

# THE POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT IN WESTERN EUROPE

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Populist radical right parties have become influential actors on the political stage in several Western European democracies. Gaining votes mainly from the mid-1980s and onwards, they represent the most recent party family to have appeared on the political map of Western Europe. The populist radical right parties group is more diverse than other party families in the region, as it includes organizations that have clearly different backgrounds and origins. The current unifying factors shared by the various populist radical right parties in programmatic terms, are their calls for restrictions on immigration and on the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversification of Western European societies, and the high priority that they assign to these political issues.

Parties campaigning to be tough on immigration and immigrant-origin minorities have emerged and have contested elections in all Western European countries, but they have not been successful everywhere. For example, populist radical right parties have not become politically influential in the following countries and regions: Ireland, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Wallonia and southern Italy. Sweden and Finland were, until recently, also countries without significant representation for such parties, but the Swedish parliament now includes a small right-wing extremist party and the Finnish parliament houses a sizeable populist radical right party, as described in more detail below.

The populist radical right parties that experience electoral breakthroughs tend to receive considerable media and scholarly attention both nationally and internationally, since they appear to be new (although most of them, upon closer inspection, are not) and since mainstream politicians and other commentators react strongly to the populist radical right's negative depictions of immigrants as a group. In the following, a brief overview is given of the largest populist radical right parties in Western Europe today, emphasizing both what they have in common and some of their country-specific characteristics. Following this empirical overview, an outline is presented of the main explanations for the emergence of this new party family and for its varying success across countries and over the past three decades.

## PROMINENT PARTIES OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

### **Belgium: Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest)**

In Belgium support for Vlaams Belang reached its peak at the national level in 2007, when it gained 12% of the total vote in the general election. In the 2010 poll, its share of the vote fell to only 7.7%. In recent years Vlaams Belang's performance in the Flemish regional elections has also deteriorated. Although Flemish nationalism and separatism was the original rallying issue for the party, immigration is a core concern for the contemporary Vlaams Belang, which emerged as the continuation of Vlaams Blok in 2004 when the latter was forced to disband following a racism judgment. Although there is no longer a formal agreement among the established parties in Belgium to exclude Vlaams Belang from coalition governments (a policy of *cordon sanitaire*), co-operation with the party is still avoided. In Wallonia, the Front National, which has focused more on anti-immigration and less on separatism, has had limited electoral success and is currently not represented at the national level.

### **Denmark: Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party)**

The nationalistic and anti-immigration Dansk Folkeparti was established in Denmark in 1995 by defectors from the Fremskridtspartiet (Progress Party) after a long period of conflict between two factions within the Fremskridtspartiet. The founding leader of the Dansk Folkeparti, Pia Kjaersgaard, is renowned for her outspoken and direct style and is highly visible in Danish political debates. Following the immigration-dominated general election campaign in 2001, the Dansk Folkeparti became the main support party for the Conservative minority coalition Government. Since then, the party's

electoral support has remained stable, at around 13%. The Dansk Folkeparti's programme centres on the public's fears of Denmark becoming a multi-ethnic society, and emphasizes the need to protect the Danish language and culture. Through its close co-operation with the Government, the Dansk Folkeparti has been particularly influential in this policy area. Other central areas of issue for the party are care for the elderly and Euroscepticism.

### **Sweden: Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats)**

At the Swedish general election of September 2010 Sverigedemokraterna passed the requisite electoral threshold for the first time when it won 5.7% of the vote and thus gained 20 seats in the legislature. Compared to the radical right-wing parties in the neighbouring Nordic countries, its share of the vote is small. However, since the party first won seats in 29 local councils in 2002, its support base has grown slowly, but steadily (particularly in southern Sweden, where most of the party's votes have been won). The Sverigedemokraterna is exclusively concerned with nationalism, immigration and integration, and it has, unlike the other successful PRPs, a recent extreme right-wing past, wearing uniforms even in the 1990s. Despite a moderation process, particularly since Jimmie Åkesson became its leader in 2005, the established parties continue to refuse to co-operate with the Sverigedemokraterna. The results of the general election held in September 2010, therefore, resulted in what many considered to be a worst-case scenario for Sweden: since neither of the two main political blocks achieved a majority of seats, the Sverigedemokraterna became a pivotal force in the legislature. However, an agreement on asylum and immigration policy between the centre-right coalition (Alliansen) Government and the Miljöpartiet de Gröna (Green Party) ensured that the Sverigedemokraterna could not make use of its potentially powerful position in this policy area.

### **Finland: Perussuomalaiset (True Finns)**

At the Finnish general election held in April 2011 the populist and nationalist party Perussuomalaiset made significant gains to take 19.1% of the vote, compared with 4.1% in the 2007 general election and 9.8% in the European Union (EU) elections in 2009. During the electoral campaign, Perussuomalaiset highlighted the Finns' frustration at having to bail out several euro area countries that were in economic crisis. The party views immigration as a threat to Finland, but it places equal importance on a number of other issues, such as removing the official bilingual status of Finland and scepticism towards the EU. Following the 2011 general election, Perussuomalaiset was invited to participate in coalition negotiations, but withdrew from them owing to its opposition to EU support for remedying the Portuguese financial crisis. Consequently, Perussuomalaiset is one of the two parliamentary parties in Finland that are not part of the oversized coalition Government. The charismatic party Chairman, Timo Soini, was previously a central figure in the populist Suomen Maaseuden Puolue (Finnish Rural Party), which was disbanded in 1995 after several electoral failures. Perussuomalaiset was established in that year, and Soini has been its leader since 1997.

### **France: Front National (National Front)**

The Front National had its breakthrough on the national political stage in France when it won 11% of French votes cast at the 1984 elections to the European Parliament. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the party won between 10% and 15% of the vote at every election. In 2002 Jean-Marie le Pen, who led the Front National for 38 years from its foundation in 1972 until early 2011, made it to the second round in the presidential election with 16.9% of the vote. However, since then the party has failed to receive the same level of support. The current leader and presidential candidate for the Front National is the daughter of Jean-Marie le Pen, Marine le Pen. She has a less authoritarian style than her

father, and some commentators have speculated that she could broaden the appeal of the party to new groups of voters. Immigration is certainly still the most important issue for the Front National, and nationalism permeates the Front National's policies in areas such as the national economy, finance, the EU and security.

#### **Switzerland: Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People's Party)**

The Schweizerische Volkspartei won the highest number of seats at the 2007 general election, with 29% of the vote. The Schweizerische Volkspartei had transformed itself from an agrarian party to a populist radical right party during the 1990s, and its popularity grew rapidly in the wake of this transformation. The Schweizerische Volkspartei, which has its main electoral base in the Protestant and German-speaking cantons of the country, has been represented in the Swiss Federal Council since 1929, although its representation has not increased in line with its rising popularity. The party emphasizes a broad spectrum of political issues, although anti-immigration, Euroscepticism, law and order, and the protection of family values are now the most central.

#### **The Netherlands: Partij voor de Vrijheid (Freedom Party)**

The 2002 general election provided the breakthrough for the populist radical right in the Netherlands. In this poll the newly established Lijst Pim Fortuyn (List Pim Fortuyn) won 17% of the vote, following the assassination of the party's leader, Pim Fortuyn, only around a week before the election. The Lijst Pim Fortuyn was short-lived, but was succeeded in 2004 by the Groep Wilders, led by the controversial Geert Wilders (who had defected from the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie—People's Party for Freedom and Democracy). The Groep Wilders was renamed the Partij voor de Vrijheid in 2006. The Partij voor de Vrijheid strongly opposes immigration, multiculturalism and Islam—as is made evident in Wilders' much debated film, *Fitna*, from 2008. In June 2011 Wilders was acquitted of charges of inciting hatred by, among other things, comparing the Koran with Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. In its first election, the general election of 2006, the Partij voor de Vrijheid gained 5.9% of the vote, but thereafter its support increased substantially, to 17% in the 2009 European elections and 15.5% in the 2010 general election. Although the Lijst Pim Fortuyn was assigned four cabinet positions following its electoral success in 2002, the established parties still consider the Partij voor de Vrijheid too controversial to be included in the coalition Government.

#### **Norway: Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party)**

The Fremskrittspartiet was founded in Norway in 1973 (as the Anders Langes Parti) as a protest against increasing taxes, and it took more than a decade before immigration became a central issue for the party. In the 1987 local elections, however, the Fremskrittspartiet (as it had been renamed in 1977) made considerable gains after campaigning on restrictive immigration policies. Electoral support for the party has grown steadily since the 1970s, and it achieved its best result so far, in the 2009 general election when it took 22.9% of the vote. The Fremskrittspartiet has not yet been represented in national government, although for many years it has co-operated with parties of the centre and right in city councils. Carl I. Hagen, who had led the party for 28 years, stood down in 2006, and although the Fremskrittspartiet appeared to adapt well to the change in leadership to Siv Jensen, its popularity began to decline. This downward trend appeared to accelerate in the aftermath of the brutal extreme-right terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011.

#### **Italy: Lega Nord (Northern League)**

The main PRP in contemporary Italy is the Lega Nord (per l'Indipendenza della Padania). As indicated by its full name, the party's core political issue is increased autonomy for northern Italy (Padania), and although it initially argued for a federal Italy, it has at times demanded outright secession. The Lega Nord, the electoral base of which is naturally in the northern regions, opposes immigration and multiculturalism, although there have been internal disputes concerning the demand for labour immigration to the industrial areas in

northern Italy. Founded in 1991, the Lega Nord achieved its best national electoral result in 1996, with 10.1% of the vote. The party has been part of several coalition governments, and currently holds four cabinet positions in the Government of Silvio Berlusconi, including the Minister of the Interior. Following poor electoral results in 2001 and 2006, the Lega Nord revived its popularity and won 10.2% of the vote in the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. Umberto Bossi has been the leader of the party since its foundation.

#### **Austria: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)**

Under the leadership of Jörg Haider, the nationalist Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) grew steadily from 1985, gaining 26.9% of the vote in the 1999 general election. It then formed a coalition Government with the mainstream conservative Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party), an arrangement that continued after the 2002 election, despite declining support for the FPÖ. In 2005 Haider and many central politicians left the party to form the more moderate Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ—Alliance for the Future of Austria). Since the split, the FPÖ and its leader (since 2002), Heinz-Christian Strache, have achieved better results than the BZÖ in every poll. In the 2008 general election, the Austrian radical right-wing won a record number of votes, but neither the FPÖ nor the BZÖ is part of the current Federal Government. Haider died in a car accident in 2008 and was replaced as leader of the BZÖ by Josef Bucher.

#### **Others**

In addition to the above-detailed electorally successful populist radical right parties, a number of other smaller and more extreme right-wing parties have also received considerable attention in Western Europe, most notably the British National Party (BNP) in the United Kingdom and the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD—National Democratic Party of Germany) in Germany.

## **EXPLANATIONS FOR THE RISE OF THE POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT**

### **Introduction**

Scholars who study the populist radical right parties and seek to explain their rise to political influence in Western Europe commonly distinguish between demand-side explanations and supply-side explanations. Demand-side explanations are concerned with questions about which socio-economic and political developments contributed to the voters' grievances that the populist radical right parties appeal to and mobilize. Supply-side explanations examine the institutional, strategic and organizational contexts of these parties, and how these various contexts facilitate or hinder the growth of such parties.

The relationship between diversity and populist radical right parties is not as straightforward as stating that more immigration from culturally and religiously distant countries corresponds to more votes for the populist radical right, or, conversely, that less such immigration leads to fewer votes for these parties. Instead, increased diversity and greater demands for immigration to Western Europe, and the fairly widespread popular opposition to this situation that has been documented in the region, has created a potential for electoral breakthrough by populist radical right parties emphasizing tough immigration and incorporation policies. Some parties in some countries managed to mobilize a part of this potential—and they became the electorally successful parties described above. Other parties in other countries proved less successful or not successful at all.

When attempting to explain not only the rise in influence of the populist radical right parties, but also the pattern of variation across countries and through time in their presence and electoral success, the demand-side explanations discussed above prove insufficient. In other words, there is broad agreement that societal changes and grievances are important factors, but it is also widely agreed that they do not provide the full story. To account for variation in the parties' success supply-side explanations are also important.

### Grievances over Economic Changes

Large and important transformations in the economies of Western European countries coincided with the rise of populist radical right parties. From the mid-1980s onwards, Western European countries have experienced deindustrialization, a welfare crisis followed by various unpopular measures of welfare retrenchment, and a number of privatization and public sector reforms. In addition, new technology, cheaper travel and political efforts to lower trade barriers have created more opportunities for businesses to relocate and have opened up previously shielded industries to international competition. The internationalization of national economies has been global in scope, but it has been most intense within the EU.

It has been argued that these vast economic changes created realignments in the electorates, most notably through the creation of new groups of modernization or globalization losers, or new working-class outsiders, who became increasingly alienated from the established parties, especially the mainstream left. The populist radical right parties, it was asserted, appealed to these voters through a combination of authoritarian and neo-liberal economic policies. In support of this theory it has been found that male blue-collar workers and those without higher education constitute an important segment of the electorates of these parties. Conversely, other studies of the ideologies of populist radical right parties have not tended to find that these parties advocate neo-liberal economic policies, but rather that they use exclusionist nationalism, or nativism, as their main political frame or core ideological device.

Studies of the attitudes of populist radical right voters find further evidence against the economic grievance hypothesis through showing that these voters do not all share ideological preferences on the traditional economic left–right axis. Instead, such voters are united on issues that cut across the economic axis. In addition, an increasing number of studies dispute the existence of a clear social base to the populist radical right electorate altogether. Although the populist radical right parties do mobilize more men than women and less among the higher educated than the lower educated, in the more recent studies, the occupational or class structure of the electorate appears to vary more within and across countries than was presupposed by the initial studies.

### Disillusionment with Politics

There are also good reasons to emphasize disillusionment with politics and politicians as a reason for the rise of populist radical right parties. On a general level, EU integration and globalization have in many areas made political decision-making more complicated and interdependent. Focus on the democratic deficit in the EU has intensified as integration has deepened, and this debate in part reflects a popular sense that political decisions have been (and continue to be) removed from the national arena and democratic control. In addition to this general unease, concrete corruption scandals in several Western European countries (including Italy, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, Greece and Germany) and within EU bodies during the past couple of decades have arguably further fuelled disillusionment with politics and politicians.

The programmes of populist radical right parties show evidence of appeals to political disillusionment in the parties' anti-establishment rhetoric and their posturing as the voice of 'the man on the street'. This type of rhetoric is the main reason that this party family is referred to as populist. Populism is a classic rhetorical device and form of political strategy and has in the past been used both by parties of the right and of the left. The populism of these parties in contemporary Western Europe has tended to be adjusted so as to speak against the reigning national political consensus of the day in the country in question. Thus, in addition to advocating restrictive immigration policies, populist radical right parties have, for example, also expressed opposition to the EU, scepticism regarding climate change, and protest at petroleum prices and road taxes. The populist frame of these parties, the idea that they represent the 'real people' against corrupted élites and politicians, goes well together with their main nativist frame of representing 'nationals' against 'foreigners', or 'us' against 'them'.

The idea that populist radical right parties mobilize 'the common people' is to some extent supported by studies of

electoral behaviour that reveal that people with higher education tend not to vote for such parties. None the less, research into the attitudes of their voters show that they are about as close in ideological terms to their chosen party as are other voters. These voting studies suggest that rather than viewing a vote for the populist radical right parties as some form of protest, such a vote is simply a normal vote, since, on balance, voters for populist radical right parties actually prefer the policies that such parties promote.

The most recent detailed comparative empirical studies of the extent to which populist radical right parties mobilize political disillusionment reach a sober and nuanced conclusion. They find that these parties mobilize disillusionment in some elections, but not all, and that the overall pattern of association between the populist radical right vote and disillusionment therefore appears quite weak when multiple countries and elections are considered together.

### Immigration and Increased Diversity

The third proposed demand-side explanation for the rise of populist radical right parties focuses on immigration and the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversification of Western European societies. As with the two other explanations discussed above, this rationale appears plausible in the sense that real and important societal changes have taken place in the political domain and they coincide in timing with the rise in political influence of several populist radical right parties.

In the time span during which these parties emerged and attained varying degrees of political power, Western Europe as a whole became a more popular immigrant destination than ever before in the post-war period. The wealthy countries of Western Europe experienced positive net migration at the same levels or higher than in the period of invited workers in the 1960s. At the same time, the poorer Western European countries, which had previously been primarily sources of emigration, themselves also became highly attractive destinations for immigrants.

Immigration to Western Europe in this period originated from a wide geographic area. In most countries family reunification procedures were the main channel of immigration from outside of the EU, North America and Australia/New Zealand, as many of those who had arrived on guest worker or colonial programmes chose to stay and bring over family members to join them. To a more modest extent numerically, but with a higher degree of public attention, the diversification of the foreign-born population also took place through the asylum system. According to UN estimates, the number of asylum seekers in Western Europe grew sharply in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their number declined significantly in the latter part of the 1990s and in the 2000s, due to more restrictive entry policies and repatriation programmes. Nevertheless, in 2011 asylum applications remained at historically high levels when compared with the situation in the 1960s and 1970s.

The incorporation of new immigrants in Western European societies has proved a far from smooth process. During the past 20 years or so, the most frequent and heated political debates over immigrant integration in Europe have concerned Muslims. Since the 1980s there have been countless impassioned political discussions about the building of mosques, women wearing veils, religious schools, allegedly blasphemous or racist films and cartoons, and the accommodation of a variety of religious practices. Further intensity and significance were added to these controversies, since the extremists who carried out the lethal terrorist attacks in Madrid, Spain, and London, United Kingdom, as well as those in New York and Washington, DC, USA, on 11 September 2001, were identified as Muslims.

Restrictive immigration and integration policy forms the core of the populist radical right parties' political programmes. Some label such ideology nativist, others ethno-nationalist, and yet others exclusionist. Whatever the designation, the main point is that these parties want to stop or reverse immigration and diversification trends, and that, in the majority of cases, they advocate strict, assimilationist integration policies. More recently, criticism of Muslims and of Islamic practices and traditions has become a central part of the programme of most populist radical right parties.

Voters for these parties tend to have more anti-immigrant, exclusionist, intolerant or authoritarian attitudes than other voters. These attitudes are strongly associated with level of education and, to some extent, with gender. The social and demographic composition of populist radical right electorates thus further supports the immigration grievance hypothesis. As a result of these studies, there is now growing consensus that immigration grievances form the most important common demand-side explanation for the rise of populist radical right parties. That said, economic grievances and political disillusionment remain important factors for mobilization for these parties in some countries and in some elections.

### The Institutional Context

The institutional feature of Western European democracies that has received the most attention in the literature on populist radical right parties is the electoral system. The size of electoral districts varies across Western Europe, with the 'first-past-the-post' system of the United Kingdom at one extreme and the Dutch proportional system at the other. Small parties have varying chances of obtaining legislative seats according to which electoral system is in play and this affects the prospects of populist radical right parties. Proportional systems (as in the Netherlands) make it easier for small parties to win representation in parliament, whereas majoritarian systems (as in the United Kingdom) make it difficult to gain seats.

The majoritarian electoral system is, in all likelihood, an important part of the explanation for why the United Kingdom does not have an influential populist radical right party, while the Netherlands has witnessed the emergence of two such parties in the past 10 years. However, electoral systems do not explain everything. In France, the Front National has remained a significant political actor, winning a large proportion of the vote for more than two decades, despite the country's majoritarian electoral system, while the Netherlands did not have a notable populist radical right party before 2002.

Yet, there is little reason to believe that electoral systems should not play a role in the case of these parties, as with other party families. In some countries, such as France, we even have evidence for the effect of electoral systems, since the Front National made its national breakthrough and received parliamentary representation following a short-lived change in the electoral system from majoritarian to proportional in 1986. Interestingly enough, however, support for the Front National did not weaken after the electoral system was changed back again to the majoritarian system in subsequent elections. The mixed evidence in support of the electoral system explanation does not imply that electoral systems are unimportant, only that they are one part of a whole series of factors that influence the potential for the success of the populist radical right.

### The Party Strategic Context

Whereas the electoral system is part of the institutional framework that lays down rules affecting how parties and voters behave and interact, the party strategic context concerns how other political parties behave before and after a populist radical right party enters political competition. The lack of competition that these parties faced from established parties in the late 1980s and 1990s is one aspect that is often overlooked, but is potentially very important. The most common explanation for the delay in the response of the established parties to public grievances over immigration is that this issue cuts across the electorates of the established parties, and that established parties prefer not to compete on such cross-cutting issues. From the late 1990s onwards, the established parties' strategic positioning changed in most countries across Western Europe as they began signalling and implementing tougher immigration and incorporation measures. However, increased competition from established parties on immigration issues has not yet crowded out any of the populist radical right parties that rose to prominence in the early days. Evidence suggests that, at least in the short term, those parties that have long focused on such topics may benefit electorally from the greater attention that they now receive when mainstream parties signal that they will become 'tougher'.

Another notable aspect of the strategic response of established parties to the populist radical right is the establishment

of more or less formal non-co-operation pacts, often referred to as a *cordon sanitaire*. Through such pacts, established parties have tried to diminish the influence of the parliamentary representatives of the populist radical right parties. It appears that, at least in the short term, these pacts have had the desired effect, but there is also some evidence to suggest that they may have improved the chances of the populist radical right parties in future elections, granting them more attention and more protest votes.

With the exception of the recently established non-co-operation pact in Sweden, such arrangements appear to have become less common responses to populist radical right parties. By 2011 three countries in Western Europe have had such parties in government—Italy, Austria and the Netherlands. In addition, the Schweizerische Volkspartei has remained in the Swiss Federal Council and gained an additional seat after taking on the tough on immigration agenda. In other countries, such as Denmark, populist radical right parties have been formal supporters of the Government while not actually controlling any ministries. Those that have actively participated in government have tended to lose votes in the subsequent election. However, this pattern of executive power followed by a dip in support may not be long-lived judging by the Dutch and Austrian examples where we have seen the same or similar populist radical right parties regain support in recent years.

### Characteristics of Parties of the Populist Right

Recent research on populist radical right parties has increasingly focused on a third supply-side explanation—the role of the parties themselves. Many studies note that the organizational strength of these parties appears to be an important factor, especially in explaining the survival or sustained electoral successes of these parties. However, there is an important exception to this pattern, which is that parties with an ultranationalist or fascist past have tended to perform poorly in spite of often quite extensive and well-established organizational apparatuses. This has led other researchers to conclude that not only the organizational structure, but also the reputation or legacy of the party organization plays a role.

The organizational framework of political parties is notoriously difficult to study rigorously. However, it is striking that all the large populist radical right parties described above that have survived and contested several elections have emphasized party organization. This can be contrasted with those that are best described as 'flash-parties'—i.e. those parties which receive a large portion of the vote in one or two elections, only to disappear in subsequent polls. Ny Demokrati (New Democracy), which contested elections in Sweden in the early 1990s, is a well-known example of a party that did make some headway in electoral terms, but whose leaders neglected party organization and which predictably disappeared from Swedish politics after a couple of elections. Lijst Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands is another example of this phenomenon. Despite the fact that it lacked any real organization, this party was included in government, a move that proved disastrous for both the Government and the party.

Organizational apparatus can be a decisive factor for the survival of political parties in elections. However, a number of powerful parties do exist with well-established and fairly strong organizational structures that clearly promote nativist agendas, but have not enjoyed any significant political breakthroughs. These are the parties that are most directly associated with the old extreme-right parties in Western Europe, such as the BNP in Britain, the NPD in Germany and the now defunct Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement) in Italy.

Some recent work has taken this idea of party legacies and reputations even further suggesting that not only do neo-Nazi, fascist or extremist legacies appear to be damaging to the electoral opportunities of populist radical right parties, but that a positive legacy as something else may be equally important. If we examine the parties that have enjoyed political success, there is a clear (but not uniform) pattern implying that it is difficult for parties to mobilize on the immigration issue if they do not have a prominent characteristic offering them a shield against accusations of racism and fascism. The reputational shields differ across countries and

include tax protests in the Norwegian and Danish cases, agrarian interests in the Swiss and Finish cases, and regional empowerment in the Flemish and North Italian cases. This supply-side explanation is potentially the key to accounting for why the populist radical right party family is so unusually heterogeneous.

### CONCLUSION

Populist radical right parties constitute an important new party family in Western Europe. This party family is united by the programmes of its constituent members to be tough on immigration and immigrants, but is otherwise more heterogeneous in policy terms than other party families in the region. The electorate of the successful populist radical right parties does not have a very clear social profile, but is dominated by men and by people lacking higher education. In some countries blue-collar workers are also over-represented in their electorates. It is apparent that parties achieve varying degrees of electoral success, that not all countries in Western Europe have a successful populist radical right party, and that they appear on the electoral scene at different points in time and have diverse histories prior to becoming concerned with issues in the domain of immigration and minority integration. The rise of these parties is most strongly connected to popular grievances over immigration and ethnic, religious and cultural diversification. Although the role of economic grievances and political disillusionment in particular cases at specific points in time are real concerns, they are less strongly linked to the growth of populist radical right parties. Demand-side explanations do not, on their own, provide sufficient explanation for variations in the success and influence of these parties in Western Europe. Focusing on the characteristics of the populist radical right parties themselves, rather than on the

institutional or party strategic context, provides the most insight into the question of why some parties with nativist, exclusionist or anti-immigrant agendas become successful and manage to sustain that success, while others fail. Party reputations or legacies as something other than fascists, neo-Nazis or extremists appear particularly important for understanding why some of these parties make significant electoral progress. Furthermore, investing in and managing to build an effective organizational apparatus appear to be important factors in sustaining that initial electoral success over time.

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