist party if it campaigns on a platform of nativism, regardless of its

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<sup>19</sup> Mudde, Cas, 2007. p. 19

<sup>20</sup> Mudde, Cas. 2007 p. 19

economics or foreign policy. Different far right parties can disagree on any number of issues, but so long as both advocate for nativist policies, then both meet the minimum definition of a far right party.

Mudde's maximum definition of a right wing populist party obviously has a stricter set of criteria. Nativist ideology remains the only vital condition for a right wing populist party, but for the maximum definition Mudde identifies two additional core concepts. In addition to nativism, the maximum definition requires that a party be authoritarian, or believe in a "strictly ordered society, in which infringements on authority are punished severely"<sup>21</sup>. A party must also be populist, which Mudde defines as an ideology that "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'<sup>22</sup>. A party that fits the minimum definition of right wing populism will hold a nativist worldview, while a party that fits the maximum definition will go to greater depths to promote and implement this worldview. If a party endorses all three of these core concepts, then it fits the maximum definition a right wing populist party.

Mudde's definition is largely in agreement with Betz's in that he characterizes right wing populism as a belief in a nativist social hierarchy fostered by anti-establishment politics. However, unlike Betz, Mudde does not place any emphasis on neo-liberalism in his definition. In fact he makes no mention of any kind of consistent economic philosophy that is shared by all right wing populist parties. To Mudde, right

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<sup>21</sup> Mudde, Cas. 2007 p. 22

<sup>22</sup> Mudde, Cas. 2007 p. 23



wing populist parties are defined first and foremost by their nativism, and do not necessarily have to espouse similar economic principles in order to be categorized into the same party family.

In forming his own definition, Richard Saull views right wing populism in a broader sense. Saull does not see nativism itself as the sole component of a right wing ideology, but rather part of a larger idea of wanting to uphold traditional societal norms. According to Saull, when viewing right wing populist parties strictly on ideological terms, there is actually not a great deal that separates them from more traditional conservative parties. He notes that both far right parties and mainstream conservative parties share an “idealization of the past, a sense of cultural pessimism and an importance attached to what are regarded as ‘natural social hierarchies’”<sup>23</sup>. However, a major difference between right wing populists and more traditional conservatives is that conservatives concern themselves with preserving the status quo, while far right parties actively attempt to implement reactionary policies that would return their respective nations to a “better time”<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, traditional conservative parties consistently champion the virtues of individualism, with respect to both economic freedom and individual rights. Most far right parties extol similar individualist rhetoric. However, Saull concludes that the far right’s unenlightened views

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<sup>23</sup> Saull, Richard. 2013. "Capitalism, crisis and the far-right in the neoliberal era". *Journal of International Relations and Development*. p.5-6

<sup>24</sup> Saull, p. 6

on race and gender are incompatible with this understanding of individualism. Saull finds that:

the far-right ideological armoury consists of a tendency towards xenophobia, 'racial exclusionism' and a commitment to institutionalizing and upholding inequalities in the spheres of gender, race, nationality and ethnicity, that combine with a strong dosage of anti-individualism whereby the autonomy of the individual is supposed to submit to the will of the nation via the state. This anti-individualism<sup>25</sup>.

In Saull's view, while right wing populism shares some important viewpoints with traditional conservatism, its reactionary and authoritarian views with respect to minorities makes it an entirely distinct ideology.

Scholars seem to be in general agreement as to the core principles of right wing populism. However, while "right wing populist" is a widely used phrase to describe these parties, there is no wide-ranging consensus that it should be the official terminology. Over the years, scholars have used dozens different terms to describe these parties. Just a few of the most common terms include: extreme right, far right, radical right, right, national populist, new populist, exclusionary populist, xenophobic populist, ethno-national populist, nativist, post fascist, and reactionary tribalist<sup>26</sup>. While it would be preferable for scholars to have more uniformity in their terminology, ultimately this wide variation in terms has not significantly hampered the study of right wing populist parties. As Mudde puts it, "we know who they are, even though we do not

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<sup>25</sup> Saull, p. 7

<sup>26</sup> Mudde, Cas. 2007. Populist radical right parties in Europe. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. p. 11-12

know exactly what they are<sup>27</sup>". Indeed, even though scholars may disagree on criteria or semantics, and despite the fact that many of these parties disagree on certain policy issues, there does seem to be a far-reaching consensus as to which parties should be categorized into this party family. In this paper I will refer to these parties as right wing populist, and even though I will cite authors who use various different terminologies, the material will nonetheless be applicable to this topic.

### *Ties to Fascism and Neo-Nazis*

It should also be noted that despite a few significant similarities, right wing populist parties are distinct from Neo-Nazi and Neo-fascist parties, and should not be categorized into the same party family. Some scholars understandably draw parallels between the contemporary right wing populist movement and the Neo-Nazi movement. After all, both are staunchly anti-immigrant and both are known to use authoritarian and anti-statist rhetoric. However, right wing populist parties cannot be equated with Neo-Nazism if only for the reason that Neo-Nazism by definition refers to any social or political movement seeking to revive National Socialism<sup>28</sup>. Neo-Nazi parties openly and emphatically support the idea that whites are the master race and that they should be the dominant ethnic group in society. The National Democratic Party of Germany, perhaps the most prominent Neo-Nazi party in Europe, referred to the election of Barack Obama as the result of ""the American alliance of Jews and Negroes" and that

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<sup>27</sup> Mudde, Cas. 1996. The War of Words. Defining the Extreme Right Party Family. In: *West European Politics*, 19: 225–248. p. 233

<sup>28</sup> McGowan, Lee (2002). *The Radical Right in Germany: 1870 to the Present*. Pearson Education. pp. 9, 178

Obama wanted to destroy the “White Identity”<sup>29</sup>. Though there are certainly those who would label right wing populist parties as racist, but even they would concede that RPPs would not publicly use racial slurs. Furthermore, Neo-Nazism is defined under Austrian law as follows:

Neo-Nazism, a legal term, is understood as the attempt to propagate, in direct defiance of the law (Verbotsgesetz), Nazi ideology or measures such as the denial, playing-down, approval or justification of Nazi mass murder, especially the Holocaust<sup>30</sup>

Even scholars who openly accuse right wing populist parties of being racist or xenophobic do not go as far to align them with such ideas. Moreover, Neo-Nazi parties are also commonly known to “advocate the overthrow of the democratic order or the use of violence”<sup>31</sup>. Right wing populist parties, while generally thought of as radical, do not as a whole endorse violent or illegal means to take over the government. Finally, Neo-Nazi parties are frequently anti-capitalist, a clear contrast to the neo-liberalism commonly advocated by right wing populist parties<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that all major right wing populist parties outright deny any ties to a Neo-Nazi or Neo-fascist parties<sup>33</sup>. While many scholars find certain right wing rhetoric to be worrisome, most

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<sup>29</sup> Swaine, John “Calls for prosecution after German politician says Obama win 'a declaration of war” Telegraph.co.uk, 11 November 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Brigitte Bailer-Galanda; Wolfgang Neugebauer. "Right-Wing Extremism in Austria: History, Organisations, Ideology". *Stiftung Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*. p.5-21.

<sup>31</sup> Laqueur, Walter, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future*, p. 117-118

<sup>32</sup> Art, David *The Politics of Nazi Past in Germany and Austria*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. P. 91

<sup>33</sup> Price, Nathan. "The Resurgence of the Radical-Right in Western European Politics: Analysis of the French, Italian, Austrian, and Belgian Cases" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association 67th Annual National Conference, The Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL, Apr 02, 2009

agree that it would be a step too far to conflate right wing populist parties with Neo-Nazism.

### *Electoral Systems*

Scholars have debated just what affect, if any, a country's electoral system has on the success of right wing populist parties. Europe has a wide variety of electoral systems, some seemingly more favorable to minority parties than others. Below is a brief summary of some of the different electoral systems in Europe:

**Proportional systems:** In a proportional system, the amount of representatives a party has in parliament is roughly equal to the percentage of vote it receives in the election<sup>34</sup>. For example, if one party were to receive 27% of the vote and another 15%, then they would be represented in a one hundred-seat parliament with 27 and 15 seats respectively. In proportional systems voters select a political party, not an individual candidate, to represent them in government. The party leaders ultimately determine which of its politicians will fill its awarded seats based on party-lists, and the voters may or may not be aware of who are on these lists<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Norris, Pippa. 1997. "Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional, Majoritarian and Mixed Systems". *International Political Science Review*. 18 (3): 297-312. p. 297

<sup>35</sup> Norris, p. 302

**Plurality systems:** A plurality system, also known as a “first-past-the-post” system, employs winner-take-all style elections in which only the candidate that receives the most votes in a given electoral district will be elected into office. A candidate does not need to receive a majority of the vote (greater than fifty percent), only one more vote than his or her opponent(s). In a first past the post system, there could be a scenario in which one candidate receives 35% of the vote, while the other contestants get 34% and 32% respectively. Though opinion on the three candidates is evenly divided, only the candidate who receives 35% will be put into office; in effect, only 35% of voters will get to have their views represented in government. The result of an election is often a “manufactured majority” in which the share of seats for the winning party is deliberately exaggerated in order to produce an effective ruling faction. As Norris explains, “The focus is effective governance, not the representation of minority views”<sup>36</sup>. Minority voices, at least in theory, are suppressed for the sake of getting things done.

**Second Ballot-Runoff Systems:** This system is designed to ensure that an elected candidate has broad support of the electorate. Under this system, also known as a two-round system, candidates who do not receive a certain percentage of the vote in the first round are eliminated, and voters will then choose from a smaller list of candidates in the second round. There are two kinds of runoffs, a majority runoff where it is absolutely necessary that a candidate receive greater than fifty percent of the vote, or a plurality

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<sup>36</sup> Norris, p. 298

runoff in which the candidate with the highest number of votes in the second round will be elected<sup>37</sup>.

None of these electoral systems have set rules on how many parties are allowed to participate. However, it almost always works out that countries with plurality systems will have two, sometimes three major parties, while countries with proportional systems will have many more viable parties. This phenomenon can be explained by Duverger's Law, which states that "The simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system"<sup>38</sup>. If voters know that only one candidate will be elected into parliament, then they will inevitably end up voting for one of the major candidates, as not to waste their vote. Empirical results would seem to support this theory. The United States, Canada, and the UK, all countries with plurality systems, only have two or (arguably) three major parties. Meanwhile, almost every country with proportional representation regularly has four or five major parties elected into government.

Pippa Norris hypothesizes that a right wing populist party must be in a country with a proportional system in order to succeed, as these kind of elections result in multi-party systems in which a greater variety of viewpoints are represented. A party will only need a small vote share in order to get into the national parliament, which means that politicians can more freely embrace radical views. Perhaps anti-immigration or anti-Muslim stances would not win the support of fifty percent of an

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<sup>37</sup> Norris, p. 300

<sup>38</sup> Duverger, M. (1959) *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Second English Revised edn. London: Methuen & Co.

electorate, but in countries like Austria and Switzerland it is enough to win the support of twenty-five to thirty percent; and in countries with multi-party systems that is all that is necessary to gain significant power. If these countries did not award seats in parliament based on proportional representation, then they would likely have two party systems that would greatly diminish the relevance of right wing populist parties.

Durverger's also applies to a two-round system. Since only one candidate will be chosen, voter's choices are essentially limited to only a few viable options in the second round. An observation of France's elections for the National Assembly indicate that it is exceedingly difficult for right wing populist parties to succeed in countries with two-round elections. Front National has always done well in opinion polls, and consistently gains support from more than ten percent of the electorate in the first round of elections. However, Front National has not usually been able to make it into the second round of national elections, and when it does it is almost always soundly defeated. Since the second round the ballot is often limited to the top two or three vote getters, it has not been able to translate this significant amount of support into any kind of tangible political power.

#### *Voter Apathy/Declining Participation*

Scholars are currently debating just what effect, if any, voter turnout has on right wing populist parties. Though they still have higher turnouts than the United States,



voter turnout has been steadily declining in Europe over the past thirty years<sup>39</sup>. Some have pointed to this statistic as a causal factor for the rise of right wing populist parties. This line of reasoning follows the conventional wisdom that lower turnout tends to benefit radical parties, as a higher percentage of a more motivated and radicalized base will show up, thus ensuring that radical parties will receive a higher percentage of the vote. However, the studies examining this theory with respect to RPPs in Western Europe have been inconclusive at best.

After analyzing the most recent Norwegian elections, Henning Finseraas and Kåre Vernby concluded that the far right Norwegian Progress Party actually benefited from a higher voter turnout<sup>40</sup>. Their findings show that low-income voters, historically a group with low turnout, came out to support the Norwegian Progress Party in such high numbers that the party gained seats even though turnout was high across the board<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, empirical data from other European elections would call into question the notion that lower voter turnout benefits far right parties. The chart below measures the vote shares for the major Austrian parties in four European Parliamentary elections. In the 1996 European Parliamentary elections, the FPÖ received had its best showing in European Parliamentary elections. Voter turnout for that

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<sup>39</sup> "Voter Turnout in Western Europe Since 1945" International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. 2004 p. 8

<sup>40</sup> Finseraas , Henning; Vernby,Kåre "A Mixed Blessing for the Left? Early Voting, Turnout, and Election Outcomes in Norway" Research presented at the European Political Science Association Annual Conference, 2013 p. 2

<sup>41</sup> Finseraas , Henning; Vernby,Kåre p. 7

year was 67.7%. Each successive election shows the voter turnout decreasing, yet the FPÖ, the most radical party, does worse each time. Obviously, there were numerous other factors that influenced the election, so it is still possible that the FPÖ benefited from lower turnout despite the fact that its vote share decreased. Still, such results would call into question the idea that radical parties automatically benefit from low voter turnout.

Year	Voter Turnout	ÖVP	SPÖ	FPÖ	GRÜNE
1996	67.7%	29.7%	29.2%	27.5%	6.8%
1999	49.4%	30.7%	31.3%	23.4%	9.3%
2004	42.4%	32.7%	33.3%	6.3%	12.9%
2009	46.0%	30.0%	23.7%	12.7%	9.9%

Figure 2.1 Taken from Pelinka, Anton and Rosenberger, Sieglinde *Österreichische Politik: Grundlagen - Strukturen - Trends* 2007 p. 171

While the theory has not been definitively disproven, there does not seem to be any strong evidence to support the theory that right wing populist parties automatically benefit from low voter turnout.

### *Immigration*

Anti-immigration sentiment unquestionably plays a major role in the success of far right populist parties. This is one of the few areas of high-universal agreement among scholars. The chart below shows a strong correlation between high levels of immigration in a country and the success of far right parties in that country.



was the primary voting motivation for right wing voters. Moreover, similar studies by Gibson<sup>43</sup>, Fennema<sup>44</sup>, Rydgren<sup>45</sup>, and Mudde<sup>46</sup> all support the hypothesis that anti-immigration sentiment is the strongest predictor for right wing populist voting. Indeed, it is a widely accepted truth among scholars that voters support right wing populist parties primarily due to anti-immigration sentiment. The task then, is not to determine whether or not anti-immigration sentiment motivates right wing voters, but to identify the primary source behind that sentiment.

To address this very question, Daniel Oesch put forward two possible explanations for anti-immigration sentiment: economic protectionism and cultural protectionism. Economic protectionism hypothesizes that voters support right wing populist parties out of a desire to limit a “perceived competition with immigrants for jobs, wages, social benefits, and housing”<sup>47</sup> while cultural protectionism hypothesizes that voters support right wing populist primarily out of a desire to defend their national identity and to “express their unease with multiculturalism and their rejection of equal rights for foreign citizens<sup>48</sup>”. When testing these two hypotheses against one another,

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<sup>43</sup> Gibson Rachel Kay, *The Growth of Anti-Immigration Parties in Western Europe* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Meller Press 2002)

<sup>44</sup> Fennema, M. (2005), Populist parties of the right, in: J. Rydgren (ed.) *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism*, Nova Science Publishers, pp. 1-24.

<sup>45</sup> Rydgren, Jens. 2005. "Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family". *European Journal of Political Research*. 44 (3): 413-437.

<sup>46</sup> Mudde Cas, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Oesch, Daniel *Explaining Workers' Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*. *International Political Science Review*. 2008, vol. 29, no. 3, p. 349 – 373 p.351

<sup>48</sup> Oesch, p. 350

Oesch's findings suggested that economic parameters are perhaps not as consequential to right wing support as one might assume, and that the right wing populist electorate appears to be "more afraid of immigrants' negative influence on the country's culture than the country's economy"<sup>49</sup>.

### *Analysis of Scholarly Literature*

In reviewing the scholarly literature from the most prominent authors in the field, I have identified three main theories as to why right wing populist parties dramatically increased their vote shares over the last thirty years. They are as follows:

1. "The Effect of Proportional Systems" - If a country has a proportional system, then a right wing populist party is exceedingly more likely to be elected into government. Conversely, it is virtually impossible for a far-right party to gain a significant vote share if it is in a country that does not have a proportional system.
2. "Culturally motivated anti-immigration Sentiment" - Many voters are uncomfortable with the cultural shifts brought about by an influx of immigrants, particularly those from Arab countries. Therefore, they support right-wing populist parties because of their anti-immigration policies.
3. "Economically Motivated anti-immigration Sentiment" - Many voters see immigrants as competition for jobs and entitlements. Therefore, they support right wing populist parties for their anti-immigration policies.

From these theories I developed the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis #1: Cultural factors are most responsible for the success of right wing populist parties.

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<sup>49</sup> Oesch, p. 370

- Hypothesis #2: Economic factors are most responsible for the success of right wing populist parties.
- Hypothesis #3: Structural factors are most responsible for the success of right wing populist parties.

My task in this paper will be to test each of these hypotheses in my three case studies and then to determine which one(s) best explain for the recent resurgence of right wing populist parties. I do this with the understanding that these theories are not mutually exclusive. It is certainly possible that all three hypotheses are true to an extent, but they cannot all be equally responsible for the rise of far right populist parties. In my conclusion, I will assess just how much or how little impact each factor had in each of the three case studies.

## **V. Case Study #1: Austria**

For the past thirty years, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) has consistently been one of the most successful parties in Austria. Under the leadership of Jörg Haider, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) first rose to prominence in 1990 when it received 16% of the vote in the Parliamentary Elections. Since then it has continued to be a major political party, gaining as much as 27% of the vote in 1999. The party has remained reliably popular, never seeing its vote share fall below 10%, and currently has a 20.5% vote share. Moreover, according to the latest polls, the FPÖ is expected to

be the leading vote getter in the upcoming European Parliamentary elections, where it is expected to receive more than thirty percent of the vote<sup>50</sup>.

In examining the FPÖ's rise to prominence as well as its sustained electoral success, I will try and determine what is unique about the Austrian electorate and electoral system in order to explain the FPÖ's success. In this case study I will investigate the FPÖ's electoral history, party platform, and the demographics and prominent motivating factors of its electorate.

### *Historical Overview*

The Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) was founded in 1956 by Anton Reinthaller. From its outset, the FPÖ ran on a neoliberal platform, one that strongly extolled the virtues of personal liberty and advocated for less government interference in the economy, creating a clear contrast from the establishment parties who were strongly in favor of the welfare state<sup>51</sup>. Throughout the sixties and seventies, the FPÖ was a minor party, with its vote share fluctuating between five and eight percent. After the election of 1970, the FPÖ struck a deal with the SPÖ. Under this agreement, the FPÖ would publicly lend its support to Chancellor Kreisky's minority government, and in exchange the SPÖ would help pass new electoral laws that were more favorable to minority parties. As a direct result of these new laws, more parties were able to get on the ballot, so the FPÖ was able to increase its representation in

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<sup>50</sup> poll conducted by Deutsche Bank, published in *The New Observer* March 11, 2014

<sup>51</sup> Meret, p.180

parliament without raising its vote totals.

The FPÖ truly began to gain momentum in 1986 when Jörg Haider was elected party leader. A charismatic and shrewd politician, Haider was able to appeal to working class voters who were feeling increasingly marginalized by the influx of immigration and other social changes. Haider decided that FPÖ would place more emphasis on immigration in its national platform, and the party's hard-line anti-immigration stance soon became the focal point of its agenda. The FPÖ were quick to see positive results of this strategy, when in 1990 the parties vote share eclipsed ten percent for the first time. Confident in the party's ability to tap into anti-immigration sentiments, Haider began to push the issue even more aggressively. In the 1996 elections, FPÖ continued to campaign on immigration as its main political issue. In a party platform titled "Contract with Austria", the FPÖ proclaimed that:

The existing immigration laws should not be softened. Each potential immigrant must prove to have a job and an accommodation. To enable the return of numerous illegal immigrants we propose ID requirements such as exist in most industrial countries today. The current practice of granting citizenship well before the legally required ten years should also be stopped<sup>52</sup>.

The FPÖ continued to gain support, and in the 1999 it received 27% of the vote, making it the second most popular party in Austria. However, party leaders soon learned that there were certain drawbacks to being a mainstream party. They actually found it difficult to maintain their populist, anti-establishment image while simultaneously being a leading party in government<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, the FPÖ's-ÖVP coalition government was widely

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<sup>52</sup> From "Contract with Austria". Found in Merit p. 195

<sup>53</sup> Meret, p. 192



criticized when it failed to deliver on its promise to reduce taxes<sup>54</sup>. These factors, along with increased tension among the party leaders, led to a sharp decline in support. In 2002, FPÖ's support had dropped to just 10 percent. Party infighting came soon after, and as a result, Haider left the party in 2004 to form a new party the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), further fracturing the FPÖ. After Haider's defection, the FPÖ chose Heinz-Christian Strache as its new leader, and the party has since returned to being one of the major parties in Austria.

### *Influence on Policy*

Even before it became a major party in government, the FPÖ aggressively pushed for anti-immigration reforms. In 1993, the FPÖ launched a popular initiative on the topic of immigration called *Österreich Zuerst!*<sup>55</sup> (Austria First!) The goal was to collect enough signatures in order to make certain restrictions to Austria's immigration policies adopted as constitutional provisions. Asserting that "Austria is not a country of immigration"<sup>56</sup> the FPÖ made several substantial demands, including the introduction of more rigorous measures against immigration, more efficient border controls and expansion of the police force. The party's list of demands also included "a restriction of the rules for achieving Austrian citizenship, tougher measures against immigrants abusing social benefits and a limitation of the percentage (no more than 30%) of students with another mother tongue in Austrian school classes"<sup>57</sup>. The petition

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<sup>54</sup> Meret, p. 187

<sup>55</sup> Meret, p. 195

<sup>56</sup> *Österreich Zuerst!* 1993, in Sully A. Melanie, *The Haider Phenomenon* (NY: Columbia University Press 1997), 87-88.

<sup>57</sup> "The Danish People's Party, the Italian Northern League and the Austrian Freedom

garnered fewer than 400,000 signatures, falling well below the party's expectations. While the party leaders were disappointed by the result, the petition was a success in the sense that it brought more national attention to immigration, all but forcing the more mainstream parties to address the issue. Later that year, the SPÖ-ÖVP led government coalition passed of restrictive measures for the immigrants already living in Austria. Under the new laws, "Immigrants were required to send to the authorities documented information about their working permit, health insurance certificate and a detailed account of their housing conditions"<sup>58</sup>. The fact that the coalition government passed these measures so soon after the FPÖ lobbied for immigration reform shows that that the parties saw the appeal that the FPÖ's anti-immigrant message and that they "feared that the FPÖ could take a leading role on the issue if the government did not tighten the rules"<sup>59</sup>. Even before the FPÖ had attained any direct political power, its activism was already having a tangible influence on Austrian immigration policy.

Once in government, the FPÖ had more power to exert its influence on immigration, and for a select period of a few years it was quite successful in doing so. In 2002, the FPÖ-ÖVP coalition was able to pass the "Fremdenrechtspaket" which translates to the "Alien Law Package". The Fremdenrechtspaket was a comprehensive list of immigration laws. Most notable of its features include a stricter set of conditions for entry and re-entry, more restrictive settlement and residence requirements, and

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Party in a Comparative Perspective: Party Ideology and Electoral Support

<sup>58</sup> Sully A. Melanie, *The Haider Phenomenon*, (New York: East European Monographs 1997). p. 87

<sup>59</sup> Meret, P. 194

new requirements for obtaining Austrian citizenship<sup>60</sup>. Though it has not passed any significant immigration reforms since Haider's defection, the FPÖ has still kept the issue relevant in Austrian politics. The FPÖ may never be make the broad sweeping changes to Austrian that it desires, but its significant legislative accomplishments prove that it is far from a fringe movement.

### *Electorate of FPÖ*

Traditionally, supporters of the FPÖ's still voters tended to be disproportionately male, working class, and lacking a higher education. However, as a major party in government, the FPÖ currently receives measurable support from all demographics. As the table below shows, the FPÖ did significantly better with men in the in the 1999 Parliamentary election, receiving 31% of all male votes compared to 22% of the female vote. The FPÖ also did 7% better among non-college educated voters.

Ulram 2000:233)

Percentage according to the features	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Greens	LIF(Liberals)
Religion					
practicing Catholics	20	59	13	4	1
others	34	22	30	7	3
Labor union membership					
members	49	19	21	6	2
non-members	24	30	30	8	4
Gender					
male	33	26	32	7	3
female	35	27	21	9	4
Education					
basic	37	24	29	3	2
higher	27	30	22	13	7

exit poll, n = 2,200

Figure 3.1 Taken from Pelinka, Anton "The Haider Phenomenon in Austria". Book. Transaction Publishing, 1997 p. 218

<sup>60</sup> Meret, p. 196

The breakdown becomes clearer when one just examines the demographics of FPÖ voters. Contrary to popular belief, the FPÖ has never been a party that has relied solely on working class votes. As the chart below demonstrates, the FPÖ has always drawn a large percentage of support from white collar voters. In fact, its support from white collar voters actually surpassed its support from blue collar voters in 1999.

**The Dynamics of the FPÖ Electorate**

<b>Percentage of the FPÖ-voters</b>	<b>1978</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1999</b>
men	54	61	60	60	62	62
women	46	39	40	40	38	38
	100	100	100	100	100	100
under 30 years	18	31	27	25	31	27
30–44	28	32	24	27	31	34
45–59	26	15	22	23	20	22
60 and older	28	22	26	26	19	16
	100	100	100	100	100	100
self employed	21	9	8	9	9	10
employed–white collar	24	32	25	24	27	33
employed blue collar	19	22	29	28	35	27
housewives	13	12	9	8	6	8
retired	23	19	27	28	19	18
students, unemployed	1	4	2	4	4	4
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Figure 3.2 Taken from “The Haider Phenomenon”, p. 219

Moreover, while the FPÖ does well with voters under thirty, the vast majority of its supporters are middle aged. Overall though, FPÖ has a relatively even voting distribution among age and economic standing. While this may surprise some, these numbers perfectly reflect the reality that traditional cleavages are much less relevant in modern European politics. A few decades ago, one’s income, social class, or religion

would be fairly accurate predictors of one's voting behavior. However, these social cleavages now have much less of an effect on one's voting behavior<sup>61</sup>. The one category that remains to be an accurate predictor, however, is gender. The FPÖ continues to appeal to men at a much higher rate than women.

Supporters of the FPÖ also tend to share a sharp dissatisfaction with the establishment. This message resonated with voters dissatisfied with the "elite" powers in charge. A vote for the FPÖ was also a vote against the establishment, and that opportunity excited many voters. A survey of far right voters in Austria found that:

"between 39 percent and 66 percent of the FPÖ electorate in the 1990s named desire to 'send a message' as one of its major motivations and saw the FPÖ as the 'new broom' to dust out Austrian politics <sup>62</sup>

While it may not have been their main motivating factor, many Austrians certainly saw protest voting as a legitimate reason to support the FPÖ. Like all other RPP electorates, FPÖ voters see establishment parties as part of the problem. They strongly identify with the FPÖ, even if it is not strictly for policy reasons. When voters cast their votes for the FPÖ many of them are expecting not just a change not just in policy, but also in tenor.

Finally, and most crucially, FPÖ voters are united by their hard-line stance against immigration. Those who support the FPÖ almost uniformly have a distrust of

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<sup>61</sup> Hanspeter, Kriesi, "The transformation of cleavage politics." *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 33, 1998, 165-185.

<sup>62</sup> Inazi, Piero (2003) *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press. p. 119

immigrants and foreigners, and many support the FPÖ for the express purpose of limiting immigration. In a national survey of FPÖ voters, it was found that:

93 Percent of those who voted for the FPÖ wanted to accept only a few immigrants or none at all. This should be compared to 64 percent of those who did not vote for the FPÖ<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, as Figure 3.3 demonstrates, FPÖ voters tend to see immigrants as a threat to Austria’s cultural homogeneity to a much greater extent than voters for other parties. A slight majority of FPÖ voters believe that immigrants actively undermine cultural life, while only 20% think that they enrich it. This results in a percentage difference index (PDI) of 31%, compared to an average PDI of -27%. FPÖ are unquestionably the most concerned with defending their cultural heritage from the perceived threat of immigration.

Cultural life enriched or undermined by immigrants	2002			PDI 2002	N
	Cultural life undermined	Neutral	Cultural life enriched		
<b>Grüne</b>	7	10	83	-76	233
<b>SPÖ</b>	21	27	52	-31	461
<b>ÖVP</b>	26	28	46	-20	563
<b>FPÖ</b>	51	29	20	31	70
<b>All</b>	22	24	49	-27	

Figure 3.3 Taken from Merit, p. 182

### Heimat

In order to fully grasp the origins of Austrian nationalism, one must understand the concept of “Heimat”. While there is no equivalent word in English, Heimat roughly

<sup>63</sup> Rydgen, Jens. “Immigration skeptics, xenophobes, or racists? Radical right voting in six West European countries” European Consortium for Political Research.

translates to “homeland” but is also more generally understood as a concept of having love for one’s heritage and country of birth. Heimat is widely understood among the Austrian people, and has positive connotations even among those who do not hold antagonistic views towards immigration or multiculturalism. However, several times throughout history, politicians have used the concept of Heimat to champion nationalist, xenophobic, or racist ideals. One can frequently hear FPÖ politicians mention of Heimat in speeches and rallies, and the party literature often references Heimat. One of the parties slogans is: *Aus Liebe zur Heimat*<sup>64</sup>(Out of love for our homeland). Moreover, the concept of Heimat features prominently in the FPÖ party platform, which proclaims:

Wir sind dem Schutz unserer Heimat Österreich, unserer nationalen Identität und Eigenständigkeit<sup>65</sup> (We are protecting our homeland Austria, our national identity and autonomy). The document goes on to say: Wir bekennen uns zu unserem Heimatland Österreich als Teil der deutschen Sprach- und Kulturgemeinschaft (We are committed to our country, Austria, as part of the German language and cultural community). Such proclamations are ostensibly patriotic, but have clear undertones that suggest antagonism towards immigrants and foreigners. If there was any doubt of the FPÖ’s nationalistic tendencies, one only need to observe FPÖ campaign slogans which make the following statements:

- Wien darf nicht, was Istanbul werden<sup>66</sup>(Vienna must not become Istanbul);

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<sup>64</sup> “McLaughlin, Liam. “ Are the Austrian FPÖ party really neo-Nazis? “. *The New Statesman*. 9 October 2013

<sup>66</sup> [www.hcstrache.at](http://www.hcstrache.at)

- Dahham statt Islam (Home, not Islam);
- Liebe deine Naechsten. Fuer mich sind das unsere Osterreicher<sup>67</sup> (Love your neighbor. For me these are our Austrians).

Whatever its prior meaning, it is clear that for FPÖ supporters the concept of *Heimat* has “evolved into an exclusionary right to the homeland”<sup>68</sup>. One could say that *Heimat* is almost a code word among the FPÖ and its supporters. By constantly mentioning its love for the homeland, the FPÖ can “argue that the main question was not about being against foreigners, but rather about safeguarding the interests and cultural identity of the historical indigenous groups”. The FPÖ claims that it is only using *Heimat* to instill pride in the homeland, but such antagonistic language speaks for itself.

From what I have gathered from empirical observation, FPÖ politicians seem to place a greater emphasis on the cultural implications of immigration compared to the economic implications. From observing the party platforms, campaign slogans, and stump speeches, FPÖ leaders certainly seem to stress the cultural dangers of immigration more than they do the economic dangers. This is not strictly quantifiable, and it does not by itself prove that cultural protectionism is a greater motivating factor than economic protectionism, but it is certainly an aspect that should be taken under consideration. The amount of emphasis that FPÖ party leaders place on cultural protectionism compared to economic protectionism is certainly telling of which issue they think resonates more with voters.

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<sup>67</sup> [www.fpo.e.at](http://www.fpo.e.at)

<sup>68</sup> Gärtner Reinhold, ‘The FPÖ, foreigners and racism in the Haider Era’ in Wodak Ruth and Pelinka Anton (ed.) *The Haider Phenomenon* (New Brunswick N.J.: Transaction Publishers: Canada 2002).



## *Euroscepticism*

Given that Austrians generally place a strong attachment to their national identity, it is unsurprising that they would be skeptical of any institution that would limit their sovereignty. Throughout the entire history of the institution, the Austrian people have held an overwhelmingly negative view of the European Union. In the most recent poll of 2011, only 37% of Austrians thought that EU membership was a good thing, compared to 47% of the EU average<sup>69</sup>. A general distrust the EU and its leaders is called Euroscepticism, which Paul Taggart describes as ““the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration”<sup>70</sup>. In general, Austrians do not seem to like the idea of being beholden to a foreign power. In fact, “The Alpine regions in the center of Europe have always been skeptical of a distant capital they saw [as] unresponsive, if not actually alien to their interests and traditions”<sup>71</sup>. Similar to how it used populist rhetoric to demonize “the elites”, the FPÖ questioned the idea of that foreign powers could understand Austria’s problems. This argument was an easy sell to those already predisposed to support the FPÖ, as Jamie Sanders believes that:

It is no coincidence that the mountainous Länder of Carinthia and Vorarlberg are where the FPÖ is most successful. These provinces are located at the most western and southern parts of Austria respectively, and the FPÖ cleverly uses this feeling of being misunderstood by the politicians in Vienna to their advantage. If these alpine regions feel

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<sup>69</sup> Eurobarometer Survey: European Commission, 2012a. *Eurobarometer: Membership to the EU*. [online]. Available from: [Accessed 22 January 2014]

<sup>70</sup> Taggart, Paul., 1998. A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems, *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(1), pp.363–388.

<sup>71</sup> Höbelt, L., 2003. *Defiant Populist Jörg Haider and the Politics of Austria*. Indiana: Purdue University Press

misunderstood by their own national capital then it is only natural that they do not trust Brussels, which is located even further away<sup>72</sup>

Even more so than most Europeans, Austrians pride themselves on having a strong national identity. In the most recent Euro barometer from 2006, 44% of the respondents said that they “sometimes” felt both Austrian and European, which was 6% higher than the EU average<sup>73</sup>.

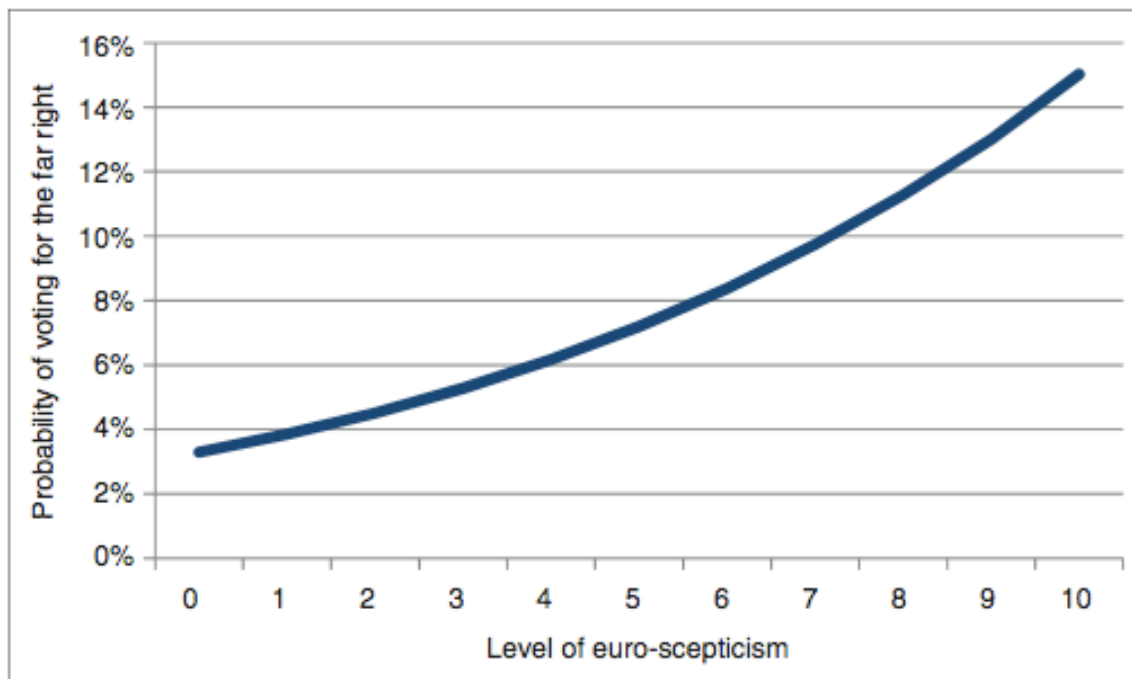


Figure 3.4 Taken from European Social Survey (2002-2008)

Moreover, the chart above taken from the European Social Survey demonstrates a fairly strong correlation between an individual voters level of Euroscepticism and the likelihood that he or she will support a right wing populist party. It seems only natural

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<sup>72</sup> Sanders, Jamie “The Freedom Party of Austria and the Rise of Euroscepticism” July 31 2012.

<sup>73</sup> European Commission, 2012a.

that those who do not trust the European Union would be significantly more likely to support political parties with strong nationalist leanings, and the data taken from Austrian voters from and Europe as a whole would support this theory.

Just as it did with its anti-immigration rhetoric, the FPÖ has shrewdly used the public mistrust of the EU to its political advantage. When Austria first entered the EU: Jörg Haider “saw a chance to pick up voters disgruntled with any loss of Austrian sovereignty”<sup>74</sup>. The FPÖ uses a fear of foreigners and the unknown when it speaks on immigrants. It is applying basically the same principles its stance on the EU. Mainly, that Austria is best left to be run by native Austrians. Its uses both arguments to gain support from those who have nationalistic tendencies.

## **VI. Case Study #2: Denmark**

### *History Overview*

The Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF), is technically the newest major right wing populist party. The party was officially founded in 1995, when Pia Kjaersgaard broke off from the previous major right wing populist party, the Danish Progress Party. The DF’s success was immediate; in its first election in 1998, it received 7.4% of the vote. It was able to increase its vote share to 12% in the 2001 elections, and since then it has not seen its vote share fall below ten percent. It currently has a 12.32% vote share, making it the third most popular party in Denmark. Moreover, if the latest polls are proven correct, the Danish People’s Party will receive the most votes in the upcoming elections for European Parliament. The party currently “would get 15 percent of the vote if the elections, slated

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<sup>74</sup> Höbelt, p. 99

for May 22-25, were held now - outdoing both the Social Democrats and Liberal Party, long the two biggest mainstream parties in the Nordic state”<sup>75</sup>. If this prediction holds true, the Danish People’s Party would be the leading party in the European Parliament of the first time.

#### *Party Platform/Positions*

The stated goal of the Danish People’s party is “to protect our country, its people and the Danish cultural heritage”<sup>76</sup>. The DF party platform repeatedly makes reference to the importance of Danish cultural heritage and how it must be preserved and protected. The party quite bluntly states that “Denmark is not an immigrant-country and never has been. Thus we will not accept transformation to a multiethnic society”<sup>77</sup>. Consistent with its views on having a strong national identity, the Danish People’s Party opposes membership to the European Union, as it does “Not allow Denmark to surrender its sovereignty”. Despite being classified as a right wing party, the Danish People’s party is firmly believes in protecting the national health system, adequate funding for education, and welfare programs, so long as they go to native citizens.

#### *Demographics of DF Voters*

Like all RPP electorates, supporters of the Danish People’s Party are united by a staunch opposition to immigration and to the integration of foreigners into Danish society. If one examines the data gathered from the Danish Election Survey from 1994-2007, one

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<sup>75</sup> Reuters. “Eurosceptic party leads in Danish poll before European election”. March 15, 2014

<sup>76</sup> “The Party Program of the Danish People's Party as established October 2002” Web. [http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/The\\_Party\\_Program\\_of\\_the\\_Danish\\_Peoples\\_Party](http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/The_Party_Program_of_the_Danish_Peoples_Party). Accessed March 11 2014

<sup>77</sup> DF Party Platform, 2002

can see a clear contrast of opinion between DF supporters and all other voters on the subject of immigration. Figure 4.1 shows that there is 69% PDI between DF voters who agree that immigrants are a threat to national culture and those who disagree. This is by far the largest disparity among Danish parties. The Liberal Party of Denmark (V) is the only party where more agree than disagree, with a 20% PDI.

Immigration a threat against national culture								
<b>1994</b>	-56	-1	-49	8	8	74	-2	
<b>1998</b>	-62	-9	-70	15	-1	73	-5	
<b>2001</b>	-66	-15	-81	9	-6	73	-5	
<b>2005</b>	-60	-17	-66	16	-6	76	-3	
<b>2007</b>	-55	-24	-81	20	-15	69	-9	
Muslim countries a security threat								
<b>1994</b>	-40	-12	-9	-2	-21	35	-11	
<b>1998</b>	-42	2	-57	18	10	65	3	
<b>2001</b>	-64	-7	-62	17	3	64	0	
<b>2005</b>	-48	-1	-54	32	-3	74	8	
<b>2007</b>	-28	4	-36	53	34	81	21	

Source: Danish Election Survey 1994-2007. (N/A) as indicated under Table 0.12

money – too much money; strongly agree/agree – strongly disagree/disagree). Percentage points.

More money to refugees and immigrants								
	SF	S	RV	V	K	DF	All	
<b>1994</b>	4	-36	-19	-48	-44	-81	-38	
<b>1998</b>	1	-37	2	-59	-52	-86	-42	
<b>2001</b>	25	-18	21	-52	-54	-83	-34	
<b>2005</b>	39	4	41	-31	-31	-69	-13	
<b>2007</b>	51	19	58	-19	-9	-53	5	
Refugees and immigrants same welfare rights								
<b>1994</b>	12	-46	-6	-51	-49	-92	-42	
<b>1998</b>	25	-27	21	-51	-46	-76	-31	
<b>2001</b>	28	-12	27	-51	-43	-77	-28	
<b>2005</b>	22	-2	22	-38	-37	-68	-20	
<b>2007</b>	29	4	46	-33	-29	-58	-10	

Figure 4.1 Taken From Meret, p. 250

DF voters are also the electorate that is most staunchly against welfare rights for immigrants, though admittedly its PDI has decreased over the years. Even so, when comparing where each electorate stands on public spending on immigration, the DF is a clear outlier.

	1994 <sup>1</sup>	1998	2001	2005	2007
DF	+18	+9	+20	+25	+24
Non-socialist parties	-10	-10	-7	-10	-7
S	+13	+11	+9	+12	+7
Other left-wing parties	-3	-2	-11	-2	-10
All	33	36	32	33	33

Figure 4.2 Taken from Merit p. 256

Figure 4.2 tracks how the working class support for the DF has steadily risen over the years, to the point where the DF has become “the clear working class party in Danish politics today”<sup>78</sup>. This shift in its demographics has certainly influenced the DF’s economic policies. Even though they are a right wing party, the DF has had to change its position to appease its growing number of working class voters who generally “place themselves at the centre-left of the economic-distribution dimension”<sup>79</sup>. Whereas the Danish Progress Party was anti-taxes and anti-spending, the Danish People’s Party has evolved into a staunchly pro-welfare party<sup>80</sup>. No doubt as a direct response to the overrepresentation of working class voters in the DF electorate.

## VII. Case Study #3: France

Front National first rose to national prominence in 1986 when it received a 9.8% percent of the vote in the National Assembly elections, making it the first right wing populist party to attain such a large vote share. However, it would find this success to be short lived. As it turns out, the 1986 elections were a special circumstance. The Socialist

<sup>78</sup> Merit, p. 220

<sup>79</sup> Merit, 244

<sup>80</sup> Merit, p. 143

Party in power anticipated big defeat in the 1986 elections, so its members voted to change the election rules to a proportional party-list system in order to preemptively reduce its losses<sup>81</sup>. In the 1988 elections, the elections reverted back to a first past the post system. Front National once again received 9.8% of the vote, but because France no longer used a proportional system, it saw its seats in the National Assembly decrease from 35 to only 1<sup>82</sup>. Front National regularly receives over ten percent of the vote in the first round of elections, but it currently finds itself unable to translate this support into significant representation in the National Assembly. Today, Front National is arguably more popular than it was in the eighties. In the 2012 elections, FN received 13.6% in the first round, significantly higher than the 9.8% it received in 1986, but under the present two round voting system it only managed to win two seats. From a purely electoral standpoint, Front National has found its first-round support to be essentially useless.

The chart below shows the vote percentage that Front National has received in Presidential and regional elections over the last twenty years. While Front National has struggled in elections for the National Assembly, it has fared much better in local and mayoral elections. Front National did exceedingly in the most recent local elections, where it became the leading party in fourteen major local governments<sup>83</sup>. Perhaps these recent elections, as well as the latest poll numbers for the European Parliament

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<sup>81</sup> Shields, James (2007). *The extreme right in France: from Pétain to Le Pen*. p.207

<sup>82</sup> Shields, p. 208

<sup>83</sup> Sammuell, Henry "France's Front National claims biggest victory in history" *The Telegraph* 30 March 2014

elections, serve as a sign that Front National is well on its way to overcoming its barriers on the national level and become a major party in the National Assembly.

National 1993	12.7%
EU 1994	10.5%
Local (cantonal) 1994	9.67%
Presidential 1995	15.3%
National 1997	15%
Regional 1998	15.4%
Local (cantonal) 1998	13.9%
EU 1999	5.69%
Local (cantonal) 2001	7.12%
Presidential 2002 (second ballot)	16.9%
National 2002	11.34%
EU 2004	9.8%
Regional 2004	14.7%
Local (cantonal) 2004	12.1%
Presidential 2007	10.44%
National 2007	4.29%
European 2009	6.47%
Regional 2010	11.42%

Figure 5.1 Taken from Langenbacher, Nora. 2011. *Is Europe on the "right" path? right-wing extremism and right-wing populism in Europe*. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Forum Berlin. p. 87

If France had true proportional representation like other European countries, many would expect Front National to be a major party in the National Assembly. However, Kai Arzeihmer is not so sure that the first round of national elections are an entirely accurate representation of Front National's popularity. Arzeihmer theorizes that two round elections are a kind of "security valve" for voters in that they can "express their political frustration with the mainstream parties without overly



disturbing the political process on the national level”<sup>84</sup>. Arzeihmer believes that many voters are supporting Front National in the initial round simply because their votes would be of no consequences; some people vote for far right simply because they want to make a statement with their vote. In the next round they would support the candidate that they actually want in office. Arzeihmer does not give an estimate as to what percent of first round voters FN voters do not seriously support the party. However, the 1986 elections can serve as proof that at the very least a certain percentage of FN voters legitimately support the party’s ideas. In 1986, under a proportional system, nearly ten percent of the French electorate cast their vote for Front National, even though they knew that this vote would count. It is possible that some first round votes for FN are protest votes, but even that would not discount the fact that many voters who support FN in the first round do so sincerely.

#### *Demographics of FN Voters*

Joël Gombin of Jules Verne Picardy University, who describes the FN electorate as “the most geographically contrasted” of French political parties as it does well “the urban France of the industrial revolution” and does not have many supporters in the rural West. However, Gombin also believes that this urban-rural disparity may be dissipating. Gombin finds that recently “The FN vote is less and less one of urban centres or even of their close suburbs,” he said, adding that it had been extending to “the semi-urban surroundings of big

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<sup>84</sup> Arzheimer, Kai, Carter, Elizabeth “Explaining Variation in the Extreme Right Vote” Keele European Parties Research Unite (KEPRU) Working Paper 19. Pg. 32

cities”<sup>85</sup>. Like other RPPs, Front National appeals to working class voters. A big part of FN’s appeal to the working class most likely derives from its anti-immigration and anti-islamic rhetoric. A poll of the French electorate on the issue of multiculturalism found that:

two thirds of working class respondents had declared themselves opposed to the construction of mosques (compared to roughly 40 percent of all respondents); 60 percent of working-class respondents had supported a ban on the construction of minarets (compared to 46 percent of all respondents)<sup>86</sup>

Clearly, FN’s increase in working class support can be attributed to its cultural opposition to immigration and multiculturalism.

It is likely precisely due to its working-class support that FN has evolved on the issue of the welfare state. In the nineteen eighties, La Pen often accused France’s unemployed of being “social parasites” and ran on an agenda of “phasing out the welfare state” <sup>87</sup>.

However, when Front National began to get more support from lower class voters, its position shifted “from a neo-liberal to a protectionist and (in some aspects) welfarist agenda”<sup>88</sup>. Front National’s evolution on the issue of welfare is quite similar to that of the Danish People’s Party. Both parties realized that it had to adapt its agenda in order to appease its working class base, and as a result both parties have thrived in recent years and see their support among the working class continue to grow.

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<sup>85</sup> Hubert, Thomas “Where are France’s National Front Voters?” *France 24 International News*. August 7 2013

<sup>86</sup> ifop, Les Français et la construction de mosquées et minarets en France, December 2, 2009, available online at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/assets/pdf/Sondage-minaret.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> Shields, p. 272

<sup>88</sup> Shields, p. 212

Figure 5.2 documents data taken from an ISPOS poll of the French electorate. The chart compares FN voter attitudes on issues compared with rest of the electorate. Like FPO voters, FN voters largely share a distrust of the European Union.

Front National in presidential elections. Only 13% of FN voters believe that EU decisions that negatively affect France should be honored, and only 38% of FN voters believe that France should even be part of the European Union. Though the French people generally hold anti-immigration sentiments, virtually all of FN voters are against immigration. 99% of all FN voters believe that there are too many foreigners in France, while 94% believe that French values do not comply with Islam. Clearly, FN voters have a fundamental mistrust of immigrants, particularly of those from Islamic nations.

Issue/supporters	National average	Front National	Socialist Party	UMP (center-right)
EU decision-making powers should be reinforced, even if this reduces France's.	23%	13%	22%	35%
France should stay in the eurozone	72%	38%	84%	88%
The overwhelming majority of immigrants are well integrated and only a small minority is poorly integrated.	29%	6%	44%	23%
France can find workers without immigration.	73%	98%	51%	76%
It is not normal that school kitchens provide different meals according to students' religious beliefs.	72%	91%	60%	80%
There are too many foreigners in France	70%	99%	43%	83%
We don't feel at home today as we did before.	62%	95%	33%	75%
Anti-white racism is a fairly common phenomenon in France.	57%	90%	37%	65%
The Muslim religion is (mostly or completely) incompatible with the values of French society.	74%	94%	59%	81%
The majority of Muslims in France are fundamentalist.	10%	40%	3%	9%

Figure 5.2 Taken from an ISPOS survey titled "France 2013 : Les nouvelles fractures" Cervipof, CNRS, <http://www.cevipof.com/fr/france-2013-les-nouvelles-fractures/resultats/>; Published in *Le Monde* January 24 2014

### *Legislative Accomplishments*

Unlike the FPO or the DPP, Front National has not had the advantage of actually being in government to implement its ideas. However, while it has not been in government to pass legislation, Front National has been relatively successful in "waging a war of ideas" and in exerting "pressure on all other parties" on the issue of immigration.<sup>89</sup> FN has been

<sup>89</sup> Shields, James (2007). *The extreme right in France: from Pétain to Le Pen*. p.204

the most forceful and effective in exploiting these issues and in dictating the terms in which they are addressed. Front National is a force to be reckoned with on the issue of immigration, and its opponents are acutely aware of this fact. Prior to 2012, Former French Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy on numerous occasions expressed his support for a proposed law that would have given foreign residents the right to vote in local elections. However, he then completely changed his position on the issue in an attempt to appease FN voters before the 2012 elections<sup>90</sup>. The fact that Sarkozy and his party shifted to the right on immigration “reflected the policy influence that the FN was able to exert on the political agenda”<sup>91</sup> Front National may not be in the National Assembly directing policy, but its influence can easily be felt. FN is certainly a major political force in France, even if it may currently lack the official standing in government.

### **VIII. Comparative Analysis: Examining the Motivating Factors among the Right Wing Electorate**

A large portion of the support for right wing populist parties is born out of anti-immigration sentiment; there are no credible scholars who would refute this. The question then becomes what exactly is the driving force behind this sentiment? Do RPP voters fear immigration because they want to look after their economic interests (economic protectionism) or because they want to stop foreigners from “diluting” their homogenous culture (cultural protectionism)? To answer this question, I will compare the two

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<sup>90</sup> “Sarkozy shifts, Hollande digs in on foreign voting rights” *France 24*. April 26<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>91</sup> Ivaldi, Gilles “The Successful Welfare-Chauvinist Party? The Front National in the 2012 elections in France” published in “European Sociological Association’s Research Network on Political Sociology Conference, Milano Italy” December 1<sup>st</sup> 2012

hypotheses directly to see which is the greater motivating factor among RPP voters. I will base my methods on Daniel Oesch’s study of RPP electorates in which he used the 2002/2003 European Social Survey to compare motivating factors among RPP voters. Oesch concluded that cultural motivations were a much more significant predictor of RPP voting than economic motivations. I will perform a similar analysis of RPP voters using data from the 2012 European Social Survey (with the exception of Austria where 2008 was the most recent ESS available) to see if I will get similar results.

In the European Social Survey, thousands European voters from dozens of different countries answered a series of hundreds of questions, and among them were a few questions on the subject of immigration. The survey participants were asked directly if they agree with the statements “Immigrants are bad for the economy” and “Immigrants undermine a country’s cultural heritage”. If we isolate the survey respondents to just those who self-identify as members of a right wing populist party, then we could get a good sense if there is a correlation between holding certain beliefs and being a member of a right wing populist party.

Figure 6.1 Created by author using data from the 2012 European Social Survey

Country	RPP Party	N Voters in Survey	N RPP Voters in Survey	% of RPP Voters in Survey	Party's Last Election Score
Austria	FPÖ	1228	161	13.10%	17.5%(2008)
Denmark	DPP	1328	116	8.73%	12.3%(2011)
France	FN	804	37	4.60%	3.7%(2011)
Switzerland	SVP	744	132	17.74%	26.6%(2011)

The chart above measures the percent of RPP voters in participating European Social Survey compared to the number of RPP who voted in the most recent elections before the survey was taken. With the exception of Front National, all right wing populist parties seem

to be underrepresented in the survey, as they are lower than the party's last election score. This is a common phenomenon among right wing voters. Oesch finds that right wing populist voters are consistently underrepresented in these kinds of surveys due to what can be described as "socially conformist behavior (people do not admit having voted for a party on the radical right)"<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, Oesch found similar disparities in his experiment, so while it would be ideal to have a perfectly accurate samples RPP voters, this is not something that is ever likely to happen.

A RPP's level of "Base Support" in a sample is measured by the total number of its self-identified supporters who participated in the ESS before one controls for other factors. In other words, if one were to randomly select a voter out of all of Austria's ESS participants, then there is a 13.1% chance that person will be an FPÖ supporter. The purpose of this experiment is to compare this base support with the level support a RPP receives once we control for other factors. In this case, these controls will be a whether a voter agrees or disagrees with the two statements: "Immigrants are bad for the Economy" and "Immigrants undermine a country's Culture".

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<sup>92</sup> Oesch, p. 354

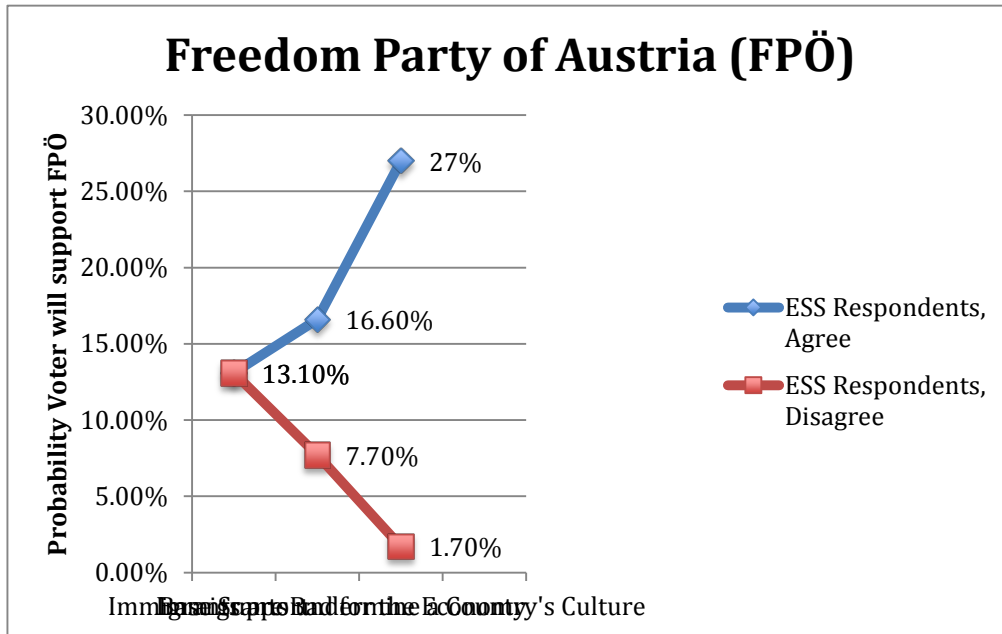


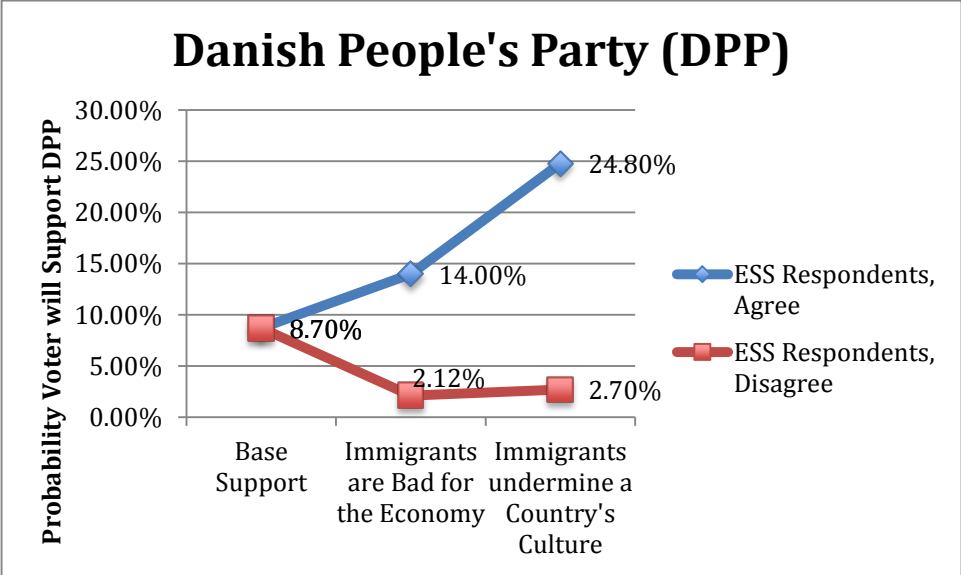
Figure 6.2 Created by Author using data from the 2012 European Social Survey

To measure base support, I counted how many of the total survey respondents self identified as supporters of the FPÖ. To measure the support for economic protectionism, I then counted how many of the survey respondents agreed with the statement that “Immigrants are bad for the economy”. If a survey respondent agrees with this statement, then they more than likely ascribe to economic protectionism. Overall 640 of the ESS respondents agreed that immigrants are bad for the economy, and of that 640, 106 were FPÖ supporters. This means that if one were to randomly select a participant out of those who hold an economic protectionist view on immigration there would be a 16.6% chance that the voter is an FPÖ supporter. This is about three percent greater than the FPÖ’s base support. Moreover, if a voter disagrees with the statement that immigrants are bad for the economy, then there is only a 7.5% chance that they are an FPÖ supporter. Compared with a base support level of 13.1%, the probability of a survey participant being an FPÖ supporter increases with a “yes” answer and decreases with a “no” answer. This can be



taken as evidence to support the theory that economic protectionism is a motivating factor among FPÖ voters. I then used this same method to measure the importance of cultural protectionism. With respect to the statement “Immigrants undermine a country’s culture”, I found an even greater disparity between a “yes” and a “no” answer (27% probability for yes and 1.7% probability for no). I then applied this method to other RPPs,. The results can be seen below:

Figure 6.3 Created by Author using Data from the European Social Survey



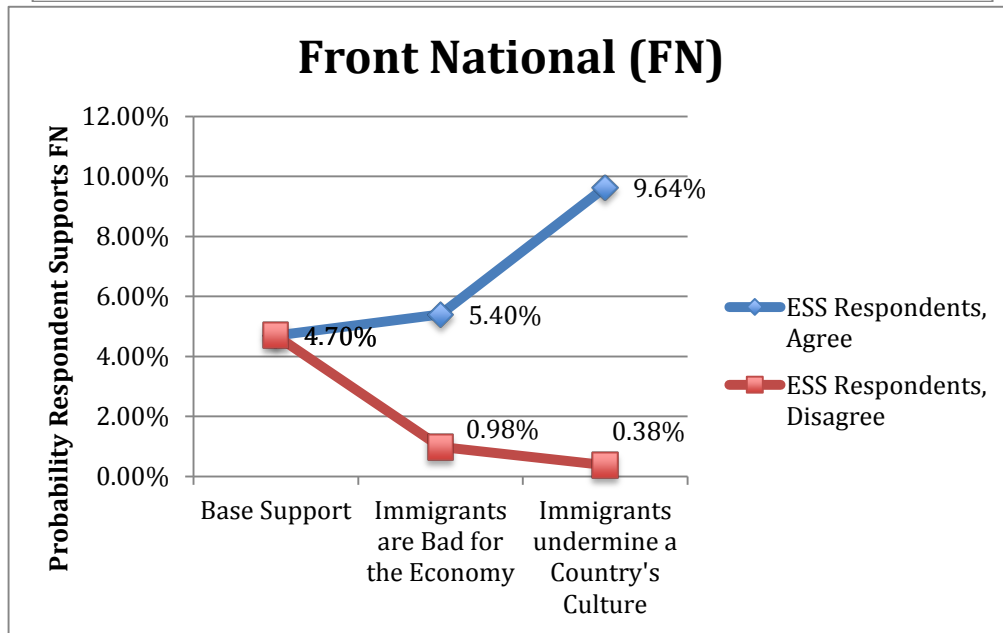
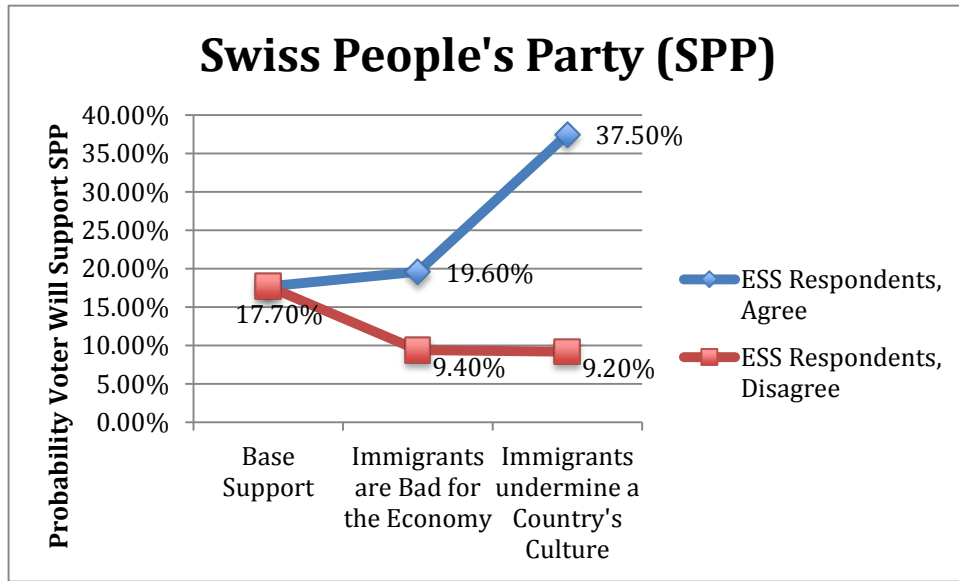


Figure 6.4 Created by Author using Data from the ESS

As one can observe, all of the other case studies follow similar distributions. In every case, the probability of randomly selecting an RPP voter increases if one controls for a “yes” answer and decreases if one controls for a “no” answer. Moreover, in every case the disparity between yes and no answers was far greater on the question relating to cultural protectionism. The results of this experiment support the idea that both cultural

protectionism and economic protectionism are predictive of RPP success, and that cultural is a much stronger predictor than economic protectionism.

## **IX. Comparative Analysis: Measuring the effect of Electoral Systems**

We know that anti-immigration positions make right wing populist parties attractive to a large number of voters, but popular support by itself will not necessarily guarantee electoral success. Indeed, the French right wing populist party Front National has a large number of supporters, as evidenced by the fact that it regularly receives more than 10% of the vote in the first round of elections. Despite this base support, FN currently only has one representative in the National Assembly. This has led many to theorize that the two-round election system is detrimental to RPPs, and that they are much more likely to succeed in a proportional system.

To test this theory, I will compare RPPs representation in the European Parliament with its current vote share in national parliament. All European elections are decided by proportional representation, so a country like France will have a completely different electoral system when electing its leaders to the European Parliament compared to the National Assembly. Therefore, in the cases of France and the UK, we should be keen to notice any major difference in RPP representation between the European and the national parliaments. Any kind of disparity in representation between the two parliaments should give one a good idea sense of the difference a proportional electoral system makes for RPPS. The Swiss People's Party and the Norway Progress Party were not included because their respective nations are not members of the European Union. The Data is represented graphically below:

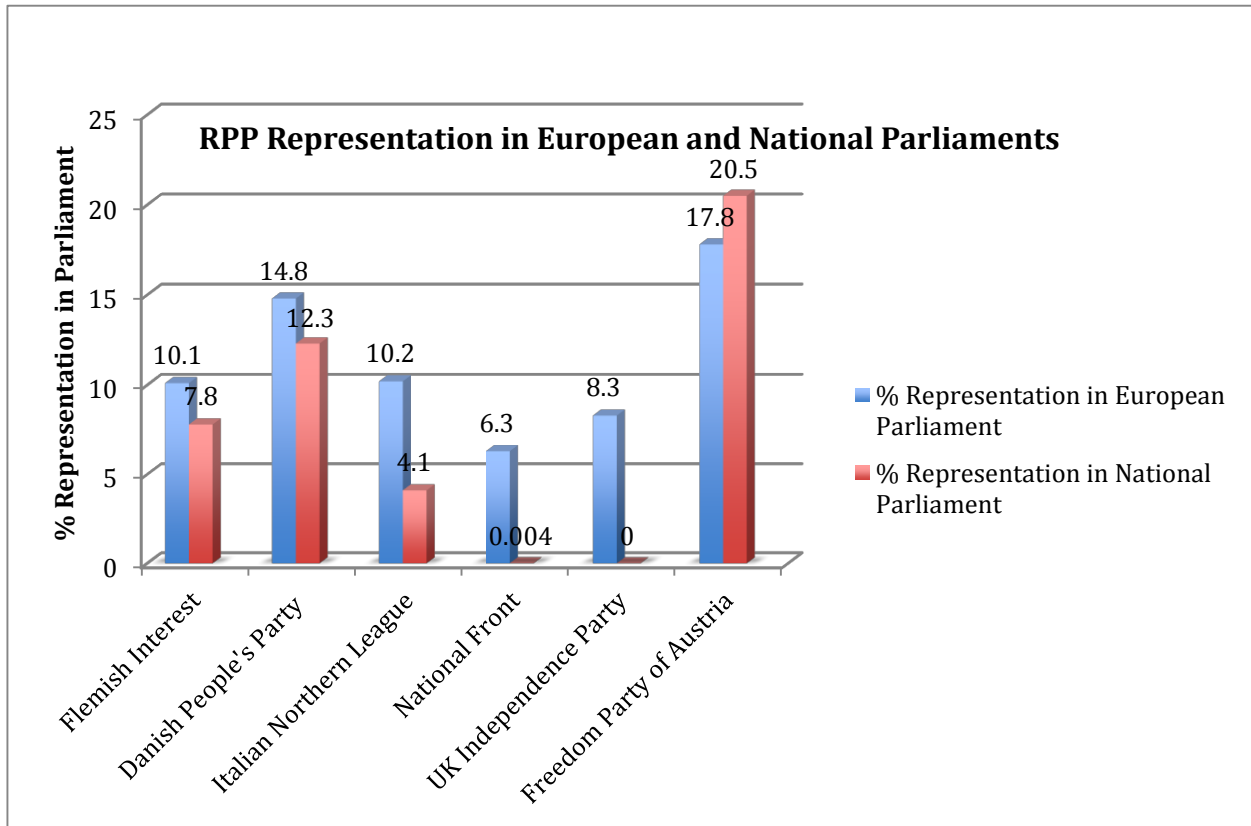


Figure 6.5 Created by Author using Data from the European Elections Database

When comparing the vote shares between national parliament and European parliaments, the vote shares of Austria, Denmark, and Belgium, are all within three percentage points of one another. Conversely, National Front and the UK independence party have basically zero representation in their own parliaments, but have significant vote significant vote shares in the European parliament. If France and the UK had proportional representation, National Front and the UK independence party would more than likely receive a significantly higher voter share, and one that would be close to the vote share they receive in the European Parliament.

It is possible that one should not take Front National's showing in European elections as a perfectly accurate reflection of Front National's popularity with the general public. Corina Stratulat theorizes that the European Parliamentary vote, much like the vote in the first round of French national elections, is a subject to protest voting, and therefore the popularity of RPPs is being exaggerated in EU elections<sup>93</sup>. Indeed, one could argue that the European parliament does not have as much of a direct effect on voter's lives as any national parliament, so it is possible that voters would not take these elections as seriously. However, if one observes Austria, Denmark, and Belgium, three countries with proportional systems, one notices that there is not a significant disparity in vote shares between national and European elections. In fact, the FPÖ actually has a higher representation in its own national parliament than it does in the European parliament. Protest voting may very well occur in these elections, but it does not seem to have such an impact as to make a right wing populist party's representation in the European parliament noticeably and consistently greater than in its national parliament. If France were to change to a proportional system, one should expect Front National to receive a vote share that is reasonably close to what it receives in the European Parliament. Front National's vote share in the European elections, whatever it may be, should serve as a rough indicator of Front National's support among the French electorate, even if it will not necessarily be reflected in the National Assembly.

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<sup>93</sup> Stratulat, Corina "The European Parliament elections 2014 Watershed or, again, washed out?". *European Policy Centre* September 2013 p. 8

## **X. Conclusions**

After reviewing the scholarly literature on the topic I brought forth three hypotheses to explain the rise of right wing populist parties in Western Europe:

- Hypothesis #1: Cultural factors are most responsible for the success of far right parties.
- Hypothesis #2: Economic factors are most responsible for the success of far right parties.
- Hypothesis #3: Structural factors are most responsible for the success of far right parties.

The evidence yielded from my three case studies as well as my own comparative analysis support the hypothesis that cultural factors are the primary predictor of the success of right wing populism. When asked directly on the subject, right wing populist voters consistently revealed that they were more concerned about the cultural implications of immigration rather than the economic implications. Indeed, Oesch's comparative analysis using the 2002 European Social Survey yielded strong evidence that cultural protectionism was a more significant motivating factor among right wing voters than economic protectionism. When I used Oesch's methods with data from the 2012 European Social Survey, I found a similar pattern: right wing populist voters in every country were significantly more concerned with the cultural implications of immigration, and it seems to be a much more accurate predictor of right wing voting than economic factors. Therefore, we can affirm that there is significant evidence to support that H1 is more relevant to the study of right wing populist parties than H2.

This thesis affirms that right wing populist parties greatly benefit from culturally motivated anti-immigration sentiment among the electorate, but only on the condition that

they are running in countries that award parliamentary seats based on proportional representation. As we have seen from the case study of France, Front National's electoral success is significantly hindered by two-round elections. Front National has significant support among the general public, and this is reflected in opinion polls, its showing in the first round of national elections, and most notably in its representation in the European Parliament. However, this support, while substantial, is with a minority of voters. This would not be an issue under a proportional system, where Front National would be awarded seats based strictly on the number of votes it receives. However, under the French system, Front National has to win individual elections outright, a much more difficult task for a radical party. Without a proportional system, a right wing populist party can still be a significant influence in the political process, but only in an unofficial capacity. Front National exerts its influence by dictating the tenor and focus of the immigration debate, but without the benefit of a proportional system it cannot advocate for its desired reforms from within the National Assembly. Since one can reasonably conclude that Front National would most likely be a major party in a proportional system, one can affirm H3 which states that RPPs owe their success in part to structural factors.

For my secondary research question, I set out to determine exactly how successful each right wing populist party has been in implementing its agenda. Though they have not limited it to the extent that they would like, on a whole right wing populist parties have been relatively successful in shaping both legislation and public opinion related to immigration. The FPO and the DF, with the help of coalition governments, have both been able to pass substantial restrictions on immigration. Right wing populist parties have been victorious not just in legislating change, but also in shifting sentiment and tenor towards

the issue. The more moderate conservative parties in Austria and France have adopted more assertive anti-immigration positions as a direct response to right wing populist parties more or less forcing the issue on them. Whether directly or not, nearly all immigration reforms over the past twenty years have been influenced by right wing populist parties in some way.

## **XI. Future Research Questions**

While this thesis was a comprehensive look at the rise of right wing populism, it was simply not feasible to address all of the possible variables. One potential explanatory factor not mentioned in this thesis is the competence of the respective party leaders. Indeed, independent of all other factors, most would suspect that some right wing populist parties are more successful than others in part because they are better run and better organized. I chose not address this in my thesis mainly because this aspect of electoral study does not lend itself well to quantitative analysis. Even if there is a widely held view that some party leaders are simply better than others at spreading their message and appealing to voters, this is still ultimately a highly subjective claim and not something that can be easily measured or analyzed. Still, this could potentially be a significant explanatory factor, and certainly one that I would like to examine in the future, even though I currently would not know how to go about doing so.



Another potential explanation that I would like to explore more can be described as the “Cult of Personality” theory. This is the idea that right wing populist parties, more so than others, are dependent on having a charismatic leader in order to become successful. Indeed, the FPO was not a major party until Haider took control, and after he left the party was again in crisis until it found another enigmatic leader in Strache. Moreover, Front National has seen its national standing increase dramatically in the short time that Marine La Pen has been the party leader, and many analysts attribute a significant portion of this success to her personal appeal. Though I was not able to find credible studies suggesting that right wing populist parties were more dependent than others on having a strong leader, it is certainly an idea that warrants further research.

As previously alluded to, this thesis was also limited by inopportune timing. The final draft of this paper was submitted in April of 2014, about a month before the European Parliamentary Elections. Obviously it would have been preferable to have election data from 2014 as opposed to 2009. Five years is not an insignificant amount of time, and the political landscape of a country can change dramatically between elections, as we have seen with France. This data would have been especially relevant considering that all three of my case studies are currently leading in the polls. These poll numbers are certainly a useful tool in gauging the current level of right wing support, but it would have been preferable to have the official election results. I am interested to see to how right wing populist parties will fare this coming May, and if I am to present this research in the future I will certainly update my findings with election data from the 2014 European election.

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