



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Master's Thesis 2023 30 ECTS

Faculty of Landscape and Society
Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Exploring the Causes of Far-Right Populism in Western Europe: Alternative for Germany and National Rally through the Lens of Immigration and Economic Insecurity

Petter Andersen Rønning
Masters of Science in International Relations (M-IR)

The Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, is the international gateway for the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). Eight departments, associated research institutions and the Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine in Oslo. Established in 1986, Noragric's contribution to international development lies in the interface between research, education (Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes) and assignments.

The Noragric Master theses are the final theses submitted by students in order to fulfil the requirements under the Noragric Master programme "International Environmental Studies", "International Development Studies" and "International Relations".

The findings in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of Noragric. Extracts from this publication may only be reproduced after prior consultation with the author and on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation contact Noragric.

© Petter Andersen Rønning, May 2023
petter.andersen.ronning@gmail.com

Noragric
Department of International Environment and Development Studies
The Faculty of Landscape and Society
P.O. Box 5003
N-1432 Ås
Norway
Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00
Internet: <https://www.nmbu.no/fakultet/landsam/institutt/noragric>

Declaration

I, Petter Andersen Rønning, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

Acknowledgement

Writing a thesis is a challenging and rewarding process. Although it has been a difficult task, it has been incredibly rewarding seeing the research take shape into what it has become. It represents a personal achievement.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Stig Jarle Hansen, who provided me with helpful tips and feedback along the way. I would also like to thank Muzaffer Senel for helping me with deciding on a thesis topic and for great feedback throughout the process.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their support. Particularly would I like to thank my girlfriend, Frida Bjørnland, for being incredibly supportive and keeping me on the right path. Thank you for your love and compassion.

Any errors are mine alone.

Abstract

Far-right populist parties are increasingly gaining influence in democracies across Western Europe. Two of Europe's largest and most crucial economies, Germany and France, have witnessed the emergence and growth of two far-right populist parties: Alternative for Germany and National Rally. This thesis aims to examine the emergence and growth of far-right populist parties AfD and RN, with a particular focus on the role of immigration and economic insecurity in shaping the electoral success of these parties. Using theories of economic grievances and the interaction between sociocultural and economic grievances, the thesis aims to broaden our understanding of how grievances play a significant role in voting for far-right populist parties. The thesis applied a data collection and qualitative case study method to compare and contrast the parties. To provide important insight into the factors that propelled the parties to become prominent far-right parties, a historical overview was undertaken. The thesis found that the internal conflict within AfD shifted the party's direction towards a more socially conservative and anti-immigration stance. The RN underwent a period of *dédiabolisation*, intending to achieve a softer party image while still maintaining its socially conservative policies. The findings highlight that both the AfD and the RN achieved remarkable electoral success in a short period using a Eurosceptic and anti-immigration platform. Both parties capitalized on crises in Europe such as the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis for electoral gains. These findings can be applied to the broader debate on the topic of far-right populism in Europe to better understand the social and economic factors that are driving support for far-right populist parties.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	2
Research Question	3
Outline of the Thesis	4
Chapter 2: Far-Right Populism and its Causes	5
Definition and Characteristics of Far-Right Populism	5
What Causes Far-Right Populism?	8
Demand-Side Explanations	8
Economic Grievances.....	10
Cultural and Sociocultural Grievances	12
Supply-Side Explanations	14
Political Opportunity Structure	16
Political Party Organization.....	17
A Winning Formula	17
Immigration, Economic Insecurity, and Support for Far-Right Populism	18
Immigration and Support for the Far-Right	18
The Relationship between Economic Insecurity and Far-Right Populism	22
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework	25
Theory of Economic Grievances	25
The Interaction of Sociocultural and Economic Grievances	28
Chapter 4: Research Methodology	30
Data Collection Method	31
Qualitative Case Study	33
Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings	34
Alternative for Germany: Eurosceptic to Radical Right	35
From the Past to the Present: Tracing AfD's Roots and Historical Development	35
National Rally in France: From Le Pen to Reform	39
A Historical Analysis of the National Rally's Emergence.....	39
The History of French Far-Right Radicalism and <i>Alternance</i>	42
AfD and National Rally: Similar but Different Parties	44
The Immigration Issue and the AfD: Exploring the Party's Policies	44
National Rally's Position on Immigration: An Analysis of the Party's Policies.....	48
The Role of Economic Inequality in AfD's Growth	52
National Rally and the Issue of Economic Inequality	56
Discussion	60
Chapter 6: Conclusion	62
Bibliography	65

Chapter 1: Introduction

Far-right populist parties are increasingly gaining influence in democracies across Western Europe. Many parties are experiencing an increase in electoral support and are increasingly having an impact on policy-making. Additionally, in recent years several far-right populist parties have either taken office or provided support to minority governments. Furthermore, two of Europe's largest and most crucial economies, Germany and France, have witnessed the emergence and growth of two far-right populist parties: Alternative for Germany and National Rally (Akkerman, L. de Lange, & Rooduijn, 2016, p. 0).

How can we explain the surge in populism in Western Europe? To what degree have the political platforms of AfD and RN, regarding issues of immigration and economic inequality, contributed to their rise in political influence and popular support within the German and French contexts? These questions will guide the thesis, as it intends to understand the development of far-right populism in Germany and France, examining how these political parties utilize crises such as the 2007-2008 global financial crisis and the 2016 refugee crisis to gain electoral significance by promoting their anti-elite and anti-immigration policies. With this approach, the aim is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how populism has gained a foothold in Western European democracies.

In the past decade, the European Union (EU) has been hit by multiple crises – a financial and debt crisis, a refugee crisis, and the 2016 Referendum that saw the UK leave the EU. These crises have created a new context for party competition across the EU member states. The crises have heightened the level of politicization surrounding European issues and contributed towards an increase in voter pessimism towards the EU, thereby creating a favourable environment for far-right populist parties (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 278). In the last decade, the French far-right populist party National Rally (RN) has made an impressive comeback into France's electoral politics (Ivaldi, 2015, p. 1), and the newly created German Alternative for Germany (AfD) garnered enough votes in 2017 to become the first new party to enter the Bundestag since 1990 (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 2). Understanding how these parties break through the “glass ceiling” and enter the mainstream is critical when analysing the growth of far-right populism.

Research Question

The thesis aims to examine the emergence and growth of the far-right populist parties Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and National Rally (RN) in France, with a particular focus on the role of immigration and economic insecurity in shaping the electoral success of these parties. The main objective of this thesis is to contextualize the emergence and growth of far-right populist parties throughout the past decade, with the goal of providing a critical understanding of this complex political phenomenon. This thesis intends to conduct a comprehensive analysis that examines how far-right populist parties gain popularity in the political systems of France and Germany by investigating how these parties gain political traction by emphasizing issues related to immigration and the economy.

This thesis examines two significant factors that drive support for far-right populist parties: immigration and economic insecurity. The aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the role they play in the growth of AfD and RN. The existing literature on the growth of populism has primarily concentrated on exploring the factors that lead to individual support for populism as well as examining specific European populist parties. However, there has been limited scholarly attention given to comparing and contrasting these parties with one another. Focusing on Alternative for Germany and National Rally can allow for a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the rise of far-right populism in Western democracies. Furthermore, their rise to prominence has been a significant development in European politics which has had a significant impact on a range of issues such as immigration and EU integration.

Research into far-right populism in Europe identifies immigration as a key issue for such parties (Evans & Ivaldi, 2021, p. 824). Eichengreen argues that the hallmark of Europe's populism is primarily characterized by its anti-immigration stance. They underline that immigration contributed to the rising inequality because most of the immigrants are less-skilled workers (Eichengreen & Begović, 2018, pp. 681-682). This research aims to investigate to what extent the two factors – immigration and economic inequality – are significant in driving support for Alternative for Germany and National Rally. By examining the experiences of AfD and RN, this study seeks to provide insights into the similarities and differences in the parties' approaches to these issues and their impact on the emergence and growth of far-right populist parties in Europe.

The three research questions that guide this study are as follows:

To what extent have the issues of immigration and economic insecurity in Germany and France contributed to the emergence and growth of the far-right populist parties Alternative for Germany (AfD) and National Rally (RN)?

What specific policies and strategies have Alternative for Germany and National Rally adopted in order to capitalize on concerns about immigration and economic insecurity?

How have immigration and economic insecurity intersected and fuelled each other in the rise of far-right populism in Germany and France?

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter two provides an overview of existing literature on the drivers of populism, beginning with a discussion of the definition and characteristics of far-right populism. It then examines the reasons behind the rise of far-right populism, categorizing them into demand-side and supply-side explanations. Finally, it explores the connection between immigration, economic insecurity, and the growth of far-right populist parties. The third chapter of this thesis provides an introduction to the theoretical framework, outlining the theories of economic grievances and the interaction between sociocultural and economic grievances. These theories aim to broaden our understanding of how grievances play a significant role in voting for far-right populist parties. Moving on to chapter four, the research methodology that will be used is introduced, along with a justification for using a qualitative approach. The fifth chapter of this thesis presents the primary findings and analysis. It begins with a comprehensive historical overview and development of the Alternative for Germany and National Rally, providing essential context to understand these parties. The chapter then delves into the analysis of the parties' approach to immigration and economic insecurity policies and how they are crucial to their success. This section aims to broaden our understanding of how these parties capitalize on heightened grievances surrounding immigration and the economy. After the analysis, the chapter is wrapped up with a discussion of the main findings and what they can tell us about the success of AfD and RN. The concluding chapter offers a summary and provides some reflections on the main findings.

Chapter 2: Far-Right Populism and its Causes

The rise of far-right populism has become a significant political phenomenon in recent years. This chapter provides a critical review of the existing literature on far-right populism and its underlying causes. First, the chapter defines far-right populism, highlighting its distinct features and distinguishing it from other forms of populism.

Definition and Characteristics of Far-Right Populism

The term “populism” can be a complex word to define, as it has been used to describe many different political movements both inside and outside of the European continent. Particularly the right-wing variant of populism is often categorized as a political movement or party emphasizing a Manichean, us-versus-them world in which “us” is referred to as the “people” defined often in ethnic or communal terms and is seen as engaging in a zero-sum game against “them”, often defined as liberal elites, “the establishment”, and minorities and/or immigrants. Oftentimes populists claim themselves as democratic, and much of their rhetoric bases itself on the idea that the existing political establishment has ignored, neglected, or even worked against the interests of the people, although democracy is understood in majoritarian or illiberal terms. Furthermore, this paradox highlights another important quality of right-wing populists which is their dislike of basic liberal democratic norms of free speech, freedom of the press, recognizing the legitimacy of opposition, and acceptance of separation of powers and limitations of executive powers (Berman, 2020, pp. 72-73).

According to Golder, populism views society as divided into two homogenous and antagonistic camps; the “pure people” versus the “corrupt elite”, or more simply, “us” versus “them”. Populists argue that politics should reflect the general will of the people, and stand opposed to elitism and pluralism. Unlike elitism, populists consider the people to be the morally superior group. Populism, in contrast with pluralism, rejects that there exist meaningful divisions within “the people” and denies the need to compromise. Furthermore, populist parties tend to simplify complex political issues by dichotomizing them into black and white (Golder, 2016, p. 279).

The main antagonistic force in the view of populism is the elite, a parasitical class that enriches itself and continuously ignores the people’s grievances. The immoral values of the elite stand in stark contrast to the wisdom and common sense of the people. Populism calls

for increased use of referendums, popular initiatives, and direct executive elections to place the power more directly into the peoples' hands. Populism's optimistic view of majority rules often put it against liberal democracy, which requires the will of the majority to be constrained by constitutional checks and balances that protect minority and individual rights. Proponents of populism often see themselves as defenders of true democracy, even though the ideology oftentimes promotes an illiberal version of democracy. In Europe, the elite typically includes the political establishment, intellectuals, the economic upper class, and the media. Through their promotion of individualism, multiculturalism, and internationalism, these groups are considered by populists as responsible for society's problems (Golder, 2016, p. 279).

Since the 1980s the term has been used to show the transformation of political ideology and practices with rhetoric, style or narratives that are designed to reach electoral audiences. In the European context, it is often linked with the rise of far-right political movements in the 1980s and the emergence of such leaders as Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, Jörg Haider in Austria, and Umberto Bossi in Italy. Meanwhile, in the 1990s, it was used to describe the rise of Latin American leaders taking an anti-neoliberalist stance such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. Lazaridis, Campani and Benveniste argue that these two forms of populism differentiate from each other, where in Latin America it is defined as inclusionary populism, as opposed to exclusionary populism in the European context. Furthermore, populism is no longer associated solely with political parties situated outside the main positions of power, as even mainstream party leaders risk being labelled "populist". Between the media and academia, populism quickly invaded the political field and in certain contexts was used as a derogatory term, and because of its wide-ranging application and common meaning, it is difficult to agree on a consensual meaning of the word (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016, p. 4).

The concept of national populism which was used to describe the re-emergence of the far-right European electoral populism, became popular after Pierre-André Taguieff used the word in 1984 to describe the historical descendants of Front National in France. And by the 1990s the label of "populist" had saturated the media and was used across the board including as a means of delegitimising counterproposals to Euro-liberalism. Camus and Lebourg argue that populists see political change as a negative phenomenon, caused by "corrupt leaders", and that only the common people can save the nation by uniting all social classes and forming one

national class to cast aside the "corrupt elites". They argue that the populist parties in Europe are a clear sign of a shift towards right-wing politics in Western countries, however, it is important to note that populism is more about the way politicians present themselves and their ideas rather than their specific policies. After 2001, the transition from national populism to neo-populism, which is characterized by a combination of liberal values which extended to the far-right field, and a criticism of multiculturalism meant a shift away from criticism of the welfare state. This presented a paradoxical situation as it seems to be contradictory to have liberal values and a far-right political stance (Camus & Lebourg, 2017, p. 179).

Cas Mudde argues that the term *populism* can be defined as an ideological feature, and not merely as a political style. So, populism can be understood as a thin-centred ideology that views society to ultimately be separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups which are the "honest people" versus the "corrupt elites". The ideologues argue that politics should be an expression of the "general will" of the people, and they revere the "common sense" of the people. So, Mudde argues that in a populist democracy, nothing is more important than the general will of the people, not even human rights or constitutional guarantees (Mudde, 2007, p. 23).

According to Sertan Akbaba, populist discourse within the European sphere differentiates significantly from its South and North American counterpart. The narrative exceeds the boundaries of the nation-state, thanks to European integration, which is one of the reasons for the emergence and rise of populism in Europe, as many European populist parties are Eurosceptic. The establishment of European integration that started in the 1950s was centred on a reaction to the Second World War, and as an outcome gave birth to the modern European Union. The aim was initially to build peace among states by pooling together resources, namely coal and steel, however, Akbaba argues that not much attention was paid to the inner peace of each state. Throughout the decades less attention was paid to the demands of the masses, and further integration led to a gap between the mainstream politicians and their electorate. According to the analysis, this led to an outcome where too much Europeanism was braided into every aspect of cultural, political, and social life, in time giving birth to a backlash owing to its inclusiveness. The discrepancy between the demands of the people and elites ran into a deep crisis, which led to people finding it difficult to identify with the mainstream. The deepening of European integration has opened the way for

populist parties to flourish and attack the established politics of the mainstream, using a strategy of “distrust mystification”, where they denounce backroom deals, shady compromises, and complicated procedures (Akbaba, 2018, p. 204).

What Causes Far-Right Populism?

To understand the rise and emergence of far-right populism in Germany and France, this section examines the different explanations for the rise of far-right populism. Critical aspects of the debate around the emergence of populism are between the demand-side and supply-side explanations. Demand-side explanations refer to arguments that locate the main causes of populism in the changing grievances of citizens. These explanations focus on economic, cultural- and sociocultural grievances, which have been used by far-right populist parties to mobilize support among voters (Golder, 2016, p. 482). Supply-side researchers focus their analysis on the failures of political institutions, politicians, governments, policymakers, parties and other actors in answering citizens' demands. This section will focus on a political opportunity structure, political party organization, and the “winning formula” of far-right populist parties (Golder, 2016, p. 486).

Demand-Side Explanations

Mols & Jetten argue what underpins demand-side research is the idea of an automatic, mechanical link between living and working conditions, i.e., unemployment levels, immigration, household income, education level, and the electoral appeal of far-right populist parties. These explanations are based on the idea that electors of these parties are fuelled by “grievances”, and demand-side researchers will often attribute any changes in populist parties' popularity to the socioeconomic conditions of the country. If those grievances remain unchanged for several reasons, like economic conditions not improving or mainstream parties seeming unable to deal with the challenges, the electorate will turn towards those parties that promise a better future, regardless of whether the parties manage to deliver on the promises. In a broader sense, demand-side explanations focus on voter grievances, and those grievances are identified by economic deprivation, rising income inequality, resistance to immigration, cultural anxiety, and cultural backlash (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 3).

Several studies link far-right successes to the grievances that show up during modernization periods. The premise of the studies lies in that in all industrial societies there is a small

amount of underlying support for far-right values. During moments of crisis related to the modernization process, this support can be mobilized and politicized by far-right populist parties. Scholars address a different aspect of the modernization process and its consequences, and Matt Golder references prominent studies. Referencing Betz (1994) who focuses on the adverse effect the shift to a globalized world and post-industrial economy has on workers and lower-level managers. This group was the basis for the industrial post-war economic model and benefitted from it, lacking the human capital to enjoy the same standard of living compared to the past. The resentment this causes, along with mainstream parties to offer solutions, leaves them open to the simplistic and nativist appeals of far-right populism. In similar strokes, Minkenberg (2000) argues that as society modernizes, traditional political and social attachments dissolve, which leads to people becoming more autonomous and the importance of authority decreases. Some individuals feel overwhelmed, angry, anxious, and isolated as a result, and far-right parties appeal to this group by offering to eliminate the pressures and create a simpler, improved society (Golder, 2016, p. 483).

According to Cas Mudde, nearly all demand-side theories of party politics, especially in the case of populist far-right party politics, are situated at the macro-level. They reference broad economic, social, and historical processes that happen on the national, supranational, and even in some cases, global levels. When analysing the electoral and political successes of far-right populist parties in contemporary Europe the term “modernization” is in almost all cases mentioned. The parties are seen as opponents of modernization that attract the *modernisierungsverlierer* (the losers of modernization), and the theory of modernization has been linked to many different processes and developments, among them globalization, risk society, post-industrial society, and many more. However, Cas Mudde criticises this view, arguing that it has serious theoretical and empirical problems. Theoretically, they remain vague about the exact effects modernization has on society, especially on the micro-level, and how the macro-process of globalization leads to the micro-level action of voting for a populist far-right party. According to Mudde, the globalization theory is particularly weak when considering empirical evidence (Mudde, 2007, pp. 202-203).

Golder references Inglehart (1977), who argues that the transition to a postmodern society produces a “silent revolution”, a shift that is characterized by a change in values, from a focus on “materialist” to “post-materialist” values. Post-materialist values prioritize the expansion of individual freedom and emphasize things such as multiculturalism, gender and racial

equality, and sexual freedom. Ignazi (1992) argues that this created a reactionary backlash among those holding traditional moral values, a “silent revolution” that benefitted the far-right. A critique of these theories is who exactly the “losers of modernization” is often left vague. Minkenberg argues that they are not necessarily at the bottom of the social ladder, rather they are in a place more secure, but they can objectively still lose something.

Statistically, the typical far-right voter is a young male, with a lower level of education, who is either unemployed, self-employed or a manual worker. A criticism of this comes from the fact this group doesn’t necessarily vote for far-right parties because they are modernization losers, but rather because they are motivated and guided by the same type of ideological and pragmatic deliberation as those voting for other parties (Golder, 2016, p. 483).

Economic Grievances

According to Golder, scholars who link economic grievances with far-right political success often do so in the context of realistic conflict theory. In times of economic trouble, social groups with clashing material interests compete over scarce resources. In these circumstances, the individuals in the in-group tend to attribute economic hardships to the out-group, which leads to the development of prejudice and discrimination. Far-right parties are adept at exploiting economic grievances by associating immigration and minority groups with economic hardship through slogans such as “Eliminate Unemployment: Stop Immigration”. Golder argues that at the individual level, there is significant evidence in support of the economic grievances’ explanation. According to the earlier description of a far-right voter, these are individuals who are likely competing with immigrants in the economic sphere and are often associated with holding stronger anti-immigration attitudes. Furthermore, individuals who feel threatened economically have been shown to hold stronger anti-immigration views, and far-right support has all things considered been strongly linked with anti-immigration views (Golder, 2016, pp. 483-484).

Scholars of economic grievances often argue that the global financial crisis of 2007 accelerated the political fallout of the decades-long divisive and destabilizing economic trends because the economic downturn affected the already suffering or left-behinds particularly hard. These groups appealed particularly well to populist rhetoric saying that the system was rigged and that others were benefitting at their expense. At the macro level, these explanations have strengths, as the connection between a destabilized economy and rising

support for populist parties is particularly strong (Berman, 2020, p. 74). On the micro level, however, scholars have not been able to establish consistent connections between an individual's economic situation and their disposition to vote for far-right populist parties. One study found little evidence that individuals who were concerned with their personal financial situation were more likely to identify with far-right ideological beliefs during a financial crisis (p. 75).

Norris and Inglehart argue that the growing electoral success of the far-right populist parties and leaders has often been attributed to several economic developments that occurred during the late twentieth century, including advanced globalization of labour, finance, and investment, an increase in cross-border trade, the liberalization and deregulation of the economy, declining job security for many unskilled workers, the loss of manufacturing jobs in Western countries, and growing economic inequality. International trade and finance have brought significant benefits to lower and middle-income countries, particularly China and India, which have seen remarkable GDP growth. Additionally, it has also decreased income inequality and improved the living standards in these countries. On the other side of the coin, the less-educated population in advanced industrialized economies have been the losers from global markets, and suffer from sluggish job growth, stagnant wages, and deteriorating public services, seem most susceptible to the appeal of far-right populism (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 135).

According to Norris and Inglehart, national governments, particularly centre-left social democratic parties, have increasingly lost their ability to control the role of international markets and multinational corporations, and have been unable to implement social policies that create a security net for the unemployed and under-privileged who have been the "losers" of globalization. Many scholars believe that when mainstream social-democratic parties fail to address economic grievances, this creates an opportunity for far-right populist leaders to gain support. Oftentimes these leaders blame foreigners and immigrants for receiving benefits such as housing and welfare ahead of legal residents, referred to as "welfare chauvinism" or "exclusionary nationalism". While some populist parties are pro-market in their economic policy, following the 2007 global financial crisis, some parties such as the French National Rally became more protectionist in their policies towards trade and labour markets (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 137).

Golder refers to a theoretical account of Dancygier, who provides a more intricate theoretical perspective on ethnic competition. According to her, the interplay of economic scarcity and immigrant political influence is the explanation for both immigrant-native and immigrant-state conflicts. If there is no economic scarcity there is no conflict, however, when economic scarcity exists and immigrants have political power, those in power have the incentive to allocate the limited resources and benefits towards immigrants rather than the native population. This causes the native population to turn on the immigrant community, creating an immigrant-native conflict, one aspect of this is increasing far-right support. On the other hand, when there's economic scarcity but immigrants lack electoral power, those in power have no incentive to provide benefits to immigrants. This situation keeps the native population satisfied; however, it produces a state-immigrant conflict in which the immigrant community seek to alter the state's behaviour by imposing costs on it. The theoretical framework highlights how economic grievances do not automatically translate into far-right support among the natives. Much depends on the context in which the grievances are experienced (Golder, 2016, pp. 484-485).

Cultural and Sociocultural Grievances

Within the demand-side, explanations focusing on sociocultural grievances are the main competitors of the economic grievances theories. Rather than focusing on economic trends, these explanations argue that social and cultural trends over the past decades such as immigration, the decline of traditional values, and the mobilization of women and minority groups are the main causes of the rise of populism. Scholars argue that these trends have challenged ethnic and gender hierarchies which have generated counteraction. Particularly in the group of white men, the counter-reaction has led to the support of far-right populists who assure the protection of their interests (Berman, 2020, p. 75). Scholars who link cultural grievances and far-right success often do so in the context of social identity theory. This theory suggests that people naturally tend to form relations with those who are similar to themselves and that a need for self-esteem leads individuals to view their own groups as superior to other groups. Far-right populist parties can exploit and encourage these tendencies by highlighting the alleged incompatibility of immigrants' behavioural norms and cultural values with those of the native population. According to some scholars, no far-right party has been successful in mobilizing immigration grievances (Golder, 2016, p. 485).

In many European countries, the foreign-born share of the population has reached significant heights, through immigration such as the refugee crisis of 2015, and had a considerable political impact through the fear generated by high-profile terrorist attacks in Europe. Considering that the recent immigrant groups came from non-Western and non-Christian backgrounds has fed fears about the decline of the European culture and identity, leading some voters to support populist parties and politicians that claim to defend European values. According to Berman, numerous political scientists and political psychologists have demonstrated the significant impact and threats to group identity and how they can drive voters to support politicians and parties that vow to safeguard their status and identity (Berman, 2020, p. 76).

Golder argues that there is strong support for the cultural grievance explanation at the individual level, as many studies have demonstrated that anti-immigration attitudes are positively linked to far-right support. While this cannot simply be read as support for a cultural grievance story, anti-immigration attitudes can just as likely be the result of economic grievance with immigration. However, distinguishing cultural and economic grievances indicate that both possibilities matter for anti-immigration attitudes. Golder emphasizes that anti-immigration attitudes do not automatically translate into anti-immigration behaviour, as highlighted by a study that found that many Europeans held anti-immigration attitudes, and yet few voted for far-right parties. Blinder argues that this is due to a widespread norm against prejudice and discrimination, and how these norms interact to determine whether an individual's vote will be guided by anti-prejudice values or anti-immigration sentiments and may vary across and even inside countries depending on the individual's surroundings. Furthermore, if social norms against anti-immigration and far-right parties exist, then individuals will have reasons to keep them private. Numerous studies point out that respondents do not always answer truthfully when the question is about a sensitive topic (Golder, 2016, p. 485).

Berman agrees that on the micro/individual level, scholars consistently find strong connections between sociocultural issues and right-wing populist voting. In Europe, "immigration policy preferences are close to a perfect predictor" of right-wing populist voting. They argue, however, that on the macro level, sociocultural explanations have problems. Empirically, exists little cross-national correlation between levels of racist or anti-immigration attitudes and populist success. Citing a study by Bartels, examining long-term

voting data found no clear correlation between levels of populist sentiment and support for far-right populist parties. Berman argues that Sweden, for example, has low scores on measures of racism and anti-immigrant views, while the right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats rank as the country's second or third-largest party. On the other hand, Ireland and Spain score relatively high on the same measures, however, right-wing populism has not been particularly successful in either country. And while right-wing populism has become more politically popular over time, racist and anti-immigration sentiments have decreased during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Europe. Furthermore, it is challenging to understand the success of far-right populist parties solely based on deep-rooted and persistent sociocultural attitudes like racism and xenophobia (Berman, 2020, p. 76).

Mols & Jetten argue that the theory of cultural backlash focuses on the extent to which voters feel like their experiencing cultural alienation over time and believe that far-right populist parties are the only parties understanding this. According to this theory, those that have little education have not been socialized to adopt changing ideas in society and as a result, feel left out and left behind culturally. In many Western countries an intergenerational fault line has emerged, creating a rift between the younger, urbanized, more educated, progressive parts of the population who support progressive politics, and the older, less-educated, and conservative parts of the population living in more rural or less inhabited areas who resist progressive causes and gravitate towards far-right populist parties because they feel excluded culturally. The researchers Inglehart & Norris tested the support for their cultural backlash theory and found in their analysis that among the older generation, male, lacking higher education, and holding tradition views there was strongest support for far-right populist parties. The findings confirm that the rise of these parties shows a reaction against a wide array of rapid cultural changes that might be eroding the fundamental values of Western society (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 6).

Supply-Side Explanations

The last decade has seen increased attention on supply-side factors, and although demand is a necessary condition for far-right success, scholars argue that there is not enough variation when analysing demand to explain cross-national and substantial differences in far-right support (Golder, 2016, p. 486). Some scholars of populism focus their attention on the supply side of politics, trying to understand if democratic institutions have become less responsive to

citizens, less able to deal with societal issues over time and in turn become susceptible to the populist backlash. Berman argues that supply-side theories reject the assumption that broader economic and/or social trends directly influence individuals' political demands and choices. Instead, supply-side theories of populism utilize the ideas of institutionalist scholars that argue that economic, social, and other structural trends are filtered through institutions that ascertain how they are translated into political outcomes. Supply-side explanations locate the main cause of populism to be the decreased effectiveness and responsiveness of political institutions, leading many individuals to support anti-establishment and anti-status quo politicians and political parties (Berman, 2020, p. 78).

According to Mols & Jetten, supply-side research can be subdivided into two sub-groups. The first and most well-known is researching strategic party positioning, where scholars argue that far-right populist parties will scan the horizon for available electoral space and position themselves strategically opposite competing parties through their party manifesto. The second group of the research goes further and argues that far-right populist parties and their leaders use creative narratives to create a "new electoral space" by turning relatively mundane policy issues into perceived existential threats. Mols and Jetten argue that both groups of supply-side researchers have merit. Populist parties must position themselves vis-à-vis competing parties and make strategic decisions in the process. Furthermore, it is shown that far-right populist parties do create and perpetuate fake news and conspiracy theories if it benefits them electorally, and leaders play an important role in this process (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 7).

Mols and Jetten cite Kitschelt's revised "winning formula" to explain far-right populist parties' ability to create new electoral space. The main argument is a dynamic understanding of party positioning and party competition, wherein far-right populist parties were seen to move into "vacant electoral spaces" that were abandoned or neglected by mainstream parties. According to the thesis, it was a conscious strategic decision by the populist parties to abandon their neoliberal stance and move towards the centre on socioeconomic issues so the party could attract disappointed mainstream party voters with exclusionist authoritarian appeals. Other scholars continued to explore the proposition and have shown evidence that these parties have managed to unite a varied mix of socioeconomic voters (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 7).

Other supply-side researchers have explored the role of charismatic leadership relating to far-right populist party success, as these parties are often portrayed in the media as owing their success to charismatic leadership. However, this is a difficult topic to answer, as the label “charismatic” is difficult to use and is more often used with the benefit of hindsight to describe leaders who had an exceptional ability to win over followers. Furthermore, an outside view of the leader might be charismatic, however, within the organization they might be destructive and divisive. While party leaders are seen as important to secure electoral success, the research focuses perhaps too much on the individual-level characteristics of the leader and not on how these leaders play a role in creating narratives that spark demand-side grievances (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 8).

Political Opportunity Structure

Golder defines a political opportunity structure, which is an external factor that influences how receptive a political system is to a political entrepreneur. The political opportunity structure of a state is influenced by various factors such as electoral rules, party competition, media, and political cleavage structure. Electoral rules are the primary factor that shapes the political opportunity structure confronting far-right parties. Small parties often find it difficult to emerge and thrive when the electoral system is rigid. Disproportional systems translate votes into seats in a way that disadvantages small parties by giving them fewer seats than their proportion of votes would suggest. This effect is compounded by the incentives for voters and elites to engage in strategic voting behaviour, and supporters of smaller parties who do not want to waste their votes have incentives to vote strategically for other larger parties. Political entrepreneurs, in a similar fashion, have strong incentives to work within mainstream parties even if their policy preferences are not represented in that party.

Disproportionate politics systems discourage both the formation and electoral success of smaller political parties (Golder, 2016, p. 486).

Berman argues that generally strong political institutions in developed countries could decay over time, causing a political system to become less responsive and effective and as a result generate increased dissatisfaction and even disorder among the populace. Supply-side explanations of populism argue that institutional decay is something that is going on in the United States, Western Europe, and other parts of the advanced industrial world in the past decades (Berman, p. 78). In Europe, Berman notes that scholars have identified developments

that have diminished the responsiveness and effectiveness of democratic institutions. The most common focus of attention is on the European Union. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, more policy-making areas became the responsibility of the European Union, most notably monetary policy. However, European citizens did not gain any greater control over these areas, while policy options were available for the national governments – over which individuals did have more direct control – diminished, especially in the economic realm (p. 79).

Political Party Organization

Most supply-side literature focuses on the political opportunity structures that Golder defined. However, how well the far-right populist parties can take advantage of these structures depend on how well the party is organized. Party organizations can be built, and far-right populist parties can show agency in shaping their electoral fortunes. Although a solid party organization might not lead to an electoral breakthrough, Golder argues that it is necessary for its electoral persistence. A political party's organizational strengths depend on the size of its active members, its organizational magnitude shown by its network of local branches, and the professionalization of its central organization (Golder, 2016, p. 489).

One study on party organization examines why some parties are able to recruit many high-quality activists and why some only attract a handful of poorly educated individuals with no political experience. The researcher argued that far-right populist parties in countries with a strong nationalist subculture that extends beyond those nostalgic for fascism can draw from a large pool of right-wing activists. However, if mainstream parties extend a “*cordon sanitaire*” around the party through social sanctions, its ability to attract quality activists is limited. And if the political and social costs of the far-right activity are high, only extremists are willing to become members of the party, resulting in a poorly organized party with an extremist ideology and limited reach. However, if it's the other way around, far-right populist parties will become attractive to moderates and opportunists, and the result is a well-organized party with a moderate ideology that appeals to a broad electorate (Golder, 2016, p. 489).

A Winning Formula

Golder argues that far-right populist parties are not necessarily only protest parties that gather voters from people that are discontent with the political elite. There is considerable evidence

that supporters of these parties are motivated by the same ideological and pragmatic considerations as that of other voters. This means that far-right populist parties can influence their electorate through the ideologies they embrace. Numerous studies show that far-right parties with an extremist and antidemocratic ideology are almost always electorally weak, as they are often considered illegitimate or ineffective options in most democratic countries. One possible explanation for why these unpopular parties retain an extremist ideology has to do with the types of activists these parties manage to attract, or it could be that these parties are expressively rather than instrumentally motivated (Golder, 2016, p. 490).

Golder argues that the “winning formula” for far-right populist parties is a pro-market position on economic policy combined with an authoritarian position on the cultural aspect. A neoliberal economic stance might have been the case in the past; however, this is not the case anymore. Since the 1990s, many far-right populist parties have adopted centrist, and in some cases leftist, economic policies that want more protectionism and strengthen the welfare state. In many cases, the parties blur their economic positions to maintain a broad coalition across the electorate. Another scholar has argued that the winning formula on the far-right has little economic content, instead opting for ethnonationalism¹ and populist anti-establishment rhetoric, without seeming overtly racist or antidemocratic. Pioneered by National Rally in the 1980s, this winning ideology will be further discussed when examining the case studies (Golder, 2016, p. 490).

Immigration, Economic Insecurity, and Support for Far-Right Populism

This section seeks to explore the relationship between immigration, economic insecurity, and support for far-right populism. By examining these factors in detail, the chapter aims to shed light on the underlying causes of this phenomenon.

Immigration and Support for the Far-Right

In the article *Right-wing hegemony, and immigration: How the populist far-right achieved hegemony through the immigration debate in Europe*, Ferruh Yilmaz argues that in the mid-1980s, the populist far-right intervened in public discourse, tapping into popular discontent

¹ Ethnonationalism (Ethnic nationalism) is the belief, theory, or doctrine that shared ancestry is the principal element of a cohesive national identity, and that a government should protect and promote the culture, language, and religion of one group, considered the primary or prestigious people of a nation, over other cultures, languages, or religions that may share that space in a multicultural society (ethnonationalism definition, n.d.).

with the political establishment and linked the fears, anxieties and the “lost” identity of the “people” to their specific xenophobic, often anti-Islamic policy topics. In this discourse, the “people” became synonymous with the “nation”, which excluded the cosmopolitan elites that were at fault for destroying the nation with careless immigration policies toward Muslim immigrants. In the social construction of the “people”, social cleavages such as class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., were absent from the far-right populist agenda. Likewise, the antagonistic “Other” was also reconstructed when *immigrant workers* became *Muslims*. Yilmaz argues that once the new antagonistic identity category became the common sense of the social structure, even those who argue against right-wing positions draw upon the same epistemology of the social, and it is this shared epistemology that is the basis of the new hegemonic argument (Yilmaz, 2012, p. 369).

Correspondingly, Sertan Akbaba argues that during the 1990s centrist politics were prevalent in Europe, and migration was seen as welcomed and treated as a necessity because of the worker shortage in the continent, which led to an opportunity for populist parties to develop the issue of migration upon identity politics. Their main theme evolved into protecting European identity from other cultures, and starting in the mid-1990s, right-wing leaders garnered fear in the masses, creating a narrative of deep decay in the system alongside a warning of threat and violence from the “Other”, feeding populist concerns across economic, social, and cultural spheres. According to the researcher, the reconstruction of European identity is currently dominated by the anti-immigration discourse (Akbaba, 2018, p. 200).

Akabab continues by arguing that the re-narration of the right-wing is emerging out of the confrontation between the parochial² and cosmopolitan views in Europe. In this discourse battle, the populist parties situate themselves as the defenders of European values, culture, and way of life with mottos such as “Europe for Europeans”, and “pure Europe”, placing themselves against the discourse of “unity in diversity”. The result of this is a redrawing of social, political, and cultural boundaries not between the European member states, but between the native Europeans and the immigrants. The new mode of politics revealed a kind of hybrid actor – a sum of all the populist parties – with a distinctly European narrative. For the European populist movement, it is fundamentally about the European continent that needs

² Parochial (limited) is showing interest only in a narrow range of matters, especially those that directly affect yourself, your town, or your country, i.e., a parochial view/opinion (Parochial definition, n.d.)

to be saved, even from the EU, and the increasing dissatisfaction with the political and socioeconomic situation in Europe among voters due to the rapid transformation of the nation-state alongside European integration has pushed many voters towards the far-right. And when analysing the far-right populist parties in a majority of European countries, a commonality of the rhetoric is anti-immigration with an aim of creating otherness (Akbaba, 2018, pp. 205-206).

According to Cas Mudde, Western European populist far-right parties are significantly xenophobic towards non-European immigrants, but often blame the national elites as the true culprits behind mass immigration. They often see mass immigration as a conspiracy of the left-wing parties, trade unions, and big business, wherein the parties and trade unions want to increase their support base, and big businesses want a cheap labour force. So, they argue that these groups work together to push through their agendas at the expense of the nation and the “little man” (Mudde, 2007, p. 66). Among the groups of asylum seekers and immigrants, Muslims have been targeted most consistently and fervently by the populist far-right parties. Mudde argues that populist parties distinctly divide the world into friends and foes based on three features of their ideology: nativism, populism, and to some extent authoritarianism. In most cases, while attention is paid primarily to immigrants and indigenous minorities, the biggest threat is often attributed to the traitorous elites and the corrupt. Populist parties also play on the politics of fear, which plays an important role in homogenizing the “ingroup” and polarizing the relationship towards the “outgroup” (p. 89).

Mudde continues by arguing that immigration and the EU are the two topics populist far-right parties focus on through the lens of economic globalization. While their nativist language directs much of their attention to the immigrants themselves, most of the parties argue that immigration is a consequence of economic globalization, and some parties see immigrants as victims of international capitalism, although without expressing compassion or solidarity (p. 189). Populist far-right parties particularly oppose neoliberal economics and mass immigration, and cultural globalization is rejected because they believe it will annihilate the cultural diversity of the nation and create the “wrong culture” (p. 196).

James Kirchick argues that the rise of right-wing populism in Europe can be mainly attributed to the 2015 Refugee Crisis, where over 2 million asylum seekers and refugees arrived in Europe and overwhelmed the system in place to deal with them. The 2016 “Brexit”

referendum in the UK, the unprecedented share of votes for far-right nationalist candidate Marine Le Pen in France during the 2017 presidential elections, the entrance of the Alternative for Germany party into the German parliament in 2017, the formation of a populist coalition government in Italy between the far-right Northern League and the leftist Five Star Movement were all political expressions of the increasingly popular belief that national borders had become too porous and that immigrants were not assimilating quickly and thoroughly enough in their respective European societies. And while the number of immigrants entering Europe has significantly decreased since the refugee crisis, the pessimistic view towards European governments' handling of the crisis and ability to integrate so many foreigners has had a profound effect on the politics of European countries (Kirchick, 2019, pp. 51-52).

Oliviero Angeli, on the topic of migration and the rise of populism in the 2018 MIDEM report, argue that the link might be more complicated. They argue that populism, especially the growth of populism, is a relatively recent phenomenon, while migration waves have existed for a long time. Ostensibly, there is no mono-causal relation between migration and the rise of right-wing populism, as an increase in immigration does not automatically lead to a populist-led anti-immigration backlash. They argue that the rise of right-wing populism is more closely related to a process in which immigration does play an important part. The starting point is an "external shock" such as the 2015 Refugee Crisis which posed major political and administrative challenges that most European countries were not equipped to handle. This difficulty in handling the crisis led to increased media coverage, and public scrutiny, and sparked heated political controversies (MIDEM, 2018, p. 12).

Increased media coverage evolved and uncovered suppressed migration scepticism in sections of the population. Seemingly, migration does not necessarily generate anti-immigration fears and attitudes, it rather triggers and strengthens pre-existing ones, as attitudes towards migrants remained virtually unchanged in European countries during the refugee crisis. Furthermore, the activation of anti-immigrant attitudes, along with the dissatisfaction with the handling of the crisis, far-right populist parties who were already capitalizing on immigration fears could mobilize voters in the protest against the "ruling elite". Lastly, the success of the populist parties opened the way for a shift in migration policies in non-populist governments (MIDEM, 2018, p. 12).

The report highlighted that the attitude towards immigrants from non-EU countries in Northern and Western Europe was considerably more positive compared to Central and Eastern Europe. And in the wake of the refugee crisis, there was little deterioration of the opinions. Angeli argues that the decisive factor for the success of far-right populist parties during this time was the fact that migration gained unprecedented attention as a political topic by the media and voters. For many voters, migration became the most important national and European problem, even ahead of issues such as economic growth or unemployment. This increased attention to migration was beneficial to far-right populist parties because it enabled them to mobilize the anti-immigration parts of the electorate and gain from the increased political polarization (MIDEM, 2018, p. 15).

Furthermore, socioeconomic cleavages became more visible in the migration debate, and asylum seekers were perceived as a catalyst for other problems, such as the argument that liberal migration policy caused a financial burden and disadvantages for the native population. However, the concerns of a large portion of those who vote for right-wing populist parties in Western Europe focus more on the cultural consequences, such as the fear of losing one's way of life and identity, rather than socioeconomic conditions. For example, Eurosceptic and Brexit voters in the United Kingdom tended to focus on cultural, and not economic arguments (MIDEM, 2018, pp. 15-16).

The Relationship between Economic Insecurity and Far-Right Populism

The 2007/2008 global financial crisis, which was followed by the Eurozone debt crisis in 2011/2012, resulted in a severe GDP decline and a spike in unemployment across Europe. Furthermore, these crises triggered major political disruptions, as stable two-party systems were swept away, long-time mainstream parties saw their voting numbers drop to single digits and far-right populist parties suddenly thrived as they entered parliaments and in some cases governments. In their analysis, Manuel Funke and Christoph Trebesch try to identify systematic shifts in the political landscape after financial crises by conducting a comprehensive historical analysis of the political fallout of financial crises. The results show that financial crises oftentimes put a strain on democracies, where it often correlates with a shrinking of government majorities, parliamentary fractionalization rises, the number of parties in parliament increases, and far-right parties see strong political gains. The analysis shows that financial crises have much stronger political effects than other types of economic

downturns such as recessions. They conclude that political fragmentation, polarization, and radicalization are a hallmark of financial crises (Funke & Trebesch, *Financial Crises and the Populist Right*, 2017, p. 6).

Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch's study on this topic shows strong evidence for the rise of right-wing extremist parties in the aftermath of financial crises, particularly far-right parties, and is true both before and after the Second World War. The electoral gains of far-right parties have been especially pronounced after the global financial crisis of the 1920s/1930s and after 2008. In the interwar period, this was particularly pronounced in Italy and Germany, with Mussolini's fascist alliance and Hitler's Nazi Party gaining significant amounts of votes during elections in the 1920s and 1930s. In other parts of Europe far-right parties also saw increased electoral success, such as the Rexists and the Flemish National Party in Belgium, the National Socialists' Worker's Party in Denmark, the Patriotic People's Movement in Finland, Falange in Spain, and National Front in Switzerland (Funke, Schularick, & Trebesch, *Going to Extremes: Politics after Financial Crisis, 1870-2014*, 2015, pp. 13-14).

We see similar results in the aftermath of the 2007/2008 global financial crisis, where many far-right and right-wing populist parties more than doubled their vote share in many advanced economies in Europe, including France, the UK, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, and Portugal. In France, the National Rally party earned 13.6 per cent of votes in the 2011 election, a significant rise compared to the pre-crisis election results in 2007 at 4.3 per cent. The 2014 European Parliament election saw the German newly created Alternative for Germany party receiving 7 per cent of the votes. Even when excluding the "Great Depression" and the "Great Recession" from the results, we can observe a shift towards the right. During the late 1980s/early 1990s Scandinavian banking crisis, hard right-wing turns were observed, when the Norwegian Progress Party won 13 per cent of the vote in 1989, compared to just 3.5 per cent in 1985, and its Danish counterpart, the Danish Progress Party more than doubled its vote share from 3.6 per cent in 1984 to 9 per cent in 1989. In Sweden, before 1990, right-wing parties gained below 1 per cent of the vote in 1988, however, after the crisis in the 1991 election, won 6.8 per cent of the vote, and the newly established right-wing populist party "New Democracy" gained 25 seats in the parliament (Funke, Schularick, & Trebesch, 2015, pp. 15-16).

Cesáreo Rodríguez-Aguilera argue that one of the best explanations for the rise of far-right populist parties in Europe can be attributed to the crisis of democracy, which seems incapable of fulfilling its theoretical promise. He argues that conventional democratic politics has given into the interests of the world of global finance in which the alternation between centre-left and centre-right governments has not been able to offer real economic alternatives to the current model. Rather it has stuck to the same model with subtle variations, reducing elections to “mere empty rituals”. As a result, the far-right benefit from popular dissatisfaction and disapproval of the corrupt, privileged, and oligopolistic³ political class, when it seems democracy is powerless in facing the large, untouchable, international economic and financial corporations. The established parties are often accused of not representing the “people”, and the old “political class” is written off for being too incompetent in facing and solving critical social problems (Rodríguez-Aguilera, 2014, p. 178).

Golder argues that the connection between support for far-right politics and the economic circumstances that shape individuals’ preferences is less clear. According to Golder, while some studies find that unemployment helps far-right parties, most find that it has either no effect or effects negatively. It is, however, crucial to understand why unemployment might lead to individual voters supporting the far-right. Golder argues that if voters believe that high unemployment is a result of high immigration, it becomes more logical for them to vote far-right. And if there is a large quantity of immigration, unemployed voters are more likely to believe that immigration causes unemployment, however, subsequent research has only partially corroborated these findings (Golder, 2016).

Mols & Jetten argue that there is little empirical evidence backing the “losers of globalization” argument. While some studies found partial evidence for economic anxiety driving support for far-right populist parties, many other studies do not find a clear link between the two. The argument of poor working-class voters flocking to radical right-wing parties during economic downturns has in many cases shown to be untrue. There has been a significant mismatch between how many understand the success of far-right populist parties and support, and the evidence research has pointed at. Research shows that these parties tend

³ Oligopoly markets are markets dominated by a small number of suppliers. They can be found in all countries and across a broad range of sectors. Some oligopoly markets are competitive, while others are significantly less so, or can at least appear that way. Competition authorities are often called upon to investigate concerns of co-ordinated actions or lack of vigorous competition (OECD, 2015).

to attract disproportionate numbers of well-off middle-class voters and that household income is a poor predictor for populist voting behaviour. For example, in the case of Brexit in 2016, analyses revealed that support for leaving the European Union was stronger among middle-class voters than working-class voters (Mols & Jetten, 2020, pp. 4-5).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the thesis. This chapter will give insights into previous research topics of *economic grievances* and *the interaction between sociocultural and economic grievances*. This chapter aims to establish the two theories I will be using to conceptualize the thesis topic. In the first section of the chapter, I will emphasize the use of the theory of economic grievances, which I will use to explain how economic inequality leads to grievances among certain parts of society that lead to support for populist parties. In the second section, I propose utilizing the theory of the intersection between sociocultural and economic grievances to address the strengths and limitations of both sociocultural and economic explanations. By integrating these explanations into a single theory, we can develop a more nuanced and compelling explanation for the emergence of populism. This interaction can also explain how far-right populist parties gain support when mobilizing certain groups against immigration policy. Scholarly efforts to explain how economic grievances and the intersection between sociocultural and economic grievances affect the emergence of far-right populist parties in Western Europe will be central to developing my analytical framework.

Theory of Economic Grievances

Perhaps unsurprisingly, economic explanations for the rise of far-right populism have been prominent. Theories based on economic grievances centre around how globalization, neoliberalism, technological change, and other factors have created discontent and divisions among people, particularly by making the economic situation more insecure for working and middle-class individuals in comparison to the privileged and highly educated urban elites (Berman, 2020, p. 73).

This theory emphasizes the consequences of electoral behaviour emerging from extensive inequality that transform the workforce and society in a post-industrial economy. There is

substantial evidence of powerful trends towards greater income and wealth inequality in Western countries, based on the rise of a knowledge economy⁴, work automation through technology, collapse of the manufacturing industry, and global flows of labour, goods, people, and capital (through an inflow of migrants and refugees), erosion of organized labour, a shrinking welfare system, and neo-liberal austerity policies. This view argues that rising economic insecurity and social deprivation among the people left behind fuels popular resentment of the political class. Populist movements, parties and leaders have exploited the vulnerability of certain parts of society – low-waged unskilled workers, unemployed people, households dependent on shrinking social benefits, residents in public housing, single parents, and white populations of lower-income that live in inner-city areas with concentrations of immigrants, by spreading anti-establishment, nativist⁵, and xenophobic rhetoric, blaming “Them” for stripping prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from “Us” (F. Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p. 2).

In close relation to the economic anxiety argument, the rising inequality explanation uses the global financial crisis to form their argument about the rise of far-right populist parties. According to this explanation, the people who were once a relatively well-off and middle-class group of voters started to slide into poverty and job insecurity in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, and the national economies in many Western countries started to slow down. This argument gained ground as the evidence for the rapidly increasing wealth inequality in many Western countries became clear. However, Mols & Jetten argue that the evidence that economic inequality is directly linked with voting for far-right populist parties is lacking and might suggest that economic inequality is just one of the factors that might drive support for these parties (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 5).

The 2007/2008 global financial crisis saw a reduction in tax revenues and squeezed public sector borrowing, restricting the capacity of welfare capabilities in many countries, and economic inequality has sharply risen in advanced economies since 1970. OECD nations closely intertwined with the global economy have seen large-scale layoffs, stagnant wages, and job losses in the manufacturing sector, and local industries have been unable to compete

⁴ Oxford Languages Dictionary: an economy in which growth is dependent on the quantity, quality, and accessibility of the information available, rather than the means of production.

⁵ Oxford Languages Dictionary: relating to or supporting the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.

with lower labour costs abroad and cheaper imported goods. Considering all these economic trends, it is not unexpected that a rising trend of populist electoral support is attributed to public resentment of rising income inequality, a decline in well-paid manufacturing jobs, a reduction of the welfare system, and stagnant wages following decades of outsourcing and relocation, globalization, and automation (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 5).

National governments have increasingly lost their capacity to control the role of international markets and multinational corporations. Centre-left social democratic parties have particularly struggled to implement social policies that provide security for the unemployed and under-privileged who have lost from economic globalization. The “losers” of globalization are often groups that were traditionally protected by national borders and perceive the weakness of these boundaries as a threat to their social security and standing. Thomas Piketty’s influential work on income inequality in the West has shown that while there has been substantial economic growth in Western countries such as the US and the UK, the gains have gone almost entirely to the top 10 per cent of the population. However, income inequality differs when comparing the US and the European Union, with it rising much further and faster in the US (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 136).

Scholars have argued that in the period from the early 1970s to the 2010s in the US the volatility of family incomes had gone way up, i.e., family incomes grew and fell ever more sharply, and statistically, the volatility of family incomes nearly doubled in the period and the distance people slid down the economic ladder when they lost their financial footing increased. This economic insecurity made citizens more uncertain about their future and those of their children, and the rising inequality led to declining social mobility. Scholars of populism engaging with economic grievances argue that economic developments have created deep divisions within many societies between rich and poor, elites and “average” people, rural and urban peoples, and the highly- and the less educated (Berman, 2020, pp. 73-74).

A central argument for the economic grievances theory often notes that the financial crisis of the late 2000s was a catalyst for the decade-long divisive and destabilizing economic trends because economic downturns and crises often hit the “left-behinds” particularly hard. Analysing voting data and economic crises from the 1870s through the present day, researchers have found that politics take a hard right turn following financial crises and were

particularly pronounced after the global crisis of the 1920s/1930s and after 2007/2008. Using economic grievances as an explanation and theory has its obvious strengths, namely a clear connection between divisive and destabilizing economic trends of the last decade and the rising support for populism. Furthermore, one study concludes that the financial crises of the past 30 years in Europe have been a catalyst for the emergence of right-wing populist politics, with many European populist parties being considered “children of financial crises” (Berman, 2020, p. 74).

Berman is more doubtful of the evidence on the micro or individual level, however. She argues that despite the plausibility that individual economic setbacks and economic insecurity would lead to far-right populist support, the evidence linking these two factors is not particularly strong. Scholars have not been able to establish a clear and consistent connection between individuals’ economic circumstances and their disposition to vote for populist parties. Berman highlights a study by Kates and Tucker, who directly tested if individuals who were concerned about their personal economic situation were more likely to identify with far-right ideological beliefs during an economic crisis and found little evidence of this being the case. Some scholars argue that if individuals are worried that their financial situation will worsen over time, for many reasons including foreign competition and automation in industry, then they may be more susceptible to the anti-establishment, scapegoating far-right populists. Some scholars claim that the key factor in determining individual support for populism lies in their perception of the overall health of the society and economy in the present and the future. However, here too, the evidence is mixed (Berman, 2020, p. 75). There is some evidence that rising economic inequality is associated with voting for leaders who promise to fix a country’s problems, even if they will do it by undemocratic means. A study found that higher income inequality in a country enhanced the wish to elect a strong leader and found a link between societal inequality and the perception that society is breaking down, only to be fixed by a strong leader (Mols & Jetten, 2020, p. 5).

The Interaction of Sociocultural and Economic Grievances

As both economic and sociocultural explanations have their strengths and weaknesses, many scholars have tried to combine aspects from both to construct a more complex, but potentially more convincing understanding of the growth of populism.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart argue that sociocultural grievances are the proximate cause of far-right populist voting, however, the growing importance and pervasiveness of these grievances stem from increasing economic insecurity and the erosion of traditional values over the last decades. Some scholars have linked changing economic conditions to populism via “status anxiety” and underline that manual labour jobs have become increasingly unable to guarantee economic security or a middle-class lifestyle. The social standing of manual labour workers has declined and their feeling of being socially marginalized has increased, which lead to growing resentment towards professional elites and immigrants as a consequence. Far-right populist parties can play on emotions and mobilize a large group that feels their social status is collectively being threatened (Berman, 2020, p. 77).

The main argument is that socially marginal people, meaning that they lack an attachment to the normative order, social engagement, or feel a sense of social respect, are more likely to support radical parties and feel alienated from mainstream politics. Scholars also find that there is a relationship between certain economic and cultural factors, such as income and education, and how people perceive their social status and how they feel marginalized in society. People with lower income or education levels are more likely to experience feelings of social marginalization (Berman, 2020, p. 77).

Scholars argue that economic and cultural developments often interact, and the field needs a better framework for understanding how the two types of developments might both contribute to creating the discontent that pushes individuals towards far-right parties. Berman emphasizes that political scientists consistently find that xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, and general resentment of out-groups, tend to rise during difficult economic crises when low-income, low-educated individuals are particularly worried about their futures and are having to compete for scarce resources. Economists also found that economic shocks can cause sociocultural grievances that lead to support for populism, for example, one study found that economic hardships increase support for nativist or extreme politicians that intensifies resentment towards out-groups and attachment towards in-groups (Berman, 2020, p. 77).

If a government permits or promotes immigration into a country but does not accommodate assistance to local areas to integrate the new population, then the economic differences

between different cities or towns within the country will play an important role in determining the level of conflict between the native population and the immigrants. Furthermore, when there are economic shortages or resource scarcity, the native population is more likely to turn against the immigrants and the immigrant population is more likely to be confrontational towards state actors (Berman, 2020, p. 77). Mols & Jetten argue that immigration and asylum-seeking can increase grievances. The peaks in immigration increase competition for scarce resources, while also increasing fears that the culture and identity of the natives might be overshadowed. There is evidence showing that far-right populist parties attract voters who favour stricter immigration policy (Mols & Jetten, 2020, pp. 5-6)

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design used in this study to examine and compare the political ideologies and strategies of two far-right populist parties, Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and National Rally (RN) in France. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena in their specific contexts.

Data collection is conducted primarily through document analysis, which is a systematic and rigorous method of examining a large volume of documents related to the parties, and enables the identification of recurring themes and patterns, as well as changes in the parties' political strategies and discourse over time. The study also employs qualitative case studies to analyse similarities and differences in the political ideologies and strategies of AfD and National Rally, and to identify factors that may explain these similarities and differences.

To ensure the rigour and reliability of the research, the study employs several measures, including the use of multiple data sources, and a detailed coding and analysis process. The study also acknowledges potential limitations, such as the availability and reliability of the data sources, and outlines strategies to mitigate these limitations. Overall, the methodology and research design used in this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the political ideologies and strategies of the Alternative for Germany and the National Rally, shedding light on the broader phenomenon of far-right populism in Europe.

Data Collection Method

The research will use the document analysis method for data collection. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, this method requires the data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge. Document analysis is often used in combination with other research methods as a means of triangulation, i.e., “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”. In qualitative research a researcher uses multiple resources and methods, such as different data sources, to confirm their findings and increase credibility. The goal is to gather evidence from multiple sources that support the research. Combining findings from multiple sources across data sets decreases the impact of potential bias by examining information through various methods. By triangulation, the researcher attempts to provide a conflux of evidence that breed credibility, and the researcher can corroborate data across data sets. Triangulation helps guard the researcher against accusations that the study’s findings are an artefact of a single method, source, or a single investigator’s bias. Researchers typically review prior literature as part of their research and incorporate the information in their thesis. The analytic procedure entails finding, making sense of, and synthesizing data contained in the documents. Document analysis yields data that are organized into major themes, categories, and case examples through content analysis (Bowen, 2016, pp. 27-28).

The thesis bases itself on the interpretivist approach to qualitative methods, which is based on the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. Interpretive approaches involve questioning and observation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, which is closely linked to qualitative data collection methods (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

As a research method, document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies. The rationale for document analysis lies in its role in methodological and data triangulation, and the substantial value of documents in case study research (Bowen, 2016, p. 29). A substantial amount of the documents analysis sources I will use are academic books, journal and- periodical articles, and reports discussing the phenomenon of far-right populism in the cases of Alternative for Germany and National Rally. A large reason for this is based on the relevance of these documents to answering the research question, however, it is also about the quality of academic articles. While the question of the author and personal bias is always

relevant, the question of the subjectivity of the author is less pronounced in academic texts, as these articles have gone through rigid review processes of peer review and use more citations and references compared to other types of documents like newspapers or magazines. However, bias is something a researcher always needs to be aware of as other sources like newspapers, magazines and non-academic sources will also be relevant to my thesis (Triad, 2016).

The advantages of using document analysis for my data collection methods in this thesis are that documents are the main references I will be using, and document analysis, is an efficient and effective way of gathering data because documents are manageable and practical data resources. Documents are a substantially common data source and come in a variety of forms, which makes documents both reliable and accessible. Documents are also stable and “non-reactive” data sources, which means they can be reread, reviewed, and analysed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher’s influence. Documents analysis is used in my thesis because it can support and strengthen the research in many ways. It is an effective primary method of data collection and can provide a piece of good background information and broad coverage of data and help contextualize my research within the field of international relations (Triad, 2016).

Common disadvantages of using document analysis are not necessarily about limitations. Something to be aware of is that a document will not perfectly provide all the necessary information required to answer the question, so using multiple documents will always be a priority. Some documents might have inaccurate, incomplete, or outdated data, and some documents might not be easily accessible, often locked behind a paywall for example. Finding high-quality documents easily accessible might present a challenge, however, using open-access academic websites has luckily made finding high-quality documents straightforward. As earlier stated, being aware of bias both in the document and from the researcher is important to keep in mind. It is important to thoroughly evaluate and investigate the subjectivity of documents and my understanding of the data to preserve credibility. Having a clear process that incorporates evaluation and measures and having a clear understanding of what the method entails, and a plan for the process will ensure an uncomplicated research process (Triad, 2016).

Qualitative Case Study

The data analysis technique used will be a qualitative case study method. The two case studies I'm researching are the two political parties Alternative for Germany in Germany and National Rally in France. I will be analysing the emergence and rise of these parties concerning immigration and economic insecurity in the respective countries. The aim of using qualitative case studies in this thesis is to produce more generalizable knowledge about how and why there has been an emergence and rise of far-right populist parties in Germany and France. Qualitative case studies are a research approach that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. By utilizing a variety of lenses, the issue can be comprehensively explored, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Jack & Baxter, 2008, p. 544).

A qualitative case study involves the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal. To be able to successfully explain the cases, each of the cases needs to be described and researched thoroughly at the beginning of the study. In the context of this thesis, the qualitative case study method entails researching the historical context of both parties and their policies and investigating the issues of immigration and economic insecurity concerning the parties. A deep understanding of the cases is important in establishing the foundation for the analytical framework that will be used in the cross-case study (Goodrick, 2014, p. 1).

This thesis uses multiple-case studies, which will allow the researcher to analyse within each setting and across settings. The thesis intends to gain insight and understanding of a particular phenomenon, namely the emergence and growth of far-right populism and using an instrumental case study approach is reliable to gain an understanding (Jack & Baxter, 2008, p. 550). Document analysis is a valuable data collection method for qualitative case studies as it generates a valuable understanding of the cases and case context. The case studies are closely linked as both parties are part of a larger European movement and trend and provide an opportunity to explore the movement on a larger scale. The case studies also have a clear objective and are intertwined with the research question. Chosen two case studies are done purposely as going above that amount will make the thesis too wide, as each case is a large undertaking with significant depth, however. As this thesis will be based entirely on secondary data analysis, the research does not require any fieldwork or primary data

collection, which requires the data collection process to be rigorous and requires me to find sturdy references. The time gap between the two case studies is not an issue in this thesis (Goodrick, 2014, p. 8).

There are some practical limitations to using qualitative case studies. When using the methodology, the researcher must possess strong synthesis skills, i.e., they should be able to combine and organize different pieces of information into a coherent whole. They also need the capacity to analyse and reconcile information that may seem to support opposing views, so the researcher must consider multiple perspectives and come up with a balanced and comprehensive evaluation. The researcher must also be able to embrace the complexities of each case and not oversimplify or generalize their findings. It is important to use logical and analytical thinking to draw conclusions based on the evidence they have gathered and to present their findings in a clear and organized manner (Goodrick, 2014, p. 8).

There are some potential disadvantages to using qualitative case studies. One of the key issues with the method is that it can be quite resource intensive, particularly if fieldwork is required. That means the process of collecting data for multiple cases can be time-consuming and might not be feasible. As this thesis does not require any fieldwork, the work will not be as resource intensive. Depending on the purposes of the study, selecting a smaller number of cases may be better. A good balance has been struck by choosing two similar cases to study, reducing the resources required for data collection and analysis. Lastly, just like the data collection method, qualitative case studies require that the secondary data is of high quality (Goodrick, 2014, p. 8).

Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the findings and answer the research question: to what extent have issues such as immigration and economic insecurity contributed to the emergence and growth of far-right populist parties in Germany and France, as demonstrated by the case studies of Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and National Rally (RN) in France? In this chapter, I will present a historical overview of the two parties, followed by a qualitative case study approach that analyses the success of these parties concerning their policies on immigration and economic inequality.

To understand the context in which Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany and National Rally (RN) in France have emerged and grown as far-right populist parties, it is important to provide a historical overview of these parties. This section will delve into the background and development of the AfD and the RN, highlighting key events, milestones, and transformations that have shaped their ideologies, structures, and electoral performances. By examining the historical trajectory of these parties, we can gain insights into the factors that have contributed to their rise as prominent far-right populist actors in their respective countries.

The qualitative case study analysis forms the core of this chapter, where I will examine the success of AfD and the RN concerning their policies on immigration and economic inequality. Drawing on the economic and sociocultural grievances theory, I will analyse the extent to which these parties have capitalized on anti-immigration sentiment and economic grievances to gain electoral support. This analysis will involve examining the parties' policy positions, strategies, and electoral performances in relation to immigration and economic inequality issues. By comparing and contrasting the experiences of AfD and the RN, we can gain insights into the similarities and differences in their approaches to these issues and their impact on the emergence and growth of far-right populist parties in Germany and France.

Alternative for Germany: Eurosceptic to Radical Right

From the Past to the Present: Tracing AfD's Roots and Historical Development

The political party Alternative für Germany (AfD) was founded by German conservatives who were unhappy with the centrist direction of the leading Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under the leadership of Angela Merkel. However, the party found its political momentum by mobilizing popular unease and distaste for the European project and specifically the composition and operation of the Eurozone and Germany's position as its political leader and main financier. The impact of the three European crises (economic and financial, the migrant crisis and the impact of Brexit) on German politics have been significant, although, of the three, Brexit has had the least impact, and was not a high-profile theme during the 2017 Bundestag election campaign. The shock of the financial crisis on the German economy was sharp but relatively short (Lees, 2018, p. 301).

Until 2013, right-wing populist and extremist parties were unable to establish themselves as a relevant political force in Germany. For most of the history of the Federal Republic of Germany's history, the country has proven to be a difficult place for right-wing populist parties to grow. While some right-wing populist and extremist parties have seen success since the 1980s in Germany, those success stories have usually been limited to the regional realm of state elections without leading to a permanent establishment of a right-wing populist party at the national level. The advent and the rise of Alternative for Germany changed the political landscape significantly. Having come up very close to the five per cent threshold in the 2013 federal election, to achieving its first electoral success in the May 2014 European election, gaining 7.1 per cent of the vote a little over a year after the parties' founding, and subsequently winning 11 per cent in the 2019 election. By the time of the 2017 federal elections, Alternative for Germany won 12.6 per cent of the votes and won 94 seats in the Bundestag, and seeing similar results in the 2021 federal elections with 10.3 per cent and 84 seats (Decker, 2016, p. 2) (Wahlrecht.de, 2017) (Wahlrecht.de, 2021).

While these results and the arrival of right-wing populism to Germany represent an adjustment that aligns it more closely with the political landscape of its Western European neighbours and their established right-wing populist parties, the question remains why this political phenomenon only arrived in Germany until recently. One argument is that the emergence and rise of AfD can be attributed to the euro and financial crises, as it opened the window of opportunity for a Eurosceptic party in Germany. Its primary policy demands were based on a controlled dissolution of the monetary union and a rejection of further European integration (Decker, 2016, p. 2). Robert Grimm highlights that Germany came relatively unscathed through the economic turbulence of the financial crisis, as after a brief contraction in 2008, the economy continued to grow. While countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy struggled to control spiralling sovereign debt and had to implement stringent fiscal policies, Germany was able to borrow money on international markets on favourable terms and managed to save up to 40 billion Euros in interest payments between 2010 and 2014. For some observers, Germany was the greatest beneficiary of the Eurozone and the winner of the sovereign debt crisis. Despite this, the electoral success of Alternative for Germany suggests that German backing of European integration has changed in recent decades. AfD has been the first German right-wing populist party to gain substantial electoral support in local, national, and European elections (Grimm, 2015, p. 265).

A closer look at the AfD's origins shows its ability to draw on an already existing network of social and political structures in Germany, and therefore the party did not have to start from scratch when it was founded in 2013. A few of its predecessors both at the party and mass levels were: The Bund freier Bürger (League of Free Citizens), founded in 1993 during the signing of the Maastricht Treaty⁶ and disbanded in 2000, the Hayek Gesellschaft (Hayek Society), the Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft (Initiative for a New Social Market Economy), the Bündnis Bürgerwille (Alliance of the Citizens' Will), the Wahlalternative 2013, and the fundamentalist-Christian campaign network Zivile Koalition (Civil Coalition) (Decker, 2016, p. 3).

The economic and financial crises that hit Europe at the end of the 2000s, and Germany leading the response to it, provided the mobilization narrative for the AfD. The AfD has its roots in a distinctly intellectual environment, as the party founders, Alexander Gauland, Konrad Adam, and Berndt Lucke, was former Department Head of the Federal Ministry of the Environment, Editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper, and tenured Professor of Macroeconomics at the University of Hamburg, respectively. In other words, they were well-informed and well-networked, and their manifesto was endorsed by many influential groups, even former members of the CDU. The new party attracted much attention when the 2013 Federal election approached, a period which saw most of the main political parties taking a more Eurosceptic position (Lees, 2018, pp. 300-301).

When attempting to identify the root causes and reasons behind the party's success, Decker argues that we must incorporate the "Sarrazin debate". SPD politician and former member of the Executive Board of the Bundesbank Thilo Sarrazin launched a national debate that took much of the public's attention during the summer of 2010. This debate played an instrumental role in paving the way for the entry of right-wing populism into the German discourse. As he employed his formula in his books about the Eurozone crisis and political correctness, in many ways he can be considered the spiritual successor to the AfD, even though he never joined the party (Decker, 2016, p. 3).

⁶ The Maastricht Treaty gave birth to the name "European Union". The member states agreed on important changes to the structure and powers of the union. Centered on three pillars: European Communities, Justice, and Home Affairs, and Common Foreign and Security Policy, these changes would transform European integration (How Maastricht changed Europe, 2023).

Seongcheol Kim illustrates the shift from an “old” AfD that started with the party’s founding in 2013 and its economically liberal-focused party platform to the shift in 2015 where we see AfD becoming more nationally conservative in its political platform. An event that illustrates this shift was the Pegida movement and AfD’s connection to it. The Pegida movement emerged in Dresden in October 2014 and represented various demands and sentiments that pitted “the people” against the likes of Angela Merkel, “traitors of the people”, “the Islamisation of the Occident”, or “liar press”. And while this paper will not explore or analyse the Pegida movement further, the intersection and influence this movement had on the AfD’s development is important (Kim, 2017, p. 3).

In July 2015, two months before Angela Merkel’s controversial decision to suspend the Dublin Regulation⁷, and after an intense struggle between moderate and more radical forces within the AfD, led to the ousting of Bernd Lucke as party co-chair and leading moderates including five of the seven MEPs leaving the party. After this de-facto split, the AfD rapidly radicalised, as xenophobic and populist positions that had once been controversial within the party became mainstream. A ban on any cooperation between the party and the Pegida movement was relaxed and later lifted. The onset of the refugee crisis in September 2015 further fuelled these developments. Frauke Petry, Lucke’s successor, had come to power with the implicit support of the most radical factions within the party and made headlines when floating the idea that refugees could be shot at the border. She also formed vague alliances with other far-right populist party leaders in the Freedom Party of Austria, the Dutch Party of Freedom, the Italian Lega Nord, and the French National Rally. Petry, however, could not, or would not, keep up with the pace of AfD’s radicalisation, as she was quickly side-lined as the AfD’s frontrunner by the 2017 federal election when she stepped down and left the party (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 6).

Arzheimer and Berning argue that the 2013 federal election poses a special problem when trying to trace AfD’s voter base, as there were so few AfD voters, but using the 2013 GLES short-term campaign panel shows that even then, AfD voters were more sceptical of European integration and immigration than any other group of. The same study also demonstrated that early deciders were mainly motivated by Euroscepticism, but later

⁷ The objective of the Dublin III Regulation is to ensure quick access to the asylum procedures and the examination of an application on the merits by a single, clearly determined EU country. The Regulation establishes the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application (Affairs, n.d.).

decisions were driven by anti-immigration attitudes. They reference a survey by Lengfeld in 2016, who claims that the “losers of modernisation” i.e., voters with low socioeconomic status were no more likely to vote for the AfD than other voters. Lengfeld argues that the AfD vote has little to nothing to do with modernisation or globalisation but is rather a driver by a preference for cultural homogeneity and an autonomous and independent nation-state. Because the survey does not tap into these arguments, it is, however, not verifiable (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 9).

In the 2021 German election, the AfD saw a decline nationally when it won 10.3 per cent of the national vote, down from 12.6 per cent in 2017. The party then stood as the fifth largest party in Germany and would play no role in the coalition negotiations. However, the election showed that the party had become an established force in parts of Eastern Germany, where it had capitalized on resentments and disparities with Western Germany. AfD came in first in both Saxony and Thuringia with 24.6 per cent and 24 per cent of the vote, respectively, and gained access to federal campaign funding (Schultheis, 2021).

National Rally in France: From Le Pen to Reform

Rassemblement National, formerly known as *Front National*, hereby referred to as its English translation National Rally (RN), voted to change its name in 2018. This change was made in an effort to distance the party from its controversial and divisive past, as the National Front had been associated with anti-Semitic and xenophobic views. As a result, it is now more appropriate to refer to the party as the National Rally, as this is the name by which it currently identifies itself. That’s why in the interest of accuracy and recognizing the party's current identity I will refer to the party as National Rally (RN).

A Historical Analysis of the National Rally’s Emergence

National Rally (RN), known as National Front until 2018, was born in 1972 and was known for a long time for its charismatic leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. It was the first “modern” far-right party to achieve significant electoral success in the European Union elections and became a model for many political parties in the years that followed. Modern concept of “populism” appeared in academic works discussing the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen, however far-right specialists at the time felt the concept was not useful when describing National Rally. Lazaridis, Campani and Benveniste argue that the recent success of the National Rally

owes much to the recent emergence abroad of a new generation of indeterminate leaders who challenge the classical characterization of political parties, and to the development of “comparative politics” in French political science which has opened the door to international comparisons. The concept of “Islamisation” has become a rallying cry for many political activists across the continent which has led to the emergence of transnational networks that oppose the “Islamic invasion” of Europe, and in the specific case of France, the issue has attracted people from a wide political background, from leftist trade-unions to far-right traditionalists, disturbing the traditional political schisms (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016, p. 56).

National Rally has commonly been considered the model for the Western European radical right. It was formed as an attempt to bring together various extreme right groups which had its origin in neo-fascist and pro-French Algerian sub-cultures. The party did however remain irrelevant during the 1970s and the early 1980s before it experienced its first electoral breakthrough in the 1984 European elections where it obtained 11 per cent of the vote. Since the election, National Rally established itself as a major actor in the French political party system. The party pioneered a strategy which combined ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism, managing to politicize cultural issues such as immigration and law and order creating a niche in the electoral population, giving National Rally electoral results between 10 and 18 per cent in French elections. During the 1990s, National Rally bolstered its place as a dominant anti-globalisation and Eurosceptic party in French politics. Following the 2008 global financial crisis, the party emerged as a strong opponent of the European Union, supporting economic nationalism (Ivaldi, 2016, p. 225)

National Rally (RN) emerged as an electoral coalition comprising various factions of the radical and national right, which was characterized as the "true right-wing" in contrast to the centrist ideologies of Christian democracy and De Gaulle's legacy in the French right-wing. The real rise of the party happened in the 1980s when the National Rally's electoral performance had been increasing for years. This success attracted activists, who helped build the organization and produce intellectual work. Presently, the party hosts a wide spectrum of radical conceptions of “otherness”, as the focus on immigration made it possible to reach a consensual political line, pitting the “French” against “immigrants”, and placing nationality at the heart of the definition of identity (Benveniste & Pingaud, 2016, p. 62).

When Jean-Marie Le Pen retired in 2011, an internal succession war began which presented a conflict between the old-guard leaders (traditionalist Catholics, conservatives, new pagan racialists, etc.) and the supporters of modernisation united behind Le Pen's daughter. Marine Le Pen came out victorious in 2011 leading to a process called *dédiabolisation* of the National Rally that sought to build a more respectable image of the party. This process has been seen as “neo-populist”, based on the model of the new radical right emerging in Northern Europe, exemplified by Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and Pja Kjærsgaard in Denmark. Inspired by *nationaux-révolutionnaires*, National Rally embarked on an ideological shift which combined the struggle against capitalism with strong nationalism, with a mix of social and conservative values to win a new electorate coming from both the working class and the classical right-wing, while taking advantage of the weak separation between right and far-right positions (Benveniste & Pingaud, 2016, p. 62).

According to Benveniste and Pingaud, this shift profoundly changed the nature of public speeches and the face of the “other” in the party rhetoric. Immigrants were no longer seen as the source of the problem but as victims of a capitalist strategy led by big businesses to increase their profits. Le Pen sought to merge with some minority groups including LGBTQ or Jewish organizations, and Islam had become the main opponent, as a result of a cultural shift in far-right ideology. National Rally has become a large political enterprise, with a mainstream organization style, and entered the online political scene on large social networks (Benveniste & Pingaud, 2016, p. 63).

With Marine Le Pen as the new party leader in National Rally, her goal was to set the party trajectory away from its extreme right status, to detoxify the party's reputation. Because of its historical legacy of far-right extremism, the party represented the typical “political pariah” and often stayed isolated from working in coalitions at the national level. To some degree it has been the result of its political ostracization by mainstream parties, however, the main reason is based on the institutional framework of the Fifth Republic and National Rally's inability to gain parliamentary seats under France's majoritarian system. With few exceptions, National Rally has been either excluded from the national parliament or had little sway. Le Pen's strategy of *dédiabolisation* has brought electoral revitalization of the National Rally and suggests that it has allowed the French radical right to broaden its support base (Ivaldi, 2016, pp. 225-226).

The History of French Far-Right Radicalism and *Alternance*

Historically, France occupies a special place in the emergence of far-right movements and is regarded by many authors as the birthplace of the values, ideas and trends that led to the emergence and rise of Nazism and Fascism in the surrounding countries. The Pétain government during World War 2 is decisive when trying to understand the roots of modern French radicalism. After the German occupation (1940-1944), the disqualification of every person involved in affairs of state can be regarded as the birth of modern far-right activism. A few organizations, some that are still active today, drew together supporters of Maréchal Pétain and in some cases pro-Nazi activists. Organizations like Jeune Nation were a place that could host people whose ideological opinions had been marginalized by years of conflict. While it was a smaller group, its influence was widespread (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016, p. 58).

The second major historical factor was the Algerian War, which made a radical speech in French political institutions more acceptable, popular, and present. The conflict was a focal point for many important issues: the French Empire and colonialism, the French army, and De Gaulle's politics of independence. The war launched the beginning of the modern legacy of the French radical right, which was the first political party based on radical ideas to enter Parliament since the end of World War 2. In 1956, 52 MPs led by Pierre Poujade, including Jean-Marie Le Pen, were elected to Parliament. The Algerian issue was a key point in legitimizing far-right ideas because they appealed to the values of nationalism and French historical prestige (Lazaridis, Campani, & Benveniste, 2016, p. 59).

The constitution of the French Fifth Republic was drafted under the circumstances of the Algerian War and was meant to overcome the political blockades in the parliament during the Fourth Republic by establishing a semi-presidential regime. The president was seen as the key pillar to ensure the stability of the regime and was designed to provide strong majorities to strong leadership, which would make the country more governable. This constitutional framework, along with the electoral code which limited the multiplication of smaller political parties, led to a consolidated bipartisanship in France. Out of these changes came the notion of *alternance*, where the two largest political blocs, led by the *Les Republicans* and the French Socialist Party, would alternate between power and lead to two opposing blocs in France. Between 1981 and 2007, the regular shift from one bloc to the other increasingly became the symbol of a stalemate in the French democratic system. The notion of *alternance*

became the embodiment of a negative form of continuity in which the change of government did not lead to a change of policy. The demand for new political figures and ideas emerged, and a vast majority of electors wanted a “total renewal of the political class” and did not want to vote for neither bloc’s presidential candidate, which highlighted a rejection of traditional political offers among the populace (Michelot & Quencez, 2017, p. 5).

The failure of the alternance correlates to a significant precondition of the rise of populism in France, as it is important when understanding the success of the “anti-system” rhetoric of the National Rally. Since its beginning in 1972 National Rally has shown itself as ideologically flexible: pro-European and economically liberal in the 1980s under its president Jean-Marie Le Pen, who wanted to be perceived as the “French Reagan”. However, at the end of the Cold War, and with the disappearance of a communist threat, Brussels and the European project became the new enemy of the party (Michelot & Quencez, 2017, p. 6).

When Marie Le Pen took control of the party in 2011, she once again transformed the discourse to embrace a protectionist and anti-liberal program economically, wherein she wanted National Rally to appeal to working-class voters. However, the National Rally kept the same binary vision of French society: a cosmopolitan elite, which served the interests of lobbies and minorities, not the interests of the French people. With the notion of alternance, the domination of the same two political blocs has given credence to the argument of a united political establishment that has shared the responsibility for the deterioration of the socioeconomic situation in France. National Rally managed successfully to demonize this “system” and underplay any political differences between the mainstream parties and sold itself as the only real alternative “anti-establishment” party (Michelot & Quencez, 2017, p. 6).

Since Marie Le Pen assumed party leadership, National Rally has seen increased electoral success in France as well as in Europe. In the 2012 Presidential election, the party won 17.9 per cent of the national vote in the first round of elections. In 2017 the party won 21.3 per cent of the votes in the first round, and 33.9 per cent in the second round, only losing to Emmanuel Macron. In the National Assembly election in the same year, National Rally won 13.2 per cent of the vote, securing eight seats. In the 2014 European Parliament election, the party managed to win 24.9 per cent of the vote and 24 seats. In the 2019 EP election, the party won 23.3 per cent of the votes and 22 seats (Team, 2020). In the 2022 French National Assembly election, National Rally won an unprecedented 89 seats in the parliament, a huge

gain on the eight seats it had won five years earlier. And Marie Le Pen secured 41.5 per cent in the second round of the presidential election, once again losing out to Macron (Peace & Chabal, 2022).

AfD and National Rally: Similar but Different Parties

The Immigration Issue and the AfD: Exploring the Party's Policies

Up until 2015, the AfD's core policy was a limited critique of the European project and could be categorized as "soft" Euroscepticism. One paradox of the AfD's rhetorical and ideological profile at the early stages of the party's development was that the moderates within the party, i.e., the economists who more than anything wanted to critique the Euro, was the group who harnessed the terminology of populism as part of their agenda. However, from 2015, the Eurosceptic narrative became increasingly part of a populist critique of the whole institution of German politics and the procedures and practices that underpinned it. Furthermore, the ordoliberal and the pro-free-market policies of the party began to be overwritten by a more orthodox right-wing populist agenda. The two main programmatic changes within the AfD happened in 2015 and 2017 when two major upheavals in the senior leadership happened. First of all, the original leading spokesperson, the economically liberal Berndt Lucke, was replaced by Frauke Petry from the national conservative wing of the party. Petry took the AfD in a more radical populist direction and took a strong position against Angela Merkel's open-door policy to Syrian refugees, a stance that resonated with voters and led to the AfD's strong performance in state parliament elections (Lees, 2018, p. 305).

The Refugee Crisis proved to be an unexpected gift to the AfD. While infighting dominated the agenda during the first half of 2015 and polling numbers took a plunge, the crisis that began that summer catapulted the party to previously unseen heights. The party grew into an almost sole medium of protest for a population that was unsettled by the uncontrolled migrant streams (Decker, 2016, p. 10). Decker argues that the motivations that drove AfD voters could best be characterized by the dual-term insecurity/anxiety. Insecurity refers to their social situation, i.e., fears of losing one's wealth, while anxiety aims to describe a fear of cultural alienation and the loss of familiar social order. These motives combined form a desire to limit government services and benefits to only the native population and exclude migrants who were perceived as lacking affiliation with the national community, also referred

to as welfare chauvinism. The AfD managed to bring these latent convictions to the surface (Decker, 2016, p. 11)

In the summer of 2015, the refugee crisis dominated the public agenda in Germany and across Europe. Alternative for Germany took advantage of the prominence of the refugee issue, and in the Bundestag election campaigns and public appearances, they focused on immigration. The party also increasingly used a more radical tone and openly sympathized with other far-right parties in Western Europe. However, in April, five months before the 2017 general election, Frauke Petry attempted to call for a more moderate course at an AfD party conference in Cologne, arguing that she wanted the party to cater to a less radical, conservative electorate and potentially create a path towards a coalition with CDU/CSU in the long term. She did, however, fail to find any broad support for this policy in the party. Ironically, it was Petry who first led the AfD along the path from a Eurosceptic party to a radical right-wing party (Lees, 2018, p. 301).

Due to the initial dominance of the economic liberal wing within the party leadership, the AfD's official political agenda which was drawn up in the party manifestos for the German and European elections continued to show its influence. Electoral campaigning did however reveal quite a different tone right away, particularly in Eastern Germany where the topic of national identity, coupled with xenophobic positions and anti-establishment rhetoric promised greater electoral windfalls, and signified a future where the AfD would shift towards more radical positions. The 2013 federal election revealed that the opposition AfD voters had towards immigration consisted of a larger block than those with Eurosceptic positions, which had been at the very heart of the party's policy manifesto. At the European election, AfD voters mentioned immigration just as frequently as a stable currency when asked about what determined their electoral choice. The balance of power slowly shifted away from the economically liberal to the national-conservative wing (Decker, 2016, p. 6).

Arzheimer & Berning refer to a study that shows that most AfD voters are from the middle quintile of the income distribution, however, the authors also present some evidence that suggests that AfD voters are more pessimistic than other groups about the economy and their personal economic situation, as well as worrying much more about crime, immigration, and social cohesion. Using a GLES tracking poll for December 2015, another study by Hambauer & Mays showed that three months after the inception of the refugee crisis AfD voters were

less likely to accept refugees than voters of other parties. This included the subgroups of refugees coming from war zones, refugees fleeing from famine or natural disasters, or people who were persecuted for their religious beliefs. However, when the poll was conducted 81 per cent of AfD voters were willing to accept refugees from war zones, which was still the vast majority (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 10).

Half a year later in June 2016, another tracking poll showed that there was a high probability of voting for the AfD when having a negative view of the refugee situation, having a general fear of refugees, having a feeling of being kept in the dark, having a sense of being negatively affected by the influx of refugees, identifying as being on the right politically and being dissatisfied with the state of democracy in Germany. Similarly, another study by Goerres, Spies & Kumlin from the same time found a correlation between AfD support and being critical of the political asylum institution and welfare chauvinism, i.e., wanting to restrict welfare benefits to the native population. Another finding showed that support for redistribution from the rich to the poor reduced support for the AfD (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 10). Another study by Bier, Rossteutscher, and Scherer took a longer view by analysing 14 GLES tracking polls over a long period from May 2013 to September 2016, where they identified three potential motives for supporting the AfD, categorizing voters into three subgroups. 1) “anti-party sentiment”, i.e., a dislike for established parties, 2) “loyal voting”, meaning that voters held core political convictions that aligned with the aim of the anti-party party, and 3) “protest voting” that signalled the shift of a previously preferred party (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 11).

The tone of the AfD on the policy of immigration did stay considerably aggressive from the beginning. During the 2013 Bundestag election, the AfD used posters with slogans such as “Courage for Truth” and “classical education over multicultural re-education”, conveying a strong anti-multiculturalism stance. And on social media, the party often tapped into right-wing vocabulary, namely denial of multiculturalism, denunciation of non-heteronormative lifestyles, and criticism of political correctness. Under Petry’s leadership, however, the AfD’s views of immigration intensified, especially during the critical period of the migrant crisis in 2016. Petry advocated for the closing of the EU’s borders, stricter identity checks at German borders, and the construction of refugee camps in the Middle East and the Mediterranean to prevent refugees from arriving in Germany. The party stressed the importance of German *Leitkultur*, or cultural primacy, which rejected the idea of Islam as a desirable part of German

culture and recommended banning minarets from being a part of mosques. The AfD's original identity of Euroscepticism became increasingly entrenched in the wider discourse of right-wing populism. This shift under Petry's leadership towards a more aggressive and extremist stance on immigration, which amplified the party's right-wing populist rhetoric, contrasted the earlier, more ambiguous approach during Lucke's leadership period (Lees, 2018, p. 306).

The AfD's ideological profile has evolved over time which has blurred the analytical distinction between Euroscepticism and populism. The party's leadership changes have coincided with the party openly courting the anti-Islam Pegida movement and using rhetorical techniques like that of UKIP's Nigel Farage, a prominent Eurosceptic in the UK, to link the European issue with fears over immigration and xenophobia among certain parts of the German electorate, most prominently in the Eastern part of the country. With the nomination of Alexander Gauland, known for his combative rhetoric, as the main leadership candidate for the 2017 Federal election, and the AfD's decision to work with a Texas-based media organization that had previously worked with UKIP and the Trump campaign, suggests a shift towards a more radical right-wing populist stance. Further evidence of the shift is shown in the 2017 party manifesto, in which only three of the seventy-six pages were dedicated to the Eurozone, while the remaining pages were dedicated to topics such as Islam and its perceived incompatibility with democracy, the demographic impact of asylum seekers, and European integration only being mentioned as a part of a broader populist critique of German society and politics (Lees, 2018, p. 307).

After 2016 the mood among the electorate shifted back towards the mainstream parties, and the AfD lost its momentum and fell back on the polls. Petry tried to convince her party conference to turn more moderate in response to the decline, however, she failed and stepped down as party leader shortly after in May 2017, although remaining a co-Chairperson. The post-2017 leadership faced a difficult challenge when more extreme nationalist groups of the party demanded a voice in drafting the party programme for the 2017 Federal election. Furthermore, there were concerns that the party had become a home to potential neo-Nazis. It had taken roughly four years for the AfD's ideological characterization to be considered a far-right populist party. Under Petry's leadership, the AfD changed to become a party that German Federal Republic politics had not ever seen before this point (Lees, 2018, p. 305).

The transformation of the party following Angela Merkel's decision to temporarily suspend the Dublin Regulation, which in turn led to the jumbled arrival of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, can be considered a significant factor in the success of the AfD in the 2017 federal election. As a result of the decision, the prominence of the asylum/migration issue rose significantly, and the AfD's repositioning proved successful in the election. While the party remained under the radar in the 2013 election, which was indeed an impressive result for a new party, it was incomparable to the later result. The AfD could take advantage of the prominence of the refugee issue and position itself accordingly (Arzheimer & C. Berning, 2019, p. 2).

Alternative for Germany saw the most electoral success in the 2017 Federal election, when the AfD won 12.6 per cent of the votes, becoming the third-largest group in the Bundestag. In Eastern Germany, the party did exceedingly well, especially in Saxony where it won 27 per cent of the votes and outpolled the CDU, which shows a clear regional divide in AfD support across Germany. Berning argues that the AfD did so well in Eastern Germany due to a combination of behavioural resentments, socio-demographic composition, and structural factors, however, the AfD is not only a phenomenon of the East. In the election, Frauke Petry won one of the district mandates, however, immediately after announced that she would not be a part of the AfD's caucus and left the party a day later. This move came as a shock to the party and its voters and a handful of AfD members followed her walkout. The move showed that the continued power struggle and splits within the party were still an issue for its progression (Berning, 2017, p. 18).

National Rally's Position on Immigration: An Analysis of the Party's Policies

The RN is arguably most well-known for its anti-immigration stance which has been central to its ideology since the early years of the party's founding. Especially in the 21st century, when immigration from outside Europe steadily increased, so did public fears about the impact of immigration on French society. And increased visibility of non-European immigrants within France had shifted the public's perspective on immigration, specifically heightening concerns about immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries. A study by the Ifo Institute found how immigration impacted voters in France, specifically that immigration increased support for far-right candidates. A Eurobarometer survey in 2016 echoed this finding and showed that the two main concerns for the French were immigration

and terrorism. Another survey by the Institute of International Affairs in 2017 found that 61 per cent of French people surveyed agreed that all immigration from Muslim countries should be stopped, while only 16 per cent disagreed with the statement. The RN benefitted from heightened anti-immigration sentiment in France as it has strengthened the appeal of its anti-immigration message (Nelson, 2020, pp. 106-107).

National Rally had an internal reform in 2011 when Marie Le Pen took power in the party and went through a *dédiabolisation* process where the goal was to transform the party into a mainstream party by softening its xenophobic image. In this process, Le Pen wanted the party to use more acceptable rhetoric and put capitalism at the “heart” of the nation’s problems, and issues such as immigration were the effect of a bigger issue and immigrants were victims of a system that exploited them (Benveniste & Pingaud, 2016, p. 68). However, most efforts of transformation efforts have focused on the strategic policy packaging of the party and severing ties with neo-fascist groups in France. The change is less perceptible in the core makeup of the party, which is radical right-wing populism, and the core characteristics of the party that is radicalness, “niceness”, and anti-establishment. Nonetheless, Marie Le Pen’s transformation process of the National Rally gave the party a second wind in the 2010s (Ivaldi, 2016, p. 226).

National Rally exemplified the radical right agenda, which combined nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The party have consistently stayed on the political right on the topic of the cultural dimension of competition and has consistently taken a Eurosceptic position. The core radical right policies of National Rally include its historical policies such as the repatriation of all illegal immigrants and foreign criminals, ending legal immigration, a significant reduction of asylum seekers, enforcing “national preference”, opposing the building of mosques, reintroducing the death penalty, more severe punishments of offender and criminals including teenagers aged 13 and up, suppressing immigrant family reunions rights, giving more power to the police. Furthermore, they fought against anti-French racism, intended to remove France from the Schengen area and the European Union, increase the discipline and authority in schools, and fought against trade union monopolies and the politicization of civil servants. These policies have shown up with a little variation, also after Marie Le Pen took the power of the party (Ivaldi, 2016, p. 228).

Islam became a prime target for many radical right parties in Europe, leading to the development of a “modernised” far-right that defended liberal values or European welfare states against an “Islamic invasion”. But in France, it did not become a central political topic until National Rally, the dominant far-right party, started focusing on the issue in 2011. Immigration, which has been regarded as the central problem in France since the rise of the National Rally, however, is less often named as the source of other problems such as security, theft, crime, the loss of national cultural identity, the rise of Islam, or multiculturalism. The right-wing and conservative views were only slightly associated with the view of immigration as the cause of national decline, as it did not fit with the National Rally’s *dédiabolisation* strategy of using more acceptable rhetoric and blaming capitalism as the root of the problems. Immigration was no longer the cause, but merely the effect of the bigger issue of “big business” keeping wages low and workers flexible and docile in a time of weak trade unions. According to National Rally, immigrants were the victims of a system that exploited them and made their origin countries poorer, because they were not in their home countries making it richer. This strategy marks a profound shift in National Rally’s strategy from the 1980s (Benveniste & Pingaud, 2016, p. 68).

Old lines about the topic of immigration were avoided, especially when those lines emphasized ethnic or cultural differences to explain the problem of immigration. This shift was a way for National Rally to distinguish itself from other movements, and avoiding those ideologies led to the recruitment of some second-generation immigrants by asserting an anti-Israel position. It did not mean that there didn’t exist racism in National Rally. At the local level, especially among older members there was still racist discourse. However, despite these party debates, all the public speeches were controlled, and every controversial word led to sanctions through expulsion from the party. National Rally was not supposed to appear as a racist party. However, one aspect where the National Rally demonstrated continuity had been the value of the “Nation”, which the party defended as a central value. Although the “enemies of the party” had changed over the years, from supporters of the independence of the colonies in the 1960s to the communists in the 1970s and replaced by immigrants after that. But in the party’s configuration, other forces were regarded as more dangerous, namely big business, and especially the European Union. Many politicians in the party emphasized the European Union’s historical role in the loss of France’s influence on the international stage and argued that the sovereignty of the country had been eliminated by the European project (Benveniste & Pingaud, 2016, pp. 68-69).

Under Marie Le Pen new radical right policies were added to the party manifesto in 2012 and can be regarded as her personal input. More than half of the policy pledges focused on law-and-order issues, particularly repression against violent behaviour in schools, further rights for victims in courts, citizen supervision of criminal trials, and the elimination of social welfare of repeat offenders. Another part of the new policies included nativist policies mostly including the new secular agenda and the fight against communitarianism⁸, as well as a legal ban on undocumented migrant regularisation. Some previous policies were scrapped or abandoned after 2002, possibly deemed too radical and undermining National Rally's efforts to present its anti-immigration in a more "acceptable" light. In half of the cases, these concerned nativist policies, including a national preference for company layoffs, dismantling emergency homes for migrants, fighting AIDS through sanity controls at the border, a safety deposit for tourists, municipal councils controlling the naturalization of migrants, expanded power to the police to check migrants, and visa applicants having to do a compulsory medical examination. Law-and-order policies such as police checks in schools forced labour camps for offenders and criminals, and restoring high-security areas in prison were also abandoned (Ivaldi, 2016, p. 229).

Nativist arguments have been imperative to the RN's framing of the refugee crisis, and the rhetoric was further fuelled by Islamic terrorism. After the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, the party quickly linked the attacks with the refugee crisis, calling for immediate closure of borders. Le Pen advocated for France to veto Germany's asylum policy, while also promising to expel foreign criminals and individuals suspected of terrorist activities if she was elected to government. The presidential manifesto for 2017 featured traditional National Rally anti-immigration policies while emphasizing security issues and calling for the exit of France from the Schengen agreement to re-establish national borders. Le Pen pledged to repatriate all illegal immigrants and foreign offenders and end legal immigration. Furthermore, Le Pen promised to prioritize French citizens for jobs, housing, and social benefits, and opposing family reunion rights for migrants and advocated for a significant reduction in asylum (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 286).

⁸ Communitarianism is the idea that human identities are largely shaped by different kinds of constitutive communities (or social relations) and that this conception of human nature should inform our moral and political judgments as well as policies and institutions (Bell, 2020).

In the 2012 presidential election, Marine Le Pen finished third place in the first round of elections, earning more than 18 per cent of the votes. This represented the best-ever showing for the RN in a presidential election. In the 2017 presidential election, Marine Le Pen placed even stronger, reaching the second round of elections, capturing approximately 34 per cent of the votes and finishing a distant second to Emmanuel Macron. Similarly, the 2022 elections saw Le Pen against Macron, and once again Le Pen lost by a significant margin in the second round. However, Le Pen had captured more than 40 per cent of the vote which was a significant improvement on the 2017 results and once again the strongest finish of any RN candidate in the party's history (Ray, 2023). Marine Le Pen had successfully, in a decade, transformed the National Rally from a small, controversial, and outsider party to one of the largest parties in France.

The Role of Economic Inequality in AfD's Growth

From the outset, the AfD's political path was built upon a synthesis of economic liberalism and social conservatism/nationalism. Many of AfD's former and current leading figures used to belong to the centre-right camp (CDU and FDP), a tendency that can be understood when looking at both parties' changes and developments in the last decades. The FDP failed to pick up the Eurosceptic mantle after the party lent support to the government's Eurozone rescue policies. Additionally, the party could not provide a counterweight to the Christian Democrats by taking independent positions on different policies such as tax policy. Furthermore, under the leadership of Angela Merkel, the CDU adopted a more socially democratic position on economic policy matters by renouncing the liberal reform agenda that Merkel herself initially endorsed. At the same time, CDU's social agenda kept moving towards the centre, discarding long-held family policies and social issues, recognizing same-sex civil unions, introducing gender quotas in the boardrooms of German companies, and supporting modern immigration law changes. The political course of action of both CDU and FDP thereby created an opportunity for the AfD to emerge and situate itself in German politics (Decker, 2016, p. 3).

In 2013, AfD mobilised voters with a Eurosceptic programme that set it apart from the pro-European positions of the German leading centrist parties Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), and the Social Democratic Party in Germany (SPD), some of the largest parties in the country. The foundation of AfD's

European critique was directed towards the fiscal and monetary regime of the European Union and the failures of the Maastricht Treaty in establishing the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) (Grimm, 2015, p. 265). The AfD initially emerged as a Eurosceptic movement with a focus on a single issue, and its criticism was rooted in an ordoliberal economic doctrine. The party garnered support from a wide range of academic and conservative liberal voters in Germany who shared this stance. As a result of its Eurosceptic position, the AfD was able to strengthen its position within the German political system (p. 272).

In the 2013 general election, AfD cannibalised the electorate of most of the far-right parties in Germany. For example, the defeat of the NPD, although it never enjoyed any relevant success on a national level anyway, was highly correlated with AfD's win. Aggregate level analysis showed that the AfD also benefitted from losses by the CDU and CSU as well, however, this was mostly the case in Eastern Germany, and it also managed to mobilise former non-voters. In the 2017 general election, the AfD's votes mostly consisted of former CSU/CDU voters or non-voters, but it also managed to attract support from across the political spectrum. Individual-level analysis has shown that the AfD did especially well among members of the working class, which might explain how the party received more than its national average in some Western German areas. Individual-level analysis showed that the electorate is predominantly male with medium to little formal education and had immigration as a primary concern (Berning, 2017, pp. 18-19).

AfD has called for an end to the "Euromantic" ideological experiment and suggested the Eurozone should be dissolved into either national currencies or currency blocks, and a return to "sound economic reasoning", the "rule of law", greater citizen participation, and more transparent democratic institutions. The party leader in 2013, Berndt Lucke, argued that the European debt crisis was a moment for debate about the European Union and that there was an absence of critical voices in the Bundestag. AfD's main economic critique rested on the ordoliberal economic doctrine, which was rooted in Germany's disastrous experiences during the first half of the 20th century and laid the foundation for its post-war "economic miracle". (Grimm, 2015, pp. 265-266). In the absence of meaningful opposition to the Euro and the EU in the Bundestag, the AfD was able to establish itself as an alternative to centrist consensus politics and bring together protest voters who had lost trust in the European project and the German government. And in the 2013 elections, the AfD managed to consolidate its position

within the German party system, when it captured seats in the Bundestag and a sizeable presence in local parliaments in Eastern Germany (Grimm, 2015, p. 274).

In the case of AfD, the categorization as a right-wing populist party has been a point of contention from the beginning. The party itself has rigorously tried casting off the label. When it entered the European Parliament, the party wanted to join the group of the conservative parliamentary group made up of Tory MEPs and representatives of the Polish Law and Justice Party, against the wishes of Angela Merkel who had approached David Cameron to make the case against allowing AfD into their group. AfD wanted to avoid any association with parties such as UKIP and their Eurosceptic stance, let alone the more uncompromising right-wing populist parties such as France's National Rally, Italy's Northern League, and Austria's Freedom Party (Decker, 2016, p. 4).

The problematic label of right-wing populism was rooted in its role as a scientific analytical category and its frequent usage in political debates with strong connotations. Some members of AfD have argued that the party's makeup was consisting of three fundamentally incompatible currents: economic liberalism, socially conservative, and right-wing populism. However, Decker argues that this approach is based on a misconception since these currents are in fact compatible and even intertwined to a certain extent. This combination makes for a "winning formula" for a right-wing party that can integrate Euroscepticism into its political platform, with populism serving as an overarching theme. It stands for the anti-establishment orientation of its policies, being embodied in having "Alternative" in its name, along with viewing itself as speaking for the "real" people or at least the silent majority (Decker, 2016, p. 5).

Under Lucke, AfD took more conservative, but ambivalent, approaches to other policy areas such as social policy, immigration, and the environment. In the party's 2014 manifesto, they advocated for gender equality, while still recognizing different identities, social roles, and life situations, placing the party on the conservative side of the issue. The manifesto called for a "humane" immigration approach where allowing immigration from non-EU countries would depend exclusively on German needs, suggesting a restrictive approach to immigration. On the issue of the environment, the AfD rejected the German Renewable Energy Act and reinstatement of environmental control to the national level, indicating a sceptical view of

renewable energy policies and a preference for national control over environmental matters (Lees, 2018, p. 306).

The party's initial focus was on the Euro and was a single-issue party when it first emerged in 2013, so a month before the 2013 elections the party programme was relatively short. The media and other political actors regularly questioned whether AfD was a conservative or a far-right party. And while the public face of the party, Bernd Lucke, occasionally used populist rhetoric, the party programme indicated no such thing. After the 2013 election, where the AfD missed the threshold of entering the Bundestag by 0.3 percentage points, the party programme broadened, but the economic focus remained. A study by Arzheimer in 2015 of the AfD's manifesto, showed that the party placed to the right of the CDU and FDP on a general left-right dimension, however, it did not place significantly different from the CSU, and left of the NPD, and argues that AfD used neither radical nor populist language. It did, however, oppose the Eurozone in its current form and took a Eurosceptic stance. Bernd Lucke tried to extend his influence over the party after the 2014 European Elections, and power struggles followed into 2015 when a debate over the links to the anti-Islam movement Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West, and this debate reflected the ideological core of the wider dispute. The AfD's co-spokesperson and head of the state party in Saxony Frauke Petry supported the movement and saw overlapping interests. Following this, Lucke proposed a vote for a principal spokesperson and lost to Petry, causing an ideological shift to the right in the party (Berning, 2017, p. 17).

Under Petry, the AfD doubled down on what Lees describes as two policy "levers" that started under Lucke's leadership. First was a "narrative lever" which was a tool used to introduce controversial or disruptive ideas into the mainstream political discourse. Secondly was a "procedural lever", a method used to reject or circumvent established political institutions that had traditionally acted as checks on populism, and rather utilized alternative political mechanisms that were more aligned with their anti-elite message. The first lever was originally used through the AfD's view of the Eurozone as created by an out-of-touch and metropolitan elite whose interests did not line up with that of the people. The party manifesto for the 2014 European Parliament election stressed ordoliberal instructions for solving the Euro crisis and appealed for a "social EU" where labour markets and social policies should be made at the local level, indicating AfD's continuity with traditional German policy approaches (Lees, 2018, p. 306).

There did not exist a contradiction between the party's economically liberal and socially conservative positions. The party had been integrated into a brand of national populism that sought to defend the wealth and economic standing of the nation and its citizens along with putting a premium on competition, while also creating a final product that asserts the superiority of their national economic model compared to other nations and cultures. According to AfD, their argumentation had rung true when looking at the economic problems faced by the Eurozone's southern countries and could be applied as the negative counterpart to Germany's supposedly exemplary system. Furthermore, the same could be applied to the AfD's preferred concept of a meritocratic government and society that was juxtaposed with the welfare state, and wanting an immigration policy that was exclusively guided by economic benefits offered by the immigrants. On economic issues, the party was roughly in line with FDP economic platform, while on social issues it was notably to the right of CDU and slightly more to the right of CSU. The strong emphasis on the free market, however, distinguished AfD from the core right-wing populist parties in Europe, who tended to stick to a more economically protectionist economic position (Decker, 2016, p. 5).

Evaluating whether to place AfD on the moderate or radical side of the right-wing populist parties in Europe presents a more complicated challenge. Both sides can be found in Europe, as exemplified by the French National Rally on one side, and the Norwegian Progress Party on the other. Internal debates within the AfD led to fierce fights for control of the party on both sides from the beginning. The economic wing of the party led by Lucke and Henkel preferred an economically liberal orientation and placed importance on the topic of the Euro within the party, while the national-conservative wing that was headed by Frauke Petry and Alexander Gauland sought to play up "identity politics" and favoured a more populist appeal towards voters. Along with immigration policy, family and gender policies were also of importance to the party. In comparison with other European right-wing populist parties, it was a distinguishing feature of the AfD, with some other similar parties espousing liberal positions on sociocultural policies (Decker, 2016, p. 5).

National Rally and the Issue of Economic Inequality

An ongoing constant in National Rally for four decades is its reliance on anti-establishment mobilization. The party discourse has consistently exhibited strong characteristics of

populism, shown by its vilifying of “corrupt” and “decadent” elites, opposing France’s four major parties during the 1980s and 1990s, while simultaneously claiming to speak for the “people”. Especially after Marie Le Pen took power the party’s anti-establishment rhetoric returned to its former glory. National Rally claims to represent a third block and serves itself as a political alternative to France’s “bipolar polity”, while also ruling out cooperation with other actors in the system. The party undermines the existing political status quo in French politics, as exemplified by its opposition to EU membership. It takes an aggressive anti-liberal stance by critiquing international laws, intermediary organizations, constitutional courts, checks and balances, parliamentarianism, and trade unions (Ivaldi, 2016, p. 230).

When Marine Le Pen took power, European issues were moved to the forefront of the RN party programme. With the context of the economic crisis and austerity in 2012, the RN emphasized its Euro policy along with a range of socioeconomic issues such as purchasing power, jobs, public debt, and pensions. In 2017, the European issue was associated with issues of democratic reform, immigration, and security, with the context being the refugee crisis and Islamic terrorism in France. The party’s rich Eurosceptic past has allowed it to frame Economic crises using traditional economic arguments against a single European currency and argue for holding a referendum for a French exit from the Eurozone. Economic Euroscepticism was central to the RN’s 2017 presidential election campaign, and featured protectionist policies, advocating for state intervention in the industrial sector, and opposing free-trade agreements. A Euro-exit was embedded in a more general claim to “restore national sovereignty” (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 285).

The National Rally has established itself as a “working-class” party, often blaming the economic struggles faced by workers on the immigration policy by mainstream parties in power. The RN plays upon the sentiment of people who consider the government “helpless” in responding to their socioeconomic needs. They do this by connecting immigration policy with the worsening socioeconomic situation for workers. RN use two arguments in this regard: first, they identify where low-income workers are laid off due to competition from immigrants seeking the same job and therefore identify it as a cause for unemployment, and secondly, they portray immigrants as exploiters of the French welfare system and emphasize the necessity to prioritise French nationals. In this way, RN draws in voters in economically insecure positions and those who feel threatened by immigrants potentially taking their jobs (Pajaniappane, 2022)

In recent years, the RN has shifted gradually towards social populism, focusing more on socioeconomic issues rather than solely on cultural issues such as immigration and law and order. This shift began after the 2008 global financial crisis when the party moved towards the left on economic matters related to wages, pensions, social welfare, and public services. In 2022 the RN emphasized the cost-of-living crisis, which resonated with the fears and concerns of the lower- and middle-class electorate. This social populism is evident in its opposition to President Emmanuel Macron and the presidential majority in the National Assembly's proposed pension reform package (Ivaldi & Pineau, 2022).

As covered in the literature review, economic instability is one of the most cited contributing factors to the rise of far-right populist parties. The study by Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch found that economic crises largely benefit far-right parties, where voting for far-right parties increases from about 6 per cent to 10 per cent following financial crises. Right-wing populist parties generally benefit the most from economic instability compared to traditional extreme right parties, having more pronounced spikes in electoral gains. The strengthening of opposition forces as a result of the new voting trends increases fragmentation within political systems, resulting in weaker and less effective governance. This can lead to slowing down a country's economic recovery and hinder crisis resolution due to political polarization (Nelson, 2020, p. 104).

In the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, France's inconsistent economic recovery epitomizes the economic conditions that are conducive to the rise of far-right populist parties. Since 2009, France's GDP continuously fluctuated and saw no significant recovery from the financial crisis for ten years. By 2015, GDP reached its lowest point since the beginning of the economic crisis. France also saw a gradual rise in unemployment until 2015 when it reached 10.36 per cent, its highest rate since 1999. This period of economic instability in France also saw the RN making significant electoral gains. In both departmental and legislative elections, the RN got an approximately 10 per cent vote increase in the 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 elections. In the 2012 presidential election, Marie Le Pen nearly doubled her vote share compared to her father's 2007 election results. The RN's economic agenda under Marie Le Pen promoted an economic "patriotism" and national preference, as demonstrated through the party's proposals of reverting to the Franc currency and implementing high taxes on companies that manufactured their products outside of France.

The economic turbulence in presented a favourable environment for the RN's economic agenda, because the people in France who were directly impacted by the repercussions of economic instability, were more likely to react favourably to the RN's economic platform due to their concerns for their financial security (Nelson, 2020, pp. 104-105).

Additionally, the connection between RN's electoral successes and France's struggling economic rebound becomes more apparent when analysing the voting patterns and unemployment rates across different regions of France. The RN's performance in the 2012 presidential election reveals that the party tends to achieve greater electoral gains in the northern and southern departments of France, which corresponds to areas experiencing high levels of unemployment. Departments with some of the highest unemployment rates in France such as Pas-de-Calais (25.53 per cent), Aisne (26.33 per cent), and Vaucluse (27.03 per cent) were also areas that showed strong support for the RN. The findings indicate that areas with elevated levels of unemployment tend to serve as crucial electoral strongholds for the National Rally. The persisting economic instability in France in the aftermath of the financial crisis, coupled with the government's inability to mitigate the situation, exacerbated financial uncertainties in the country. This situation caused people to become apprehensive about neoliberalism and globalization, and the evidence suggests it has bolstered the attractiveness of the RN's protectionist and nationalist economic agenda (Nelson, 2020, p. 105).

The deterioration in the economic situation in the aftermath of the global financial crisis has amplified public discontent with mainstream parties in France, providing strong incentives for the RN to prioritise populist strategies of voter mobilisation. Anti-establishment attitudes in France became more pervasive over time; a vast majority of French people answered in a survey that "politicians don't care about people like them" and wishes for a strong leader to put everything in order. Euroscepticism and anti-globalisation have also become more widespread in French society. Furthermore, *dédiabolisation* has helped normalise the public's view of the RN and its leader. The popularity rate of the RN and Marie Le Pen almost doubled since she took over as party leader. Support for the RN's ideas has increased as well, with one-third of the French public sharing its ideas (Ivaldi, 2016, p. 239).

While Euroscepticism was a successful short-term strategy during the crises, it did interfere with the RN's hunt for credibility, as it impeded the party's ability to establish a

governmental profile and reach out to moderate voters. The RN's "exit-EU" position was rejected by an overwhelming majority of French voters, and its Eurosceptic policies became a significant factor in ostracizing the RN, and it has stayed as a political pariah in the French party system. Le Pen's campaign strategy was recalibrated in the presidential runoff, signalling that leaving the Euro was no longer a priority. The party also toned down its positions on the EU since the 2017 elections, rather it wants to focus on an EU-reformist stance (Ivaldi, 2018, pp. 286-287).

Discussion

Both the Alternative for Germany and the National Rally have achieved remarkable electoral success in a relatively short span of time. Marine Le Pen has propelled her party from the fringes of French politics since 2011, employing a process of *dédiabolisation* that has culminated in unprecedented electoral victories. In contrast, the much younger AfD was founded in 2013, initially as a critique of the Euro and with a stance of soft Euroscepticism. However, it later transformed into a more conventional far-right populist party, eventually achieving significant electoral gains through an anti-immigration policy platform in response to the refugee crisis. Though the party's initial Eurosceptic approach was effective in some measure, it was ultimately the anti-immigration strategy that proved to be its most successful electoral tactic.

Germany emerged relatively unscathed from the global financial crisis, whereas France experienced a longer and more erratic recovery. Against this backdrop, the RN effectively mobilized voters by prioritizing socioeconomic concerns such as purchasing power, unemployment, and pensions, while advocating for protectionist policies and the restoration of national sovereignty by opposing the Euro and the European Union. The RN's political platform proved particularly attractive to voters who were dissatisfied with the mainstream parties' handling of the economic crises that plagued France. Furthermore, the inconsistent trajectory of France's post-crisis economic recovery provided fertile ground for the RN's policies, as many voters experienced economic insecurity in the aftermath of these crises. Notably, Marine Le Pen adeptly harnessed the economic grievances of voters in regions with high unemployment rates.

Initially, the AfD focused on the Euro as its singular policy concern, critiquing the lack of opposition in debates surrounding the European Union and its currency. Through this approach, the party successfully established itself as an alternative political option, consolidating voters who had lost confidence in both the EU and Germany's participation in it. At this stage, the party actively sought to dispel the label of being a right-wing populist, and there was little evidence to suggest that it could be considered as such. In its first election, however, the party failed to enter the Bundestag by 0.3 percentage points, prompting a need for the party to broaden its policy platform. While the party achieved some degree of success with its economic policies, it was not until a few years later when the party underwent a leadership and strategic shift that it achieved the level of electoral success for which it is now known.

The anti-immigration policy has been a central policy of the RN's platform, with a particular emphasis on immigrants from Muslim countries, whom far-right populist parties such as the RN view with suspicion. However, following Marine Le Pen's ascension to power, the party's rhetoric shifted away from targeting immigrants as the sole source of societal issues, instead emphasizing the broader forces of globalization, capitalism, and the European Union as being responsible for these problems. In the wake of the refugee crisis and various Islamic terrorist attacks, the RN capitalized on the anti-immigration sentiment in France, utilizing it to mobilize voters who desired tighter border controls. The RN's successful *dédiabolisation* strategy enabled it to present a more acceptable image to the public, although many of its core characteristics remained unchanged. Ultimately, the RN profited from the heightened anti-immigration sentiment within France.

By 2015, the AfD underwent significant changes in leadership and ideological orientation, as the economically liberal Berndt Lucke was replaced by Frauke Petry from the socially conservative wing of the party. The party subsequently pivoted towards a more radical populist stance, emphasizing anti-immigration rhetoric that resonated with a larger portion of its base. The refugee crisis was an electoral gift to the AfD, and it catapulted the party to previously unseen heights. As many voters were concerned with the uncontrolled migrant streams, the AfD grew into a protest representative for this movement. The party managed to take advantage of the situation and used a more radical tone in the debate. In particularly Eastern Germany, the radical tone of the party promised greater electoral windfalls, and the party became the third-largest group in the Bundestag after the 2017 federal election. The

refugee crisis handled by the Merkel government can be considered a significant factor in the success of the AfD in this election and was a breakthrough for the party.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The objective of this thesis has been to investigate the extent to which immigration and economic insecurity policies have contributed to the growth of the far-right populist parties Alternative for Germany (AfD) and National Rally (RN). These parties were selected due to their significant growth in the last decade, which has made them significant players in the political landscape of their respective countries and has garnered attention from scholars and policymakers alike. The analysis started by providing a historical overview of Alternative für Deutschland and National Rally by delving into the background and development, highlighting key events, milestones, and transformations that shaped their ideologies, structures and electoral performances. The historical trajectory of these parties offers valuable insights into the factors that propelled them to become prominent far-right populist actors in their respective countries. It is noteworthy to consider the significant historical factors that led to fundamental changes within both parties. The internal conflict within AfD shifted the party's direction towards a more socially conservative and anti-immigration stance. In contrast, the RN underwent a period of *dédiabolisation* when Marine Le Pen assumed leadership, intending to achieve a softer party image while still maintaining its socially conservative policies.

The second section of the findings and analysis chapter set out to discuss and compare the AfD's and RN's approach to the issues of immigration and economic insecurity. The analysis suggested a significant change within the AfD after the replacement of Berndt Lucke as head spokesperson, and the party was taken in a more radical populist direction. The refugee crisis marked a pivotal moment for the AfD, as the party capitalized on the widespread attention it received. The party's shift in stance proved fruitful, as it performed well in subsequent elections, particularly in Eastern Germany, and it emerged as the third-largest group in the Bundestag. Meanwhile, National Rally, which was already espousing anti-immigration views prior to Marine Le Pen's leadership, altered its rhetoric to portray immigrants as victims of a system that exploits them. However, the fundamental policies of the party remained unchanged, as evidenced by the similarity between Marine Le Pen's policy manifesto and the

party's earlier stances. In a similar fashion to the AfD, the RN capitalized on the refugee crisis by framing it as a security issue and adopting an anti-immigration stance. The party's anti-immigration policies gained popularity from the growing concern about immigration among French voters. In the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen emerged as the second-most voted-for candidate, performing better than the 2012 election both times.

Upon examining economic inequality, the thesis found that the AfD was able to quickly mobilize a significant number of voters solely through its economic policy platform. Although the party would see more success with its anti-immigration platform, the AfD almost managed to enter the Bundestag within its first year as a party. The AfD was able to establish itself as a platform for critical voices against the European project and solidify its position within the German political party system. However, in contrast to its subsequent electoral victories, the economic policy of the AfD could be viewed as having had a relatively limited impact on the party's success. On the contrary, National Rally was successful in positioning itself as a working-class party and capitalizing on the stagnant economic recovery of France following the global financial crisis. Socioeconomic issues continued to be at the forefront of RN's party programme for the majority of the elections, which can be considered a significant factor in the party's success.

Towards the end, limitations and recommendations for further research on this topic will be considered. The thesis concluded that both immigration and economic insecurity play significant factors to contribute to the growth of AfD and RN. The work of this thesis was limited by the resources available and my experience as a researcher. Furthermore, this thesis is subject to limitations due to potential researcher biases, including a focus on certain perspectives over others. The literature briefly mentioned supply-side factors, and I suggest that future research can expand on demand-side research by exploring explanations that propose that institutional failures might play a part in voting behaviours. The decreased effectiveness of institutions such as the European Union could potentially contribute to the electorate supporting anti-establishment parties like the AfD and RN. As both parties have shown criticism towards the EU as an institution, it may be worthwhile for future research to explore how institutional failures can impact voting behaviours and contribute to the rise of far-right populist parties. Moreover, researchers can investigate the interplay between demand-side and supply-side explanations, as both factors may influence each other. By considering both perspectives, a more comprehensive understanding of the rise of far-right

populism can be achieved. Building off from this thesis, a researcher might consider if the conclusions can be applied to other European far-right populist parties. Lastly, further research could be done to examine the intersectionality between immigration and economic insecurity in the context of far-right populism. This could involve exploring how the parties' policies on these issues interact and overlap, and how they are perceived and received by different voter groups. As far-right populism is a complex topic, there are many approaches a researcher can take to study it further.

To conclude this discussion, I would like to highlight the main objective that have guided this research. Undertaking the topic of far-right populism through the lenses of immigration and economic insecurity can hopefully contribute to a better understanding of its growth in the European political landscape. Although this thesis has focused on the specific cases of AfD and RN, its findings and analysis can be applied to the broader debate on the topic of far-right populism in Europe. As far-right populism continues to be a significant development in European politics, it is important to continue exploring the underlying factors driving its growth. By studying these cases, scholars can better understand the social and economic factors that are driving support for far-right populist parties.

Bibliography

Affairs, E. M. (n.d.). *Country responsible for asylum application (Dublin Regulation)*.

Retrieved from European Commission: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation_en

Akbaba, S. (2018). Re-Narrating Europe in the Face of Populism: An Analysis of the Anti-Immigration Discourse of Populist Party Leaders. *Insight Turkey*, 199–218.

Akkerman, T., L. de Lange, S., & Rooduijn, M. (2016). *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*. New York: Routledge.

Arzheimer, K., & C. Berning, C. (2019, August). How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and their voters veered to the radical right, 2013–2017. *Electoral Studies*.

Beach, D. (2020, March 26). *Process Tracing Methods*. Retrieved from Oxford Bibliographies: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0227.xml>

Bell, D. (2020, May 15). *Communitarianism*. Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>

Benveniste, A., & Pingaud, E. (2016). ar-Right Movements in France: The Principal Role of Front National and the Rise of Islamophobia. In G. Lazaridis, G. Campani, & A. Benveniste, *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering'* (pp. 55-80). London: Springer Nature.

Berman, S. (2020). *The Causes of Populism in the West*. New York: Annual Review of Political Science.

Berning, C. C. (2017). *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) – Germany's New Radical Right-wing Populist Party*. Munich: ifo Institute - Leibniz Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich.

- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). Chapter 12 Interpretive Research. In A. Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*. Tampa: Global Text Project. Retrieved from University of Nottingham.
- Bowen, G. A. (2016). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 27-40.
- Camus, J.-Y., & Lebourg, N. (2017). *Far-Right Politics in Europe*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Convergence criteria (Maastricht Treaty)*. (2021, January 28). Retrieved from Insee.fr: <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1348>
- Decker, F. (2016). The ‘Alternative for Germany’: Factors Behind Its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party. *German Politics & Society*, 1-16.
- Eichengreen, B., & Begović, B. (2018). Book Review: The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era. *PANOECONOMICUS*, 677-686.
- ethnonationalism definition*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Dictionary.com: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ethnonationalism>
- European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF)*. (n.d.). Retrieved from European Commission: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/eu-financial-assistance/euro-area-countries/european-financial-stability-facility-efsf_en
- European Stability Mechanism: Who we are*. (n.d.). Retrieved from European Stability Mechanism: <https://www.esm.europa.eu/about-us>
- Evans, J., & Ivaldi, G. (2021). Contextual Effects of Immigrant Presence on Populist Radical Right Support: Testing the “Halo Effect” on Front National Voting in France. *Comparative Political Studies*, pp. 823–854.
- F. Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2016). *Trump, Brexit, and the rise of Populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash*. Cambridge: Harvard Kennedy School.

- Funke, M., & Trebesch, C. (2017). *Financial Crises and the Populist Right*. Munich: ifo Institut.
- Funke, M., Schularick, M., & Trebesch, C. (2015). *Going to Extremes: Politics after Financial Crisis, 1870-2014*. Munich: Center for Economic Studies and ifo Institute.
- Golder, M. (2016). Far Right Parties in Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 477–497.
- Goodrick, D. (2014). *Comparative Case Studies*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.
- Grimm, R. (2015). The Rise of the German Eurosceptic Party Alternative Für Deutschland, between Ordoliberal Critique and Popular Anxiety. *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique*, 264-278.
- How Maastricht changed Europe*. (2023, February 2). Retrieved from Europa.eu:
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/maastricht-treaty/>
- Ivaldi, G. (2015). Towards the median economic crisis voter? The new leftist economic agenda of the Front National in France. *Fr Polit*, 346–369.
- Ivaldi, G. (2016). A new course for the French radical right? The Front National and ‘de-demonisation’. In T. Akkerman, S. L. de Lange, & M. Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- Ivaldi, G. (2018). Contesting the EU in times of crisis: The Front National and politics of Euroscepticism. *Politics*, 278-294.
- Ivaldi, G., & Pineau, E. (2022). *France's Rassemblement National: What to Make of the Party's First 6 Months in Parliament*. Washington D.C.: Institut Montaigne.
- Jack, S., & Baxter, P. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 544-559.
- Kim, S. (2017). The populism of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): an extended Essex School perspective. *Palgrave Communications volume*.
- Kirchick, J. (2019). European populism and immigration. *Great Decisions*, 51-58.

- Lazaridis, G., Campani, G., & Benveniste, A. (2016). *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and 'Othering'*. London: Springer Nature.
- Lees, C. (2018). The 'Alternative for Germany': The rise of right-wing populism at the heart of Europe. *Politics*, 295-310.
- Michelot, M., & Quencez, M. (2017). *THE RISE OF THE FRONT NATIONAL: Taking Stock of Ten Years of French Mainstream Politics*. German Marshall Fund of the United States.
- MIDEM. (2018). *Migration und Populismus*. Dresden: Technische Universität Dresden.
- Mols, F., & Jetten, J. (2020). Understanding Support for Populist Radical Right Parties: Toward a Model That Captures Both Demand-and Supply-Side Factors. *Frontiers in Communication*.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nelson, A. (2020). The Rise of Neo-Nationalism and the Front National in France. *Seattle University Undergraduate Research Journal*.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- OECD. (2015). *Oligopoly markets*. Retrieved from oecd.org:
<https://www.oecd.org/daf/competition/oligopoly-markets.htm#:~:text=Oligopoly%20markets%20are%20markets%20dominated,at%20least%20appear%20that%20way>.
- Pajaniappane, A. (2022). *How can political science explain the rise of the National Front (FN) in France?* London: London School of Economic and Political Science.
- Parochial definition*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Cambridge Dictionary:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/parochial>

- Peace, T., & Chabal, E. (2022, June 22). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from French election: A 'breakthrough' for the far right?:
<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/6/22/french-election-a-breakthrough-for-the-far-right>
- Ray, M. (2023, March 19). *Marine Le Pen: French politician*. Retrieved from Britannica.com: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marine-Le-Pen>
- Rodríguez-Aguilera, C. (2014). The Rise of The Far Right in Europe. *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, 178-181.
- Schultheis, E. (2021, September 28). *Germany's far-right AfD loses nationally, but wins in the East*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/german-election-far-right-afd-loses-nationally-but-wins-in-east/>
- Team, B. I. (2020, February 24). *Bridge A Georgetown University Initiative*. Retrieved from FACTSHEET: NATIONAL RALLY (RASSEMBLEMENT NATIONAL, PREVIOUSLY FRONT NATIONAL OR NATIONAL FRONT):
<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-national-rally/>
- The Fiscal Compact – Taking Stock*. (2017, February 22). Retrieved from European Commission: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/fiscal-compact-taking-stock_en
- Triad. (2016, March 9). *AN INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENT ANALYSIS*. Retrieved from RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN EDUCATION:
<https://lled500.trubox.ca/2016/244>
- Wahlrecht.de*. (2017, September 24). Retrieved from Wahlrecht:
<https://www.wahlrecht.de/news/2017/bundestagswahl-2017.html>

Wahlrecht.de. (2021, September 26). Retrieved from Wahlrecht:

<https://www.wahlrecht.de/news/2021/bundestagswahl-2021.html#prognosen-hochrechnungen>

Yılmaz, F. (2012). Right-wing hegemony and immigration: How the populist far-right achieved hegemony through the immigration debate in Europe. *Current Sociology*, 368-381.



Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003
NO-1432 Ås
Norway