

Far-right success in Europe

Good overviews:

- *Arzheimer, K. (2018). Explaining Electoral Support for the Radical Right (J. Rydgren, Ed.; Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.*
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274559.013.8>
- *Mudde, C. (Ed.). (2017). The populist radical right: A reader. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.*
- *Berman, S. (2021). The Causes of Populism in the West. Annual Review of Political Science, 24(1), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102503*

Intro: Supply vs Demand Factors, Definition

Most researchers have adopted a framework of supply vs demand variables when studying the European far-right. I think it is generally useful and because it is so common, it makes sense to adopt it for the purpose of reviewing this literature. Note also that most people have adopted a distinction similar to that of Mudde (2019) to differentiate between the two big camps of the far-right in Europe: the (populist) radical far-right and far-right extremism. The difference here is that the former generally acts within liberal democracy even if its goals or ideology are partially or wholly incompatible with it. The latter simply seeks to destroy and replace liberal democracy outright. Crucially, radicals will run for office whereas extremists use various forms of protest including violence. Unfortunately, the literature does not necessarily follow the exact naming convention, sometimes even when the conceptual understanding is the same.

Demand-Side Factors

1. Economic Conditions:

- Unemployment and economic insecurity:** Economic downturns, high unemployment rates, and financial crises often increase support for RRP. Studies suggest that economic hardship fuels resentment towards elites and immigrants, who are perceived as economic threats (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Golder, 2003).
- Economic downturns:** Financial crises might exacerbate public discontent with the existing political and economic systems. Some studies show that economic

instability and insecurity make populist messages more appealing as people seek alternatives to the status quo (Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch, 2016).

- c. **Rising inequality and globalization:** Some argue that economic inequality and potentially negative impacts of globalization, such as job losses due to outsourcing and technological change, contribute to economic insecurity and therefore fuel support for the radical right (Kitschelt, 2005; Kriesi et al., 2006; Rydgren, 2013; Piketty, 2014; Milanovic, 2016; Rodrik, 2018).

2. **Culture, Attitudes:**

- a. **Backlash against post-materialism:** Seminal paper for this thesis is Ignazi (1992). Also Norris & Inglehart (2019).
- b. **Anti-immigration attitudes:** Hostility towards immigrants or a similar out-group is a consistent and strong predictor of support for the radical right (Lubbers et al., 2002; Rydgren, 2008).
- c. **Authoritarian personality:** Potentially the oldest and most enduring explanation out there, going back to Adorno et al. (1950). More recently studied by Altemeyer (1996).

3. **Protest voting and distrust of the establishment:** This is a common explanation among pundits and the political class, but the existence of this effect is slightly unclear from the literature and usually overshadowed by other explanatory factors, most notably attitudes against an outgroup (Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Billiet & Witte, 1995; van der Brug et al., 2000; van der Brug & Fennema, 2003; Norris, 2005; Arzheimer, 2009; Ford, et al., 2011, Arzheimer, 2018).

4. **Disillusionment** with traditional political parties and institutions might fuel support for the far-right. Corruption scandals, ineffective governance, and perceived detachment of the political elite from ordinary citizens' concerns can contribute to this disenchantment (Dalton, 2004; Mair, 2013). Similarly, some voters have been shown to vote for radical right parties as a form of protest, driven by dissatisfaction with the political status quo (Arzheimer, 2009). Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) could potentially also fall into this category, since they argue that decaying trust in a country's constitution / institutions is instrumental in democratic backsliding. But this could equally be a supply-side point, since they argue that leaders will create and then take advantage of damaged institutions.

5. Additionally, several **socioeconomic and demographic variables** have been tested including:

- a. **Crime:** Worries about crime has been shown to have an effect (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). See also point about issue salience below.
- b. **Religion:** Religion plays an important role in the Iberian context, where the far-right is traditionally closely affiliated with the Catholic Church and/or Catholic traditionalism (Camus, 2017; Arzheimer, 2018). Arzheimer and Carter find that in general, there is no relationship (2009).
- c. **Euroskepticism:** Uniquely European phenomenon and has been featured in some studies; generally disregarded by literature since it is not unique to far-right and it is mostly just anti-elitism or anti-capitalism (Arzheimer, 2018).
- d. **Immigration:** There are a number of studies linking higher immigration to far-right support (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Arzheimer, 2018; Alesina & Tabellini, 2022), but this literature is not conclusive and, like crime, is likely a salience mechanism.

Supply-Side Factors

1. **Issue salience, framing, and priming:** This is, in my estimation, currently one of the most actively researched and discussed explanations. Basically, the argument is that important demand factors (especially anti-immigrant or anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes, anti-establishment sentiment, or dissatisfaction) are somewhat latent and then activated (made salient). One particular focus is on non-far-right actors doing this opportunistically (e.g. a center-right conservative complaining about immigration) and thereby putting the focus on an issue that the far-right owns and can win with. A seminal paper from the party competition literature was Meguid (2005). More specifically looking at salience shifts are for example Dahlström, and Sundell (2012), Dennison (2020), Mendes and Dennison (2021), and Krause et al. (2023). Relatedly, **media coverage** may contribute to support for the far-right, as the media has power over deciding which issues are discussed and how much in public discourse. I am not very familiar with this and I am sure there is more, but from Arzheimer (2018), I could find some work from the Netherlands by Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2007; 2009).
2. **Social media:** to my knowledge, there is not much work linking the resurgence of the European far-right directly to the rise of social media (Muis et al., 2020), although far-right (and/or populist) behavior online has been studied quite extensively (Caiani & Wagemann, 2009; Caiani & Parenti, 2013; Hawley, 2017; Muis et al., 2020).

3. **Party identification:** (Not sure this fits into the supply category) Voters have, on average, become less likely to feel strongly attached to any one political party and this has helped the far-right electorally (Arzheimer, 2009).
4. **Party competition:** Various party competition explanations have been brought forward. In countries where significant opposition to liberal democracy exists (Eastern Europe), far-right parties are the obvious choice for such voters (Mammone & Jenkins, 2012; Mareš & Havlík, 2016). De Vries & Hobolt (2020) argue that in the manner of “political entrepreneurs” new parties naturally exploit open, unaddressed issues. Since the far-right was traditionally unsuccessful in the aftermath of World War II, there was an opening.

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