Organisation Research Unit

CARR Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right

YEAR IN REVIEW REPORT

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About the Organisation Research Unit

The CARR Organisation Research Unit (ORU) is a group of scholars concentrating on three research strands: (1) political party organisation, (2) movement organisation, and (3) online network organisation. Taken together, these strands circumscribe the universe of organised far-right socio-politics. This report contains brief analyses of some of the most important developments for organised far-right socio-politics in 2020.

About the CARR Year in Review Reports

The CARR Year in Review reports feature the latest research from CARR Fellows reflecting back on significant developments over the course of the year, specifically on topics pertaining to the individual Research Units. CARR Year in Review reports aim to provide a useful resource within a broader network of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers focusing on key dynamics of the radical right.

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About the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right

The Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) is a UK-based research centre and pedagogical outreach initiative focused on the study and countering of radical right extremism and intersecting phenomena (e.g. populism, gender, antisemitism, and Islamophobia) that aims to support a variety of mainstream groups, from government agencies to grass-roots charities, through podcasts, commentary, research reports, presentations, media interviews, and commissioned work.

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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL ZELLER

Recent years have witnessed an ongoing, transnational trend of increasing activity by far-right organisations, from political parties to movements to online networks. 2020 gave rise to a unique set of circumstances that, like many other parts of society, affected far-right organisations. The present report provides a review of important themes and topics in this area. It addresses the pivotal developments for the far right in the United States, Europe, and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic dominated life in 2020. Fittingly, Lynda Gilby's overview of pandemic response, as well as ongoing global health governance, heads the report and provides an essential global frame of reference for the subsequent sections, which focus on different national contexts. COVID-19 and governmental responses became a focal point for far-right organisations which propagated or instrumentalised conspiracies to mobilise activists. Blyth Crawford and Ofra Klein discuss how the QAnon conspiracy in the U.S. and conspiratorial thinking in the Netherlands, respectively, have taken hold. William Allchorn and Andreas Dafnos show how these typically online conspiracies fuel offline activism by examining far-right mobilisations in the United Kingdom. In Germany, too, the pandemic and online activity was paired with street-level activism: Sabine Volk details the mobilisation of 'anti-corona' demonstrations that spread throughout the country.

In Eastern Europe, several states have far-right governments in power. While the first wave of COVID-19 in the spring had a lesser impact, the autumn's second wave broke more heavily within these countries. Michael Zeller discusses the case of Poland, where the populist radical right government has continued, indeed accelerated, its implementation of a reactionary Catholic agenda. In Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán wields autocratic power and has espoused far-right rhetoric long before 2020, the government has intensified its socially conservative agenda that stigmatises LGBTQ individuals, as Katherine Kondor reviews in her piece.

Yet the activity of far-right organisations has not gone unchallenged from growing continuously. Maik Fielitz, Vasiliki Tsagkroni, and Andreas Dafnos detail the trial and conviction of members of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party in Greece, as well as the

proscription of the party organisation. This far-reaching decision carries important implications for Greece's democratic system. Though not met by bans, the far right in Australia is facing comparable difficulties in mobilising efforts. As Mario Peucker writes, the diminishing concern over Islamist extremism has deprived far-right groups of a central mobilising issue and resultantly decreased their ability to organise demonstrations—but this does not mean far-right activists and sympathisers have disappeared.

Taken together, members of the Organisation Research Unit at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right present some of 2020's most significant developments for the organised far right. COVID-19 reshaped, at least for a time, the far right's mobilising landscape, but as several sections discuss there are still fertile fields for far-right contention.

FAR-RIGHT POPULISM AND GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH IN 2020

LYNDA GILBY

Source: https://www.cetim.ch/covid-19-pandemic-and-human-rights-2/.

2020 exemplifies the grave challenges that populist nationalism poses for global health. A deadly pandemic, coupled with right-wing populist opposition to public health measures which threatens global health governance and multilateral cooperation, coincides with an already fraught international political environment of escalating far-right populist politics. Domestic politics on public health, notably from the United States, spilled out into international forums, which saw the Trump administration vote against a United Nations COVID-19 omnibus resolution because it mentions 'sexual and reproductive health' (SRH) and 'sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights' (SRHR). President Donald Trump also announced that the United States would be leaving the World Health Organization (WHO), of which the United States is the largest donor, despite the world still being in the throes of the pandemic.

Photography by Joshua Roberts/Reuters. Source: https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-discusses-opening-country-coronavirus-peaks-areas/story?id=69979743.

Countries governed by male conservative leaders, such as Brazil, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, have fared far worse during the pandemic, rejecting the advice of public health officials despite obligations under the International Health Regulations set out by the WHO "to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks." Furthermore, the populist backlash to traditional institutions, including health institutions, has also resulted in an inability to reach an agreement on international commitments on a broad range of global health issues---including the right to health for refugees and migrants, LGBTQI+ persons, as well as access to SRH services---with profound implications for global health and human rights. Populist nationalism around the world threatens global health responses to the pandemic by rejecting science and downplaying the virus, given that global health governance is seen as incompatible with populist nationalism, a "political strategy which focuses on division." National priorities are emphasised over a cooperative global response to an international problem and populist authoritarian leaders such as Donald Trump seek to take power away from institutions, which include public health institutions and specialised normative health agencies such as the WHO.

The use of social media platforms also becomes a threat to public health due to the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories online. Right-wing politicians around

the world attempt to harness these dangerous and outright false messages for their own political gain, rather than embracing science and calling for an end to misinformation. For example, the fringe party Advance New Zealand emerged in April and attempted to instrumentalise the growing online misinformation around the New Zealand government's robust response to the virus in order to gain seats in parliament. Although the party only won 1% of the total vote and failed to take any seats, they fueled the increase in anti-lockdown sentiment and gave a platform for further dissemination of conspiracy theories in the media.

Far-right politicians' weaponisation of the pandemic to further their political agenda strikes immigrant and minority communities particularly hard. Already targets for discrimination by nationalist parties, many are disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to substandard living conditions and lack of access to quality health care. Furthermore, in line with the right-wing populist playbook of scapegoating immigrants, marginalised communities are blamed for spreading the virus and face violent attacks in the streets as xenophobia increases in an environment where far-right leaders fuel hate speech, refuse to denounce hate crimes, and exploit fear surrounding the virus to further promote an ultra-nationalist, white-supremacist agenda.

In 2019, the Global Health Security Index scorecard ranked the United States and the United Kingdom as the most prepared to handle a pandemic. Yet, the course of 2020 reveals that such evaluations fail to account for the potentially destructive effect of local political environments. By June, the United States and the United Kingdom had the greatest number of excess deaths as a result of the crisis. It would seem that the scorecard "did not account for the political context in which a national policy response to a pandemic is formulated and implemented."

Not even the pandemic could halt anti-SRHR activities around the world as attacks on reproductive rights reached new levels. Governments that oppose SRHR use the cover of the pandemic to increase restrictions on SRHR and limit access to SRH services. This is also observed in the continued politics of silencing of SRHR by the Trump administration, which in October signed the so-called 'Geneva Consensus Declaration,' which aims to expand a coalition of conservative governments against the inclusion and recognition of previously agreed SRHR. Signatories of the document consist of thirty-three "largely illiberal or authoritarian governments," many of which are ranked among the worst

countries in the world to be a woman, according to Georgetown Univeristy's Women, Peace and Security Index.

Although Joe Biden has been elected the next president of the United States, 'Trumpism' and the global rise in autocracy, which creates disruptions and deadlocks during international negotiations, will likely persist. Additionally, the far-right coalition-building orchestrated by the Trump administration throughout the United Nations and its agencies will continue even when he eventually leaves the White House. This is because an ultra-conservative agenda, which rejects science, human rights, and public and global health measures, is already part of the strategy of far-right political parties and leaders. With the United States having been the largest donor to global health assistance, international health agencies and local health providers in low-and-middle-income countries may be forced to look to more stable funding sources that are not subject to which government is in power. While the world eagerly awaits the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, in planning future pandemic responses, public health professionals and policy-makers will need to look at ways to combat populist scepticism, which this year "resulted in delayed responses to the pandemic, underplaying of the risk and thus potentially contributed to avoidable illness and death."

2020: QANON'S YEAR OF EXPANSION IN THE U.S.

BLYTH CRAWFORD

An attendee at a Donald Trump rally holds up a 'Q' sign. Photograph by Imago Images/Zuma/B. Cahn. Source: dw.com/en/challenger-to-qanon-conspiracy-theorist-drops-out-of-race-for-us-congress/a-54902650.

The so-called 'QAnon' conspiracy theory grew significantly during 2020, spurred on by increasing public anxieties surrounding the coronavirus pandemic and political tensions within the U.S. election. The community of adherents has increased its support base, with membership of QAnon Facebook groups spiking 120% in March alone. This rapid online growth has evidently continued throughout the year.

The QAnon conspiracy originates from 4chan's /pol/ board in October 2017 and has roots in the 2016 'Pizzagate' phenomenon. It is perhaps best understood as an omnibus of conspiratorial narratives stemming from the premise that a U.S. government insider, known only as 'Q,' is exposing 'Deep State' corruption through a series of posts made on anonymous online image boards. Since the first so-called 'Q drop,' nearly 5,000 similar posts have been made, deeply embedded in misinformation, which frame President Donald Trump as a valiant 'sleeper agent' locked in a battle of good versus evil in attempt to uncover a secret underground cabal of Satan-worshiping paedophiles engaged in child sex trafficking with connections to the Democratic party, as well as

various 'elites.' Beyond this central narrative, various off-shoots of QAnon espouse a range of more niche conspiracies, the most extreme of which devolve into open antisemitism.

While at its broadest level QAnon is a largely non-violent conspiracy, it has also been linked to a number of violent incidents and arrests throughout 2020, including two alleged kidnappings and a train derailment. Amid tension surrounding the U.S. election results, two men were arrested on 5 November for illegally carrying firearms outside a convention centre where votes were being counted in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, having arrived at the scene in a vehicle adorned with QAnon paraphernalia.

Unrest in response to the coronavirus pandemic has significantly influenced the evolution and internationalisation of QAnon. While Q did not initially comment on the pandemic in its earliest stages, eventually Q drops began spreading disinformation about the virus; echoing conspiracies which were already salient in other online communities, such as the efficacy of hydroxychloroquine; and that the virus was a strategy to cover up corruption within the Democratic Party. Prior to these comments, however, alarmist narratives and misinformation about COVID-19 had already become widespread throughout social media, in many ways laying the foundation for permutations of the QAnon narrative to take hold within more mainstream audiences.

In particular, the softer, repackaged version of the QAnon conspiracy, spread under the banner of 'Save or Children' or 'Save the Children,' has revitalised QAnon, reaching a relatively mainstream audience on social media, particularly within (predominantly female) health and wellness communities. This version of the narrative, which has been dubbed "QAnon Lite," has made the conspiracy more palatable to mainstream audiences, often foregrounding the necessity of ending alleged human trafficking, rather than on specific Q drops themselves, while continuing the spread of mis/disinformation. Amid tough crackdowns on QAnon content from social media companies, this softer face of the movement has enabled some material to remain on mainstream sites, while many hardcore Q supporters have transitioned to alternative platforms like Gab and Parler.

COVID-19 AND CONSPIRACY: HOW POPULIST DISCONTENT HAS CREATED A CRISIS OF REALITY

OFRA KLEIN

The COVID-19 pandemic has formed a breeding ground for conspiratorial ideas to flourish. From Bill Gates having invented the virus to using hydroxychloroquine as a remedy to the disease: in times of uncertainty, conspiracy theories offer a simple answer. The destructive potential of such conspiracies became clear when dozens of telecom masts, perceived as 5G masts, were set on fire in the Netherlands, a country previously perceived as immune to conspiracy theory adherence. In October, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), identified for the first time in its terrorism threat assessment that conspiracy theories are one of the main threats for terrorism: "Conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation have, since the outbreak of COVID-19, spread more quickly from the fringes of the internet to mainstream channels."

Just like the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the virality of false information online is dependent on certain key actors, or 'super-spreaders,' who can distribute information in a manner infectious to viewers. During the pandemic, Dutch super-spreaders or 'influencers' have helped transmit misinformation by translating and adapting videos to the Dutch context. A video by former TV presenter and current YouTuber Robert Jensen helped popularise the link between COVID-19 and Bill Gates. Similarly, rapper Lange Frans and internet conspiracy theorist Janet Ossebaard have promoted other conspiracies related to COVID-19.

Susceptibility to conspiracy theories is closely related to populist views. After all, several alternative realities are paired with critiques of elites (a core element of populism). The intellectual and political elite is accused of withholding 'the truth', selling lies, and failing to act in the interest of the people. A survey carried out by IPSOS reveals that supporters of populist parties in the Netherlands, namely the right-wing parties Party for Freedom (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FvD), as well as the left-wing Socialist Party (SP), exhibit less resistance to conspiracy theories. These sceptics might be more likely to rely on alternative opinions on current affairs, such as those by rapper Lange Frans and Victoria Secret model Doutzen Kroes. Kroes casts doubt on the good intention of the government

and elites. Lange Frans went so far as to express his wish to assassinate Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. Distrust in how the elite is handling the COVID-19 crisis also has seemingly contributed to the increased support for other conspiracies unrelated to COVID-19, such as QAnon. This conspiracy, discussed elsewhere in this report, argues that the elite consists of a large paedophile network. Lange Frans, again, contributed to its popularity with a rap mentioning the Dutch royal family in relation to this network.

The survey by IPSOS fortunately shows that only a minority of the Dutch population believes in conspiracy theories. Yet, a large percentage of respondents seem to be unsure about the real truth. This addresses one of the core problems of debunking conspiracies: they often contain sufficient links to reality to be perceived as truthful. Protest actions develop rapidly and social media platforms have a difficult time keeping up with the large amount of content posted on these issues. Recently, politicians and the media have received increased threats and, at times, been violently attacked. The NOS, one of the main broadcasting companies in the Netherlands, even removed its logo from their vans. Despite the news of a forthcoming vaccine these sorts of problems are far from solved: a new challenge will be to convince anti-vaxxers of its benefits.

BLM, COVID-19, & QANON: UK FAR-RIGHT MOBILISATION IN 2020

WILLIAM ALLCHORN & ANDREAS DAFNOS

BLM demonstrators face EDL supporters in front of Churchill's statue in Parliament Square, London on Tuesday, 13 June 2020. Photograph by Victoria Jones/PA.

The UK far right has experienced a marked transition in the past decade from parliamentary to more extra-parliamentary forms of activism. Initially expressed in the form of street protest movements in the early 2010s, such as the English Defence League, signs of vigilantism and terror groupuscules are now added to the mix as the UK far right transforms into a more fractured, post-organisational phase of movement development.

Predominantly focused on anti-Muslim forms of mobilisation since the early 2000s, the UK far right experienced a shift back to more biologically racist themes this summer as a result of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in June and record numbers of (illegal) migrants crossing the English Channel in August. With the former, a large-scale protest attended by Britain First, the UK National Front, and Democratic Football Lads Alliance activists, as well as other anti-minority protesters demonstrates the exploitation of anti-BLM narratives by the organised far right, and the possibility of a unifying mobilisation theme for the fractured movement, which has struggled to retain relevance post-Brexit. Former leader of the English Defence League, Tommy Robinson, emerged as a spearhead

of anti-BLM protests to "defend our memorials" (despite his withdrawal at the last minute due to his own concerns regarding inflammation of "racial tensions" as a result of the rally).

Added to this, the UK far right has mobilised on the more traditional issue of migration. Adopting a more vigilante-style of direct action protest, far-right organisations and actors have gone about observing migrants crossing the channel and visiting locations where migrants and refugees are resident. Even former UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, mobilised on this issue, visiting hotels in Kent and Worcestershire. The narrative that has been adopted and developed concerns 'invasion' and a broad coherence with the government's line of repatriating migrants back to their country of origin.

BUF (British Union of Fascists) flag displayed at anti-lockdown protest in London in September 2020. Photograph by Unknown.

As anti-government and racist conspiracy theories swirled around the UK during the initial throes of the coronavirus pandemic, established far right and conspiracist influencers (such as James Thring and David Icke) joined forces on the streets in several cities to voice their opposition to the government's lockdown measures. Sparsely attended and displaying fascist symbols, the UK far right seems to follow a trend of other European partners in being unable to seize on the pandemic to put boots on the streets.

Particular emphasis should be placed, however, on another conspiracy theory that appears to be on the rise and detailed in this report. The so-called 'QAnon' conspiracy theory has migrated to the UK from the United States, espoused by well-known British far right figures in recent street demonstrations (e.g., through the 'Save our Children' campaign). Although it appeals to people with different ideological backgrounds and

orientations, the use of QAnon slogans and iconography by some far-right activists (and the coded antisemitism behind the idea of a 'deep state') means there is room for the far right to further build its narratives on a distorted interpretation of reality.

Moreover, the revelation in June that the number of far-right sympathisers charged with terror offences increased from 33 to 44 presents another facet of the threats emanating from the far right in the UK today. This should be viewed in line with another trend over the years that concerns underage white males' involvement in terror-related plots and crimes at an increasing rate. We note, however, that the British government has responded more forcefully this year. Following National Action's proscription in 2016, from February to July 2020, two neo-Nazi groups were further proscribed—(1) Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) and (2) Feuerkrieg Division (FKD)—awhile the System Resistance Network (SRN) was also recognised as an alias of National Action.

Stickers posted by the UK neo-Nazi 'Hundred Handers' group. Photograph by Hope not Hate.

Finally, in terms of specific organisational developments, two UK groups emerged in the far right space this year. One that came to prominence is the biologically racist Patriotic Alternative, whose activities are mainly restricted to stickering, vlogging, and 'prepper'-type outdoors activities around issues of 'white marginalisation' and a 'white lives matter' discourse. The other, more sinister group, Hundred Handers, also engages in such activities, but with an overt neo-Nazi ideology. Its use of Telegram to co-ordinate

activities by an autonomous and anonymous (largely teenage) leadership warrants the attention of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners going forward.

FAR-RIGHT STREET PROTEST AND THE 'ANTI-CORONA' DEMONSTRATIONS: SPOTLIGHT ON GERMANY

SABINE VOLK

Protest against coronavirus measures in Berlin. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stra%C3%9Fe_des_17._Juni_29.8.2020_.JPG.

In the context of the restrictions to public life and freedom of assembly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the phenomenon of 'anti-corona' demonstrations spread over large parts of Europe and beyond. Although not the only drivers of these protests, far-right actors were heavily involved in the organisation and implementation of demonstrations which questioned the use and legitimacy of measures taken by European governments to contain the spread of the coronavirus. In the U.S., conspiracy theorists, such as QAnon supporters, and far-right activists participated in anti-lockdown protests. In Italy, the neo-fascist New Force (Forza Nuova) demonstrated against social distancing measures on Liberation Day in April. In the U.K., the 'UK Freedom Movement' mobilised for demonstrations all over the country, including the so-called Freedom Festival in London in May. In Ireland, the group Health Freedom Ireland and the Irish Yellow Vests protested against face masks. And in Poland, the far-right party Confederation (Konfederacja)

organised protest events against the obligation to wear masks in public spaces in September.

Some of the largest and most frequent demonstrations took place in Germany. Critics of the coronavirus measures from across the political spectrum merged into broad and unexpected coalitions over the course of the crisis, including a strong contingent of far-right actors. These new networks united neo-Nazis, Identitarians, conspiracy theorists such as QAnon supporters, 'anti-vaxxers,' and left-wing esoterics and mystics in their opposition to the government. Coordinated by organisations such as the Berlin based 'Communication Point for Democratic Resistance' (Kommunikationsstelle für Demokratischen Widerstand), the Stuttgart based 'Lateral Thinking 711' (Querdenken 711), and the group 'Resistance 2020' (Widerstand 2020), amongst others, these various movement organisations have mobilised for street protest from late March onwards. The largest events, with thousands of participants, took place in Stuttgart, Munich, and Berlin. Demonstrators typically disrespected safety and hygiene rules such as wearing face masks or maintaining physical distance. Far-right infiltration of the protests became particularly evident when far-right extremists performed a widely mediatised 'storm on the parliament' in late August, carrying the historical war flag of the former German Empire.

In addition to these new networks and coalitions, Germany's established far-right groups also continued to mobilise for pre-existing street protest campaigns—despite the increased infection risks. For instance, the largest far-right street movement, Dresden based Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA), took back to the streets in May after a brief period of virtual protest. More extreme segments of Germany's far-right scene also reappeared on the streets in the context of the crisis. One example is Pro Chemnitz, which received international attention during the xenophobic riots in the eastern German city of Chemnitz in the summer of 2018. Having failed to mobilise after the riots, the group organised street demonstrations together with representatives of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and the National Democratic Party (NPD). These illegal demonstrations were set up as decentralised gatherings, creating difficulties for the police to disperse them.

Over the course of the year, far-right street protest related to the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore some novel strategies and reinforced the public display of previously existing themes and frames. The networking and coalition building between actors from across the political spectrum, including far-right extremists and conspiracy

theorists, was often compared to a so-called anti-democratic Querfront, recalling the extremist attacks on the democratic state during the Weimar Republic. Conspicuously, the far-right typically framed their public protest as acts of necessary and heroic resistance against the so-called 'corona-dictatorship' by an 'authoritarian' or 'totalitarian' political establishment. Indeed, they claimed the role of chief protector of constitutionality and civil liberties, as well as the economy. A selective reading of the past and collective memory became a key strategy to sustain this claim.

PIS'S POLAND: THE RADICAL RIGHT IN POWER

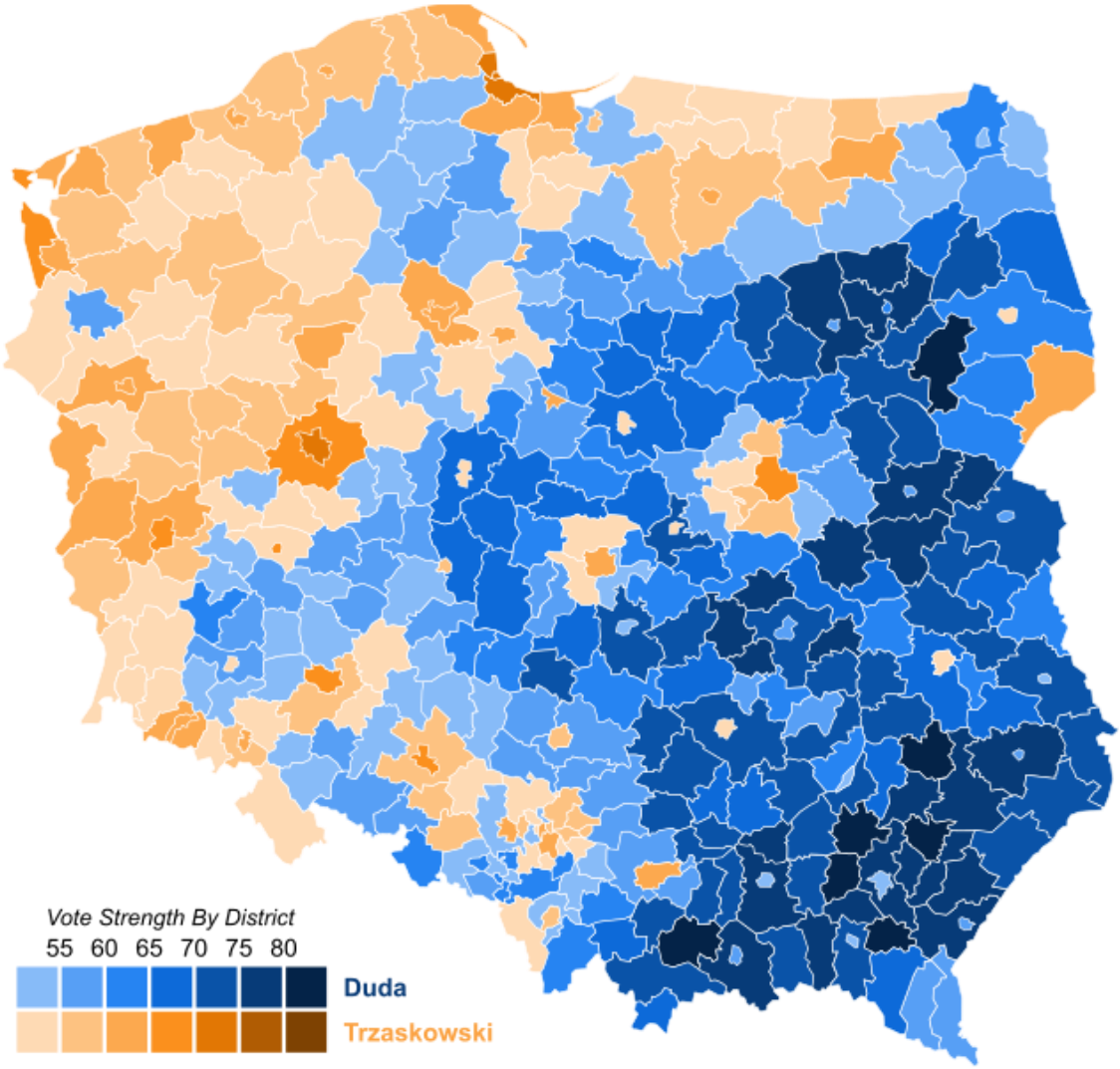
MICHAEL ZELLER

When the first wave of COVID-19 infections spread across Europe, several countries in eastern Europe were noted for being only slightly affected by the virus. Governments in these countries, including several populist radical right parties, crowed about how swift action—early lockdowns and imposition of mask requirements—prevented the sorts of outbreaks wreaking havoc in western Europe. Poland and its populist radical right governing Law and Justice (PiS) party were among those that stemmed the early tide of COVID-19—even going to the length of restricting the size of religious services, a significant step in the famously Catholic country. But managing an initially effective response to COVID—a victory in the spring proved fleeting as autumn brought swelling levels of infection—did nothing to distract PiS from continuing its autocratic agenda. During 2020 this agenda focuses most prominently on two themes: (1) opposition to abortion and (2) to homosexuality and so-called 'LGBT ideology.'

Apart from a handful of other conspicuously religious countries, Poland has the strictest legal prohibitions on abortion in Europe. The PiS government, with the full-throated support of Poland's Catholic episcopacy, sought to tighten those restrictions further in 2016, resulting in massive protest mobilisation that ultimately compelled the government to drop the proposal. The government seized on the supposed insulation from protest afforded by anti-COVID measures, advancing a proposal in April and acting on a legal ruling in October that limits abortion to cases of "rape, incest or a threat to the mother's health and life". Yet, as in 2016, popular protest has compelled the government to back down. Nevertheless, these moves against the health and reproductive rights of women has been accompanied by a push to leave the Istanbul Convention, which commits signatories to combatting violence against women, and instead to support 'traditional families.' Such steps, cast as antithetical to traditional gender roles, are a central feature of PiS's action in 2020.

Staunch opposition to LGBTQ rights has been the other defining feature. Support for 'traditional families' and firm opposition to so-called 'LGBT ideology' were central planks in the platform of President Andrzej Duda's successful re-election campaign. Duda's

campaign deployed striking rhetoric: the LGBTQ community was compared to, on several occasions, the evils of communism, Nazism, and the plague; PiS MP and campaign representative Przemysław Czarnek bluntly said, "Let's stop listening to these idiocies about human rights. These people are not equal with normal people." Such stark, polarising rhetoric garnered Duda a narrow electoral victory with 51% of the vote—but unsurprisingly produced a visibly polarised result. The electoral map below displays the sharp political divide between west and east and between urban and rural Poland. Most troublingly, Poland is distinctly ill-equipped to handle this form of polarisation.



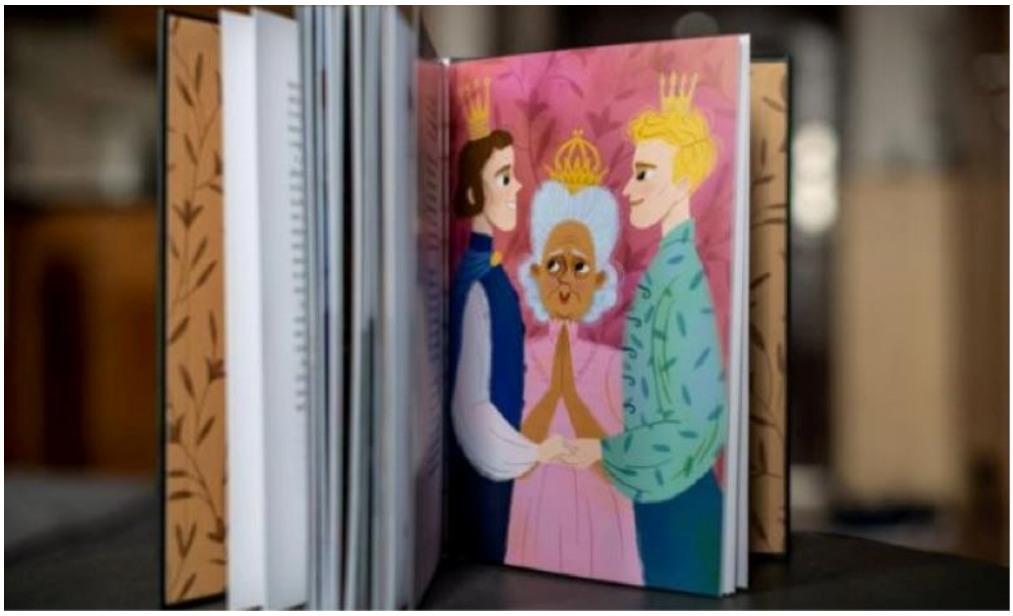
2020 Polish Presidential Election Map. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020_Polish_presidential_election_-_2nd_round_results.svg.

Even before the COVID-19 outbreak Poland was already dealing with a once-in-a-generation constitutional crisis regarding its judiciary. The onset of the pandemic has done

nothing to slow, indeed, may have accelerated, the PiS government's autocratic machinations. President Duda's re-election has solidified PiS's hold on power and reinvigorated the political will to enact a radical agenda characterised by religious conservatism. In doing so, PiS relies on the support of the Catholic Church and its adherents and right-wing communities in the east. 2020 has confirmed the empowerment of these conservative and reactionary forces, ensuring populist radical right politics will continue to hold sway in Poland for several years.

HUNGARY'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: RISING XENOPHOBIA AND AN ATTACK ON LGBTQ

DR KATHERINE KONDOR



Inside the book *Meseország Mindenkié*, an illustration accompanying the story about Cinderella. Photograph by Márton Neményi (Transindex.ro). Source: https://777blog.hu/2020/10/12/a-meseorszag-mindenkie-ugy-margojara/.

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic hit Hungary in early March, with two Iranian students being reported as the first two infections; two days later the Hungarian government suspended issuance of visas to Iranian citizens and, ultimately, the students were expelled from the country. The governing far-right FIDESZ party eventually closed the country's borders and restricted entry only to Hungarian citizens. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his party have long spouted xenophobic and anti-migrant views, most especially since the 2015 refugee crisis which saw a national anti-migrant billboard campaign. Opportunities were not lost with this pandemic, as 'foreigners' are scapegoated as the main source for the spread of the virus; indeed, the Hungarian government has been accused of weaponising the pandemic to fuel xenophobic attitudes. Along with several other controversial actions, such as the emptying of 33,000 hospital beds and silencing journalists, the government passed the Authorisation Act, effectively giving Orbán the power to rule by decree. As one of their first actions with this new power, the government

passed a law mandating that transgendered people only be recognised according to their sex at birth. The government also announced that disseminating 'fake news' about the pandemic, or the government's response to it, is a crime punishable by up to five years in prison; as a result of this several people were arrested and detained after criticising the government on social media (which some likened to being picked up by the black cars of the socialist era), although none have been charged.

The end of summer saw a continuation of the government's anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, exacerbated by the publication of a new children's book in late September. The book Meseország Mindenkié, ('Wonderland is for Everyone') presents 17 chapters about different young protagonists who vary in their identities, not only LGBTQ+ but including several others; for example, the story of the three-eared rabbit who is bullied for looking different. The publication of this book was met with protests by the extreme-right Our Homeland Movement, and the eventual shredding of the book on video by one of the party's representatives. This prompted major controversy and several actions by ultra-conservative and far-right organisations attempting to ban the book and intimidate supporters. Days later, Orbán stated on public service radio: "With respect to homosexuals, Hungary is a tolerant and patient country. But there is a red line that may not be crossed, and I will summarise my views like this: Leave our children alone!" Incidentally, Putin said a similar statement in 2014, which is quite ominous given the path Orbán's government has taken since.

Image of a Facebook post by FIDESZ on 4 October 2020, stating "Hungary, with respect to homosexuality, is a tolerant and patient country, but there is a red line which cannot be crossed. LEAVE OUR CHILDREN ALONE." Source: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/FideszHU).

As the country entered a second wave of COVID-19 infections, Orbán's government continued to use the pandemic to further its political agenda. Indeed, the government did not waste any time after announcing a Second Authorisation Act on November 10th, again giving Orbán the power to rule by decree for 90 days; at this time the government also announced new strict measures to fight the pandemic, which included, among other things, a curfew and a ban on large gatherings. The following day, Orbán's government proposed amendments to the constitution, which include a restriction to the notion of public funds in order to refuse freedom of information, making it mandatory that children be raised by "Christian cultural values," that is, defining a mother as female and father as male, and the inability for someone to change gender after birth; these amendments bar same-sex couples from adopting, but single parents can request exemption through special ministerial permission (see the Hungarian Helsinki Committee's detailed summary). Additionally, at 23:59 on November 10th, one minute before the pandemic measures barring outdoor gatherings (and, hence, the ability to protest) went into effect, the government proposed a change to election law, making it impossible for coalition governments to run in elections and effectively wiping out the opposition. In addition to the threat of a crumbling healthcare system and soaring infection numbers, the prospects for liberal democracy in Hungary in 2021 do not look particularly hopeful. It is questionable as to whether, or how, the new decisions of the European Commission will affect Hungary, but Orbán has not been slowed in the past.

THE BAN OF GOLDEN DAWN: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR GREEK DEMOCRACY AND FUTURE OF THE GREEK FAR RIGHT

MAIK FIELITZ, VASILIKI TSAGKRONI, & ANDREAS DAFNOS

Protest in Athens related to the trial of Golden Dawn. Photograph by Costas Baltas/Reuters. Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-10-07T072153Z_29128117_RC2JDJ9JLHZ6_RTRMADP_3_GREECE-GOLDEN-DAWN-TRIAL.jpg?resize=770%2C513.

On October 7th, the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn was declared a criminal organisation by the three-member Criminal Court of Appeals in Athens. For years, Golden Dawn made international headlines for blatant references to historic fascism, its paramilitary violence, and open animosity towards liberal democracy. In times of crisis, this formerly fringe organisation of the Greek far right developed into the third most popular political party with as much as 15% in the polls after its election into parliament in 2012. The murder of the anti-fascist Pavlos Fyssas in September 2013 changed the state's response to the neo-Nazi threat: accused of leading a criminal organisation, Golden Dawn's leadership, ringleaders, as well as rank and file members involved in massive crimes faced a historic trial—the biggest trial of a far-right organisation since Nuremberg—

that lasted five and a half years, including 453 sessions and 216 witnesses, and ended with 12 former MPs in jail. In addition, 57 Golden Dawn members and associates were convicted in October.

With the legal ban of an anti-democratic challenger, the Greek state has employed one of the most radical methods of militant democracies to contain extremist threats. This procedure has been contested from multiple sides: the Greek far right accuses state institutions of leading a political trial; the left criticises the proceeding for reacting much too late as the criminal action of Golden Dawn dates back to the 1980s; and experts contest the fragile indictment. In fact, the post-dictatorial democracy in Greece is poorly prepared for scenarios when (far-right) extremist challengers make a bid for power. Unlike other European countries, Greece has no constitutional option to ban political parties once they have been authorised to participate in elections. Hence, the trial has far more extensive implications for Greek democracy, but also for the future of the Greek far right.

Undoubtedly, the verdict in the trial against Golden Dawn marks an important moment in the social and political life of Greece. In a recent post, Daphne Halikiopoulou puts forward three reasons: the verdict (1) vindicates the actions, on a symbolic level, of family members, victims, and activists who opposed the neo-Nazi party over the years; (2) shows that the rule of law has been maintained, ensuring that punishment will follow crimes; and (3) proves, on a political level, that institutions can be independent and resilient.

However, it would be premature to conclude that the trial has caused the demise of the far right in Greece. The far right is a multi-faceted phenomenon and takes different forms. Besides, it is observed that the so-called "mainstreaming of far right" discourse and ideas can undermine liberal democracies. In other words, in order to minimise the threats posed by the far right, modern societies need to detach from its agenda. Beyond that, a recent report by the Center for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo found that Greece has experienced more far-right violence (per capita) than any other Western European country in the period from 2016 to 2019. At the same time, we should not neglect the fact that the far right is still present in the Greek Parliament; the last general election saw Greek Solution, a small far-right party, secure 10 seats and 208,806 votes in total.

A lesson we can draw is how Golden Dawn, a criminal organisation with a history of violence, anti-democratic leanings, and neo-Nazism, found space in the Greek democratic

system to spread a nationalist ideology and attract the attention of part of the electorate that brought it into parliament. In the Greece of a financial, socio-political, and refugee crisis, Golden Dawn did come as a surprise to a few. But nationalism, the core of the party's ideology, did not as it was already deeply rooted in Greek society before the party's emergence. Despite the fact that the party appeared as an anti-establishment and anti-austerity alternative, which made it captivating to voters, its nationalistic ideas made it equally attractive. It is the essence of nationalism in Greek society that we need to reflect on when we think of the future of the far right in Greece. From LA.O.S. to Golden Dawn, to Greek Solution and to Greeks for the Fatherland, nationalism is the core ideology that can be found in all organisations of the far right. So as long as roots of nationalism continue to grow and be nurtured at a societal level, then the far right will continue to have a place in the Greek political scene.

Finally, the drama of Golden Dawn is not entirely over. Even though its leadership is behind bars, their online outlets are still propagating calls for perseverance and the youth sections organise actions in the streets. Two Golden Dawn convicts are fugitive and refuse to accept their prison sentences. The party has been a life project for die-hard neo-Nazis. Those who formed the hard core of the organisation will not meekly surrender to the decision of the court. Recapitulating the threat of Golden Dawn leader Nikos Michaloliakos from 2013—"When they forbid us, they are opening the gates of hell"—the threat for radicalisation is real and the violent action of various far-right groupuscules during the last years gives us a glimpse of the militants prepared for vindictive action.

FROM ANTI-ISLAM PROTESTS TO FASCIST CELLS: AUSTRALIA'S VOLATILE RADICAL RIGHT MILIEU IN 2020

MARIO PEUCKER

Failed street-level mobilisation in Australia. Photo by author.

Not much is left of the Australian radical right that rose in the mid-2010s in a socio-political context of heightened moral panic concerning the role of Islam in society. This year, most of the radical right groups that organised street protests against mosques, refugees, or alleged Black-on-White crimes between 2015 and 2019 are gone or defunct. That far-right groups form and fracture often within the time span of only a few years is well known, but the demise of individual groups rarely marks the decline of radical right milieus. This remains true in the Australian context where group demobilisation has coincided with fundamental changes in structures and tactics of the far right.

Already in 2018, research on the radical right in Australia identified a trend of increased radicalisation. This was evident in the ideological shift from a culturally exclusivist, often dehumanising anti-Islam agenda, towards more racialised narratives around so-called 'white genocide.' As this ideological hardening continued, the 'White identity under threat' agenda is now, in 2020, more prominent in Australia's radical right than ever before. Anti-Islam narratives have not disappeared, but rather been incorporated

into this grand narrative related to the 'Great Replacement,' which was also central to the ideological motivation for the murderous terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand by an Australian man.

This ideological shift has gone hand in hand with organisational changes. Notwithstanding the continuous low-visibility activities of certain 'old-school' neo-Nazi groups such as Combat 18, new networks with an explicit fascist outlook have emerged in 2020. These networks have formed as openly neo-Nazi cells merged with groups that have their origins in the anti-Islam movement of the mid-2010s, when they strategically used the widespread moral panic around Islam to push their ethno-nationalist agenda.

These developments were influenced by changing political and discursive opportunity structures and, related to that, failures of far-right groups to mobilise on what they consider a 'silent majority.' At least three interconnected factors appear central to this formation.

First, the Christchurch attacks in March 2019 forced people within the radical right to reconsider their political views, or at least face the fact that anti-Muslim hatred can ultimately lead to such murderous violence. It seems highly plausible that many who used to sit on the periphery of the radical right decided to disassociate themselves.

This is related to the second factor: in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack mainstream social media companies increased their efforts to take down prominent far-right accounts. Those with a higher level of dedication and deeper ideological (and possibly personal) connections to the radical right migrated to alt-tech social media sites which are less moderated and even more of an ideology-reinforcing echo chamber than Facebook or Twitter. In Australia, the platform of choice for the radical right has become Gab, where the sub-group 'Australia' saw skyrocketing membership numbers (from fewer than 4,500 in March 2019 to over 11,200 in June 2019), and more recently Telegram.

The third factor is related to the diminishing moral panic around Islam as ISIS received less media attention and jihadist terror attacks declined sharply. Anti-Islam rhetoric no longer mobilises people the way it did in the mid-2010s, and the Christchurch terror attack where 51 Muslims were murdered also contributed to shifts in the public climate, which may still be negative towards Islam in substantial segments of society, but seems less conducive for continuous political mobilisation and recruitment.

Recent far-right mobilisation in Australia has focused on low intensity activism like stickering. Photo by author.

The contraction of the radical right milieu into more ideologically dedicated and personally connected cells and networks affects the way these actors try to spread their narratives and recruit new supporters. It has become increasingly obvious that attempts to mobilise large crowds (the 'silent majority') at street rallies failed. There have been no significant public protests organised by the radical right since January 2019. Instead, radical right groups have engaged in clandestine stickering and postering blitzes in predominately left-leaning suburbs and small-scale provocations of social justice oriented public events on climate action, anti-racism, or indigenous recognition.

The decreasing public presence of the radical right does not imply a diminishing threat level. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case. Australia's domestic intelligence agency (the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) revealed that their right-wing extremist case load has increased from around 10-15% in 2016 to almost 40% in 2020. Australia's radical right remains highly volatile, maybe more than ever; and during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed a further blurring of the boundaries with the emergence of more ideologically ambiguous movements such as QAnon, as well as Australia's version of U.S. based Sovereign Citizens.