

Organisation Research Unit



YEAR IN REVIEW REPORT

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DECEMBER 2021

CARR ORGANISATION RESEARCH UNIT YEAR-IN-REVIEW 2021

To cite this document:

Zeller, M. C. (Ed.) (2021). "CARR Organisation Research Unit Year-In-Review 2021". CARR Report. London, UK: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right.

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 2021.

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 C. ZELLER

In 2021, dynamics and trends generated by the pandemic continued to unfold—not least among far-right social forces. Members of CARR’s [Organisation Research Unit](#) (ORU) have helped to reconnoitre these developments throughout the year with scholarly and policy publications (see the bibliography of members’ publications this year at the end of this introduction). Furthermore, several ORU members and other CARR Fellows participated in a [project to identify proscribed right-wing extremist organisations](#) in the United Kingdom and the states of the European Union. Further reporting about this project is forthcoming. In this report, ORU members take a conceptual approach to analysing the contemporary far right.

Far-right violence marred the first days of 2021 as extremists rioted at the United States Capitol on 6 January. Fittingly, then, Andreas Dafnos’s analysis of competing discourses among rioters leads this report. With his colleagues in the SPARTA research project, Andreas reveals the internal dynamics of the rioters, namely that there is contention within this group. Several rioters were not even particularly supportive of Donald Trump. Revealing varying opinions among rioters helps to illuminate how different online discourses lead to different types of action, and to reveal the heterogeneity within far-right groups that are often portrayed as homogenous.

In countries around the world, the pandemic has accelerated the rate of far-right activity online. The resultant fluidity of far-right activism, unmoored to traditional organisations, has led some to argue that the contemporary far right is ‘post-organisational.’ William Allchorn examines the veridicality of this claim by looking at the scene in the United Kingdom. Though the data suggests the post-organisational perspective is premature, ongoing developments may lend greater credence to it.

2021 was a particularly consequential year for the far right in Germany. Following a right-wing extremist riot outside the German parliament in October 2020, a wave of mobilisation against COVID-19 restrictions continued. Maik Fielitz and Michael Zeller

discuss how conspiracism has become the main dynamo of German far-right activism, spurring on new interactivity among movements and political parties. Sabine Volk shows that it is mistaken imagine that all these actors are violent; while most engage in ‘discursive violence,’ routinely dehumanising whole social groups, several—such as Generation Identity and PEGIDA—are committed to nonviolent activism. Nevertheless, as Agata Kałabunowska explains, German security services have started to recognise the ‘New Right,’ including Generation Identity, as a threat. This threat recognition, however, is not based on violent activity, but rather the New Right’s radicalising, anti-democratic rhetoric and their connection to violent far-right elements. With the recent inauguration of a new centre-left government in Germany, both far-right mobilisation and discussion of responsive policy measures looks set to continue developing apace.

In the final contribution, Alessio Scopelliti presents a distinction between established and new radical right parties and the cleavages on which they are founded. This conceptualisation can help researchers and observers better understand how different radical right parties form strategies and operate within different political contexts.

Taken together, the pieces in this report offer conceptual lenses to understand some of the most significant developments for the organised far right in 2021 and beyond.

CAPITOL HILL RIOT: ANALYSING THE DISCOURSE OF FAR-RIGHT INDIVIDUALS IN ONLINE SPACES

DR ANDREAS DAFNOS

On 6 January 2021 in Washington D.C., the Capitol Hill Riot (CHR) was a shocking moment for the American society, which saw hundreds of people storming the Capitol in an attempt to stop the counting of electoral college votes. The attack was the result of the denial of former President Donald Trump and his supporters to accept his loss in the 2020 presidential election. Among the violent crowd, whose behaviour led to the [death of four people and the injury of hundreds](#), there were various far-right groups and individuals. These included, among others, [pro-Trump activists, conspiracy theorists, and unlawful militia groups](#).

The riot was not an isolated and spontaneous event. In the weeks between the election on 3 November 2020 and the riot, [several protests](#) were organised in the country that took the form of rallies, marches, and even clashes between Trump supporters and counter-protesters. In December 2020, for example, the Proud Boys, an extreme-right group, fought with Antifa counter-protesters after a peaceful demonstration in Washington D.C. that was organised by Trump supporters; as a result of the violent clashes, [four people ended in hospital with stab wounds](#).

However, the street arena was not the only space in which the far right expressed its views and opposition to the new political situation. In fact, the far right, in the weeks and months before the CHR, used social media platforms [to spread political information, engage with \(like-minded\) individuals, and organise action](#). More broadly, recent research has shown that [new internet technologies](#) constitute an attractive space to people inspired by far-right ideologies. Therefore, and in relation to the CHR, it is rather important to analyse the online discourses of far-right sympathisers before, during, and after the riot in order to better understand the different paths and mechanisms of interactions.

SPARTA, a Research Project

At [SPARTA](#), an interdisciplinary research project at the Universität der Bundeswehr München, we are particularly interested in this aspect of far-right politics and the CHR. Our aim is to analyse both qualitatively and quantitatively the differing opinions that can be observed within the online ecosystem of far-right activists. Although [previous analysis](#) on the CHR has focused on the strategic methods that have united the various factions of the far right, our work has been inspired by studies that look at their differences. It is worth noting that these differences may result [in multiple sub-cultures that have their own identity](#). Given that the far right consists of [both radical right and extreme right groups](#), it is not surprising that the current literature has in multiple cases shown its tendency for fragmentation and infighting.

SPARTA's Approach

Our analysis at SPARTA is based on the concept of ‘conspiratorial narratives’ that has been advanced by [Stephane Baele](#) and is defined “as a story which integrates, in a single teleological explanation for the alleged suffering of a given social group, a large range of events from past and present that are allegedly hidden and provoked by various nefarious archetypal actors.” In essence, the concept helps explain why, when, and against whom violence happens. Of particular interest here is the idea that the binary classification of people into in-group and out-group categories is not sufficient to explain the complexity of human interactions. This is the reason why Baele also suggests the inclusion of another category: the hybrid group. This category refers to those who have (broadly) betrayed the in-group and tried to promote the interests of the out-group. The result of this process is that the notion of hybridity and how different categories of people are defined and understood also determines the types of action that are being proposed by far-right activists. The resulting argument is that hybridity and the different logics of action lay the groundwork for infighting.

SPARTA's Contribution

Our data, drawn from four different platforms (theDonald.win, 8kun, 4chan, and Twitter) indeed showed that several people were labelled as traitors in far-right

discourses online. Donald Trump was the political actor who was most widely discussed as a “traitor.” Although some voices asserted that Trump was a saviour who made America great again, there was opposition to this view that claimed he was part of a system in American politics that is deeply flawed. Regarding the CHR, these differing opinions within the far-right community resulted in different types of action and were the reason for infighting. Depending on who was defined as part of the hybrid group, there were differing levels of support for the riot, while the justification also varied. More precisely, those driven by an accelerationist agenda (which aims “[to bring about the failure of the ideologies that prevail in any given system or country](#)”), and who thought that Trump was part of the problem, viewed the violent unrest as a means to cause further chaos.

Finally, our analysis shows that a thorough analysis of online discourses is needed to comprehend the infighting between far-right activists during the CHR, how it was caused, and what it meant when different categories of people were defined as part of the hybrid group. This is the reason why we think the concept of ‘conspiratorial narratives’ is a useful framework to describe the development of the interactions mentioned above in different social media platforms. At SPARTA we are currently developing computer-assisted tools to test these ideas with big data.

TOWARDS A TRULY POST-ORGANISATIONAL UK FAR RIGHT? THE USEFULNESS OF A NEWLY EMERGENT CONCEPT

DR WILLIAM ALLCHORN

Despite [recent hype](#) around a post-organisational phase in extremist movements, the notion of a decentralised, leaderless group or movement – at least on the far right – is not a recent innovation. As far back as 1992, [Louis Beam](#) coined the concept of “leaderless resistance” to describe the need for white supremacists to abandon planning in large groups, and to instead “take action in small cells of one to six men”. Coming in the wake of the 1988 [Fort Smith Sedition trial](#), where fourteen white supremacists were accused of plotting to overthrow the United States Federal Government and conspire to assassinate federal officials, and the associated belief among extremists that it would destroy the whole of the American white supremacist movement, Beam encouraged this shift to smaller far-right organisations in order to limit the scope of damage done by the destruction of group organisations and infiltration.

Fast-forward to the present day and certainly the sheer number of far-right terror groupuscules, alt-right influencers, and extra-parliamentary actors - without membership lists, hierarchical structures, or formal orders of association - have blossomed as a result of the Web 2.0 and alt-tech age of the internet. With a lot of individuals and groups nowadays simply existing as [loosely affiliated and incorporated organisations](#) on an online Telegram chat or Discord server, the ability to quantify movement [cohesiveness, unity, and impact](#) is becoming more and more difficult for researchers and practitioners alike. In a forthcoming contribution for Routledge’s Handbook of Far-Right Extremism in Europe, I apply the concept of post-organisation to the UK far-right protest scene. Using measures of organisational disunity and strategic diversity and ideological unity as a proxy for the level of post-organisation, I hope to shine a light on how these post-organisational dynamics work out in practice.

Here, post-organisation is defined - in relation the far right - as a decentralised, non-hierarchical movement that requires little or no organisational unity in order to work broadly in the same tactical direction and towards similar ideological goals.

Finding 1: Organisational (Dis)Unity

In the chapter, I first test the extent to which the UK far-right movement is organisationally unified, as measured by the number of groups that ebb and flow over time. Taking the UK as a case study and [CARR's FRGB dataset](#) as a starting point: there has indeed been a consistent upward trend of subnational protest organisations in recent years.

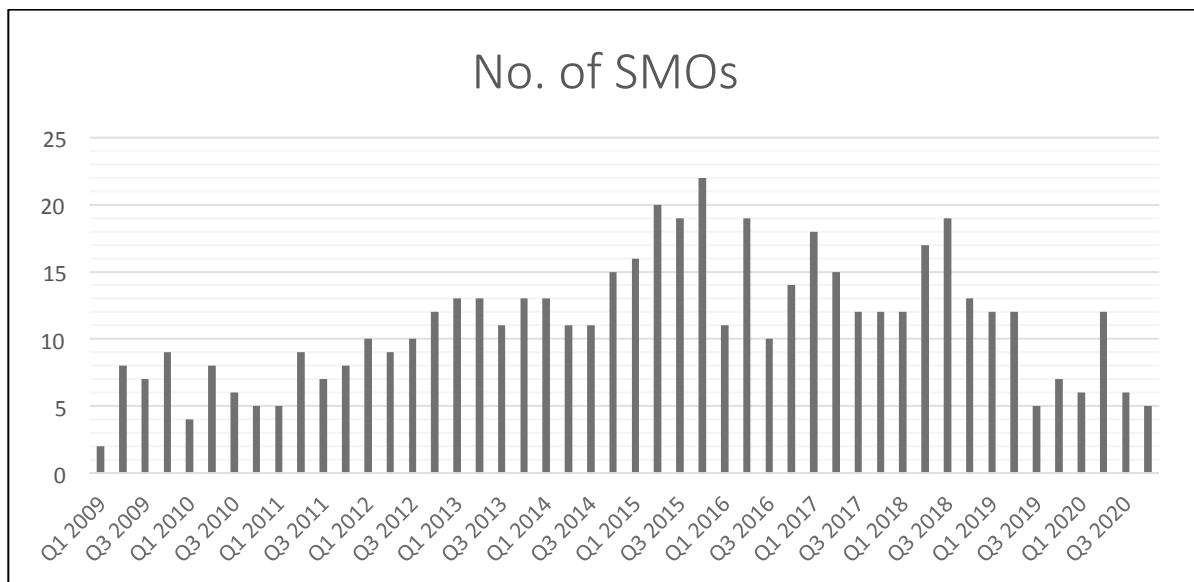


Figure 1: Number of Far-Right Social Movement Organisations in the UK (Q1 2009-Q4 2020) (Source: Allchorn, W. & Dafnos, A. (2020) "[Far-Right Mobilisations in Great Britain: 2009-2019](#)" London, UK: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right)

This increase in the volume of actors is not surprising for the UK scene. As written about by Dr Andreas Dafnos and myself [elsewhere](#), the implosion of key electoral actors (like the British National Party and the UK Independence Party) and the rise of others aping key elements of the movement's agenda has both led to broader fragmentation and to a more closed opportunity structure for such organisations to develop into more formal political actors. What is interesting in Figure 1, however, is the more recent

slowdown in fragmentation.¹ This suggests that there might be opportunities for [a predominant actor](#) to appear on the UK scene and unite otherwise disparate far-right ideological elements.

Finding 2: Ideological Unity

Another test that I use in the Routledge Handbook chapter in order to establish the extent of post-organisation in the UK far-right scene are the reasons that they mobilise nowadays. As shown in Figure 2, the most popular reasons in the past ten years have tended to be [some expression of anti-Muslim bigotry](#), including fears about the Islamisation of UK public life or spreading false claims about the nature of child grooming being an inherently Islamic problem.

¹ It is important to note here that the FRGB dataset does not always allow us to see the exact number of groups that participate in a protest event because sometimes we do not have information to hand to identify groups exactly. These are therefore based on counts abstracted from third-party sources (e.g. journalist reports, anti-fascist bulletins and social media records) that might actually be larger than those captured.

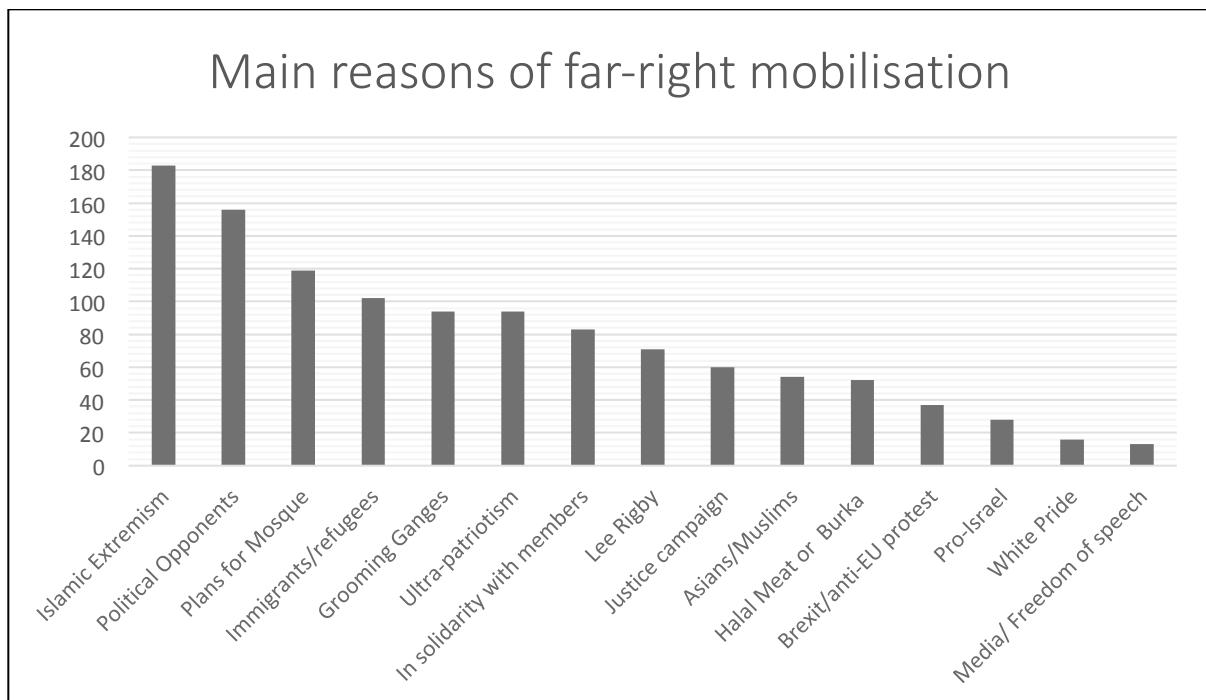


Figure 2: Main reasons of far-right mobilisation (Q1 2009-Q4 2020) (Source: Allchorn, W. & Dafnos, A. (2020) "[Far-Right Mobilisations in Great Britain: 2009-2019](#)." CARR FRGB Dataset Research Report 2020.1. London, UK: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right. P.16)

Looking at bit more closely at the proliferation of mobilisation rationales, visualised in Figure 3, it is clear that the trend towards ideological fragmentation is not so pronounced as from the organisational perspective (see figure 1) and peaks around similar points as the number of organisations that are present on the UK scene. In Q3 of 2015, Q2 of 2016 and Q2 of 2018, there are clear upticks in the range of rationales given – especially with the onset and emergence of white supremacist organisations (such as National Action and splinters of the BNP and English Defence League). Of course, there is a high degree of ideological unity in the core part of this period. Moreover, the level of rationales proliferating could also [simply be an organic outgrowth of an uptick in protest activity](#) by the likes of the Democratic Football Lads Alliance, Patriotic Alternative, and English Defence League.

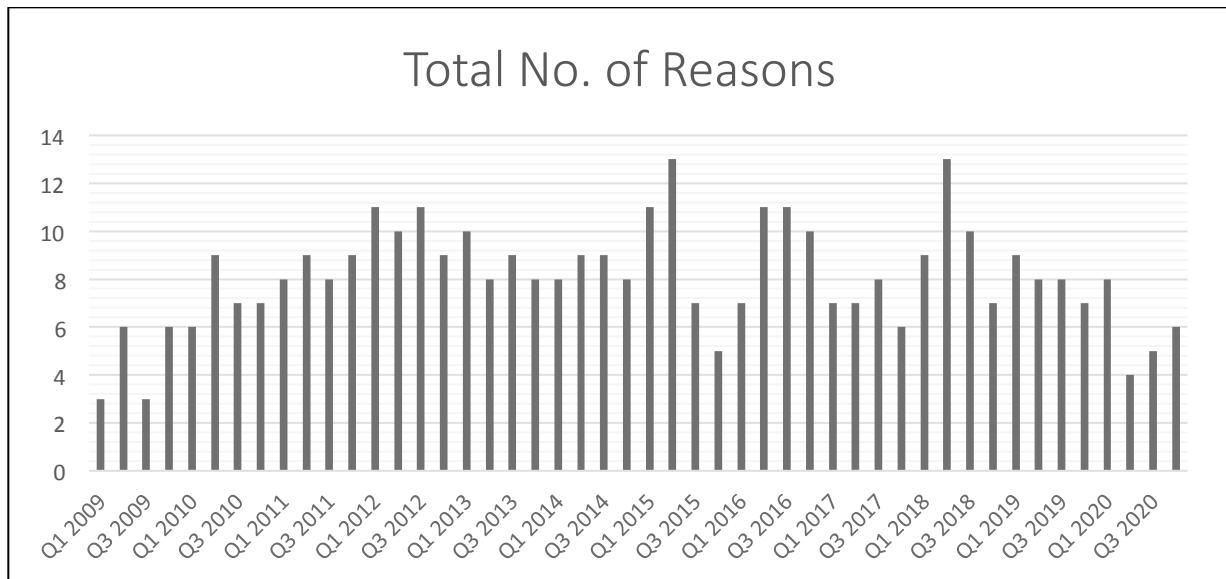


Figure 3: Total Number of Ideological Rationales given for UK Far-Right Mobilisations per Quarter (Q1 2009-Q4 2020) (Source: Allchorn, W. & Dafnos, A. (2020) “[Far-Right Mobilisations in Great Britain: 2009-2019](#)” London, UK: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right)

Finding 3: Strategic Diversity

A final test that I use in the chapter to get to the bottom of this post-organisational phase in movement development is the diversity of tactics used by organisations and how they differ over time. Contrary to the trends above, what is noticeable here is how the UK far right seems to be converging on strategies of demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, and disruption/vigilante type events over time in order to express their political views. This is again a symptom of the closed opportunity structure when it comes to engaging in formal party politics, but also opens up such forums as a meeting ground for far-right activists – with many co-sponsored demonstrations happening around key events in this period (e.g., [Lee Rigby’s death](#), the [Brexit/EU referendum](#), and the recent [Statue Defence protests](#) in 2020).



Figure 4: Number of Tactics used by the UK Far-Right (Q1 2009-Q4 2020) (Source: Allchorn, W. & Dafnos, A. (2020) “[Far-Right Mobilisations in Great Britain: 2009-2019](#)” London, UK: Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right)

Conclusion

The supposition that all forms of far-right activism are in a post-organisational phase is slightly premature – especially in the offline context. In the UK, whilst there has been a proliferation in organisations, ideological rationales, and tactics used to achieve political recognition and salience, the more recent picture seems to be a partial reversal of this trend, that is greater tactical unity and reduced organisational fragmentation. Of course, data from more countries (such as those in the [CREX CFP dataset](#)), a longer time period, and an analysis of online versus offline trends would offer a fuller picture; but in the UK case – harnessing the insights obtained from the FRGB Dataset - it appears that the far-right movement is becoming more cohesive, united, and impactful, shifting towards street protest and a more race-based – rather than cultural – forms of discrimination. Whether a predominant actor will emerge is yet to be seen, but it does pose the question of what could be the next leading actor and whether it could bring the post-organisational phase to an end.

LATERAL THINKERS? THE FAR RIGHT (AND) CONSPIRACISM IN GERMANY

MAIK FIELITZ & MICHAEL C. ZELLER

With the decrease of migration flows in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, far-right parties and movements in Europe have lost a key issue to mobilise electorates and supporters. In the case of Germany, established actors like the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) and PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*) filled the gap by heavily criticising the measures of the pandemic, fostering anti-establishment sentiments and sowing distrust in science and democracy. Yet the pandemic has also spurred new dynamics within the far-right scene, many of which have been generated by [rising conspiracism](#), the tendency to believe in conspiratorial explanations for major economic, political, and social developments thereby delegitimising democracy. The far right in Germany epitomises several of these emergent phenomena: conspiracism has proliferated among far-right supporters and other segments of the population, presenting the opportunity to capitalise on new cross-cutting cleavages; online conspiracism has fuelled a wave of offline protest activity; and new party actors purporting to represent this activism have arisen, generating far-right party competition.

New phenomena mediated through the digital spheres

As the pandemic continued significantly to limit face-to-face interactions, political discourse further moved to digital platforms and charged platform operators with great responsibility over trusted information and the mental wellbeing of their users. The increased intervention to moderate false information and to ban malicious actors has fostered a trend among far-right activists to move to alternative media platforms and promote an alternative reality. In fact, since late 2020 far-right groups received a [larger audience on Telegram](#) than on more mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. At the same time, [Telegram is home to many conspiracist worldviews](#) and a [large hub of the anti-vax movement](#).

Since early 2020, misinformation on the pandemic and conspiracist propaganda materials have mushroomed and attracted a much larger audience than some established newspapers. Among them are groups of the infamous conspiracy cult [QAnon](#) as well as [\(former\) celebrities](#) that campaigned against the COVID-19 restriction measures, generally motivated by a mix of attention hacking, political conviction, and economic interest. Several micro-influencers and groups networked via Telegram mobilised nationwide under different flags for mass protests that repeatedly escalated into violence. The number of relevant acts of violence related to this specific milieu [also increased, especially in the second and third waves of the pandemic](#). Security agencies even speak of [a new form of extremism](#) stemming from specific opposition to anti-COVID-19 measures and general disenchantment with democracy.

While [studies](#) on the composition of this milieu point to heterogeneity ,impact of far-right groups upon audiences influenced by such narratives has also been [discussed](#). Without a doubt, the pandemic presented an opportunity for the far right to reach new audiences and to position itself in the less politically structured movements. Yet, while there has been a distinct overlap in mobilising narratives and demands, the far right could not really capitalise on the mobilisation capacities the Querdenker milieu ([literally, 'lateral thinker'](#)) achieved In fact, many of those who joined demonstrations in the context of the pandemic had little experience in protest activities. However, in terms of online organisational structure, the far right is mainly present in a loose manner and on alternative media, which means that its capacity to mobilise sympathizers is in fact rather limited.

New dynamics in the movement sector

The proliferation of conspiracism is not limited to online networks, however. Demonstrations against COVID-19 restrictions and vaccinations, which began in 2020, continued in 2021 with events occasionally drawing thousands of participants. Often misleadingly grouped under the single moniker Querdenker, these protests—often consisting of multiple protests with different organisers on the same day—attract diverse constituencies, including far-right groups but also religious, wellness, and several

esoteric communities. Shared opposition to COVID-19 measures, participation in demonstrations, and ongoing online exchanges have imbued the metastasis of COVID-19 conspiracism with a syncretic quality, blending together various conspiracist narratives.

Demonstrations, particularly larger ones, have been marked by altercations with police and attacks on journalists. Local administrative courts have regularly issued bans under provisions of the Versammlungsgesetz (Law on Assemblies), usually referring to the state of the pandemic and to the likelihood that the specific protest would violate protective measures (e.g., [as in Berlin in August](#)). Yet banned demonstrations have often gone ahead despite court rulings. Of greater consequence for the future of these movement actors were the decisions throughout the year by most state offices for the Verfassungsschutz (Protection of the Constitution) to put them under observation. This permits the agencies to surveil specific organisations and their finances. In justifying their decisions, authorities often referred to the prevalence among the organisations and protests of right-wing extremists and antisemitic conspiracism.

In certain regions this is thoroughly justified. For example, in Saxony, with the regional movement [Freie Sachsen \(Free Saxonians\)](#), we can see that far-right and neo-Nazi activists can successfully exploit the discontent of the local population against the COVID-19 measures. Founded by the right-wing extremist lawyer Martin Kohlmann, this group (previously operating as ‘PRO Chemnitz’) participated in several COVID-19 denial demonstrations and repeatedly endorsed violence in the context of Querdenker protests. Other regions are less marked by the presence of far-right activism, such as the more mixed and often esoteric Querdenker scene in [Baden-Württemberg](#), but there too some groups are under [observation by the security services](#).

New competition in the party sector

The continuation of protests and other hostility to COVID-19 measures triggered new electoral dynamics in Germany. Several members of the AfD party voiced support for or even appeared at protests against COVID-19 restrictions—not to mention many MPs refusing to wear masks during parliamentary proceedings. In part, these actions aimed to win support and votes in September’s elections to the Bundestag (Federal

Parliament). However, whereas the AfD sought to coopt this support, new parties, more closely associated with the movement, emerged with hopes of gaining parliamentary seats. Among these, [Die Basis](#) is particularly noteworthy. This one issue party has largely been born in the context of the protests against COVID-19 measures and, with [1.4% in the elections](#), received more votes than all right-wing extremist parties like the NPD, Die Rechte, and Der Dritte Weg put together—and may have taken some important votes from the AfD.

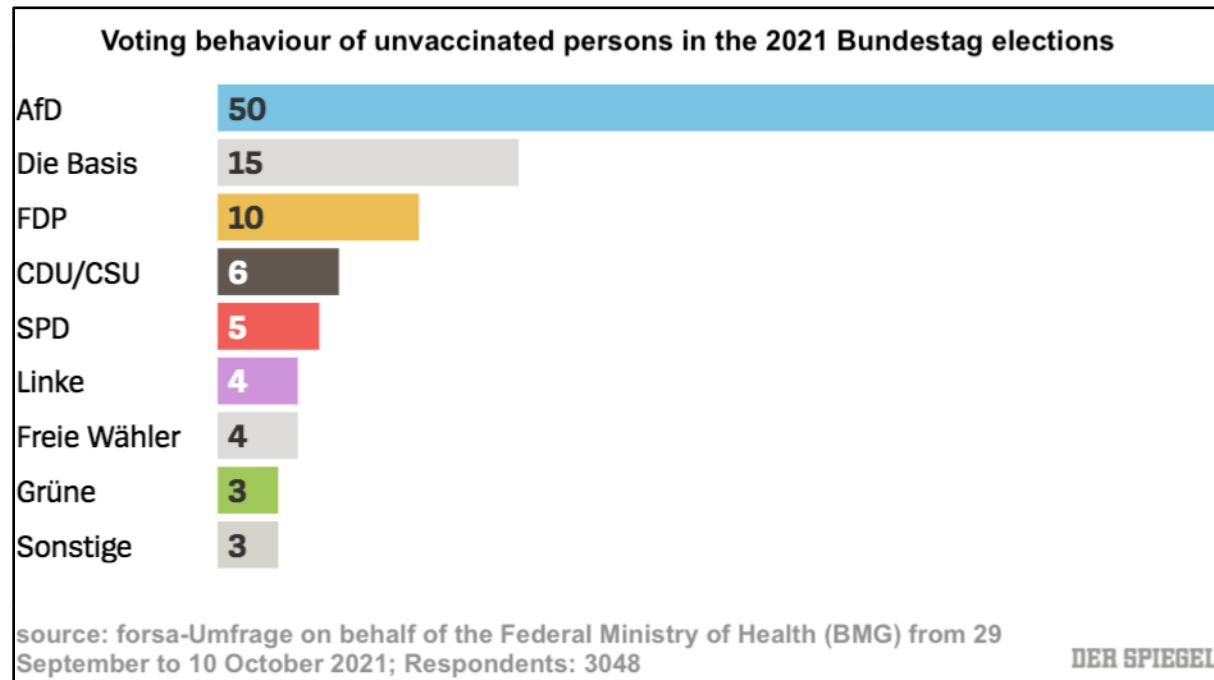


Figure 1: the voting behaviour of unvaccinated persons in the 2021 Bundestag elections

The emergence of the Querdenker milieu has divided parts of the AfD. While the eastern German factions promoted a close alliance with the Querdenker movements, the west German factions maintained a certain distance. However, in terms of voting behavior, a recent survey by [Der Spiegel](#), depicted in Figure 1, revealed that roughly half of unvaccinated individuals in Germany voted for the AfD. But the fact that 15% of unvaccinated voters supported the Die Basis suggests that the AfD may have [lost some voters](#) to this Querdenker party.

Beyond the east-west divide, studies imply a causal relationship [between AfD votes and infection rates](#). Together with the voting behaviour of unvaccinated people, this supports the conclusion that the decision to be vaccinated has for many become a choice of politics rather than health. This encapsulates how far-right (and adjacent) actors manage to polarise society and ultimately undermine trust in institutions and norms that are essential for social cohesion.

PEACEFUL PROTEST? EUROPEAN GRASSROOTS FAR-RIGHT ACTORS AND THE IDEA OF ‘NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE’

SABINE VOLK

This contribution draws from a [blog](#) piece published on openDemocracy and from a forthcoming publication with Manès Weisskircher in the Routledge Handbook on Nonviolent Extremism, edited by William Allchorn and Elisa Orofino.

Scholarship as well as media observers typically [associate](#) grassroots far-right actors with physical violence. The members of far-right organizations are typically imagined as aggressive hooligans or rancorous neo-Nazis who commit hate crimes against social minorities such as perceived immigrants or homosexuals. Indeed, in the context of the so-called European refugee crisis in 2015-16, hate crimes against asylum seekers homes and alleged foreigners surged across Europe. In 2021, images of the far-right riots in front of and inside the United States Capitol building reinforced understandings of the far right as inherently violent.

Nevertheless, in contemporary Europe nonviolent forms of action have become an equally important in the repertoire of far-right activism. In fact, a large number of grassroots actors refrain from using physical violence, instead drawing on forms of action that are not inherently violent such as peaceful demonstrations and online activism. Key examples among the transnational European far right are the youth organization “Generation Identity” (also: “Identitarian Movement”) and the originally German “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident” (PEGIDA). With branches across European countries, both organizations do not engage in violent forms of action. Rather, Generation Identity sets up highly symbolic performances, for instance at the European Union’s external borders, such as the Mediterranean or the Polish-Belarusian border, to protest against liberal immigration policies. PEGIDA’s core action repertoire is the demonstration, typically advertised as ‘peaceful protest’ against multicultural society, the political establishment, and leftist politics writ-large.



Image 1: "7 years of nonviolent resistance", PEGIDA demonstration, Dresden, Germany, 17 October 2021 (Source: Sabine Volk)

In fact, far-right actors go so far as to appropriate the notion of 'nonviolent resistance'. This ideal of peaceful protest stems from emancipatory political thought, crucially associated with the late American philosopher Gene Sharp (1928-2018) whose works inspired pro-democratic resistance movements across the world for several decades. According to Martin Sellner, leader of the Austrian branch of Generation

Identity and star of the pan-European youth movement, non-violent resistance must be the key strategy to overcome what he calls the left's 'opinion dictatorship': in a 2017 article in the journal 'Sezession'—published by Germany's leading far-right think tank—Sellner uses Sharp's writings to elaborate on the supposed parallels between Germany's 'leftist totalitarianism' and military dictatorships around the world. Since this supposedly totalitarian system suppresses the right via 'cultural hegemony', a concept that Sellner borrows from the left-wing intellectual Antonio Gramsci, the right-wing resistance needs to beat the system at its own game – that is, with ideas rather than violence. Sellner therefore calls for symbolic forms of protest, such as the Identitarian Movement's much mediatised [action](#) at Berlin's [Brandenburg Gate](#) in 2015, or the various '[Defend Europe](#)' missions in the Alps, Pyrenees and [Mediterranean Sea](#).



Image 2: "5 years ago: The peaceful occupation of the Brandenburg Gate Berlin", screenshot from a promotional video of Generation Identity, posted on Martin Sellner's Telegram channel, 26 August 2021.

According to international scholarship on the far right, organizations such as Generation Identity and PEGIDA should be classified as 'radical' rather than 'extreme' right. Indeed, scholars typically distinguish between radical and extreme right actors

based on their action repertoires. This strand of thought defines radical right actors as those refraining from using physical violence, while extremist actors “tend – circumstances permitting – to engage in aggressive militancy, including criminal acts and mass violence in their fanatical will for gaining and holding political power” (Bötticher, 2017, p. 74 emphasis in original).

While acting in a nonviolent way, the analysis of actors such as Generation Identity and PEGIDA however reveals that far-right grassroots activists engage in racist and dehumanizing discourse on social minorities and the liberal-democratic institutions of European states that may be considered as discursive violence. For instance, far-right rhetoric degrades Islam and (perceived) Muslims as backward, barbaric, and extremist. It also delegitimizes the political establishment of European democracies as corrupted and totalitarian. Finally, far-right discourse dehumanizes elected representatives and opposition politicians, especially from left-wing parties or allegedly representing leftist ideologies.

Such empirical observations have implications for theory-building in international scholarship on the far right. In light of the trend to adopt nonviolent forms of action in far-right street politics, while using racist and dehumanizing rhetoric against social minorities and the institutions of the European liberal democratic states, it becomes apparent that scholarly definitions of extremism must be broadened to include ‘extremism of thought’ (Richards, 2015, p. 371). Grassroots far-right actors thus might also be classified as extremist based on their ideology and discourse.

THREAT RECOGNITION: THE NEW RIGHT AND GERMANY'S DOMESTIC SECURITY AGENCY

DR AGATA KAŁABUNOWSKA

In 2021 for the first time, the German annual report concerning the protection of the constitution (*Verfassungsschutzbericht*) dedicated a separate chapter to the New Right (*die Neue Rechte*), listing it among right-wing extremist movements. The New Right is organisationally less structured than other right-wing groups. It focuses on intellectual rather than typical political work, and tries to delegitimise globalisation and other related phenomena, such as multiculturalism.

Although the view that the New Right is a part of the far-right scene is common among scholars, so far it has not been explicitly categorised as such or described as a threat to the liberal democratic order by Germany's domestic intelligence agency. A seemingly slight change in the typical structure of the *Verfassungsschutzbericht* exemplifies an important shift in the perception of the New Right. It also fits into a wider trend and follows a recent ban of the Génération Identitaire, a French New-Right group. These developments show that states and their security services are beginning to recognise the threat posed by New Right organisations.



Identitarian movement march in Berlin (Source: [dpa/Paul Zinken](#))

The annual report presents the New Right as an informal network of groups, individuals, and organisations whose political views range from "right-wing extremist to right-wing conservative" ([Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020](#)). The main reason for Federal Office's concern is the fact that the movement spreads anti-liberal and anti-democratic positions in society. It does so by operating in the pre-political sphere – not in parliaments but rather through protests and demonstrations as well as intellectual work delivered by New Right think tanks and magazines. The movement aims at spreading the idea of a counter-revolution from the right, often undermining human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law ([Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020](#)).

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution admits that the differentiation between constitutional and anti-constitutional acts of the New Right movements is difficult. A similar view is shared in the academic literature on the far right, which points out to the tactics used by New Right groups that may hinder classifications (see e.g. [Pfahl-Traughber 2020](#); [Langebach, Raabe 2016](#)). The ambivalence of this particular stream of thought and activism rests on the seemingly legitimate expressions of disappointment with modern – globalized and multicultural – society and the

unwillingness to act aggressively. New Right organizations are not known for engaging in violent riots and do not use typical far-right slogans while demonstrating. They rather preach the protection of national traits, point out mistakes made by ‘leftist-liberal’ European governments, and call for the awakening and renewal.

The Identitarians are widely considered an archetypal New Right movement. The German branch of the movement, classified by the Federal Office as an extreme-right organization, attracts young people by presenting itself as an alternative group aiming to protect the German and European culture, language, and heritage. *Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland* distances itself from the far right both in terms of the language it uses as well as the appearance of its projects. It does not show any admiration for the Third Reich, typical to many German far-right groups, but rather uses symbols and rhetoric focusing on ancient European history, including using a Spartan lambda as its main logo. The movement is also cautious about using explicitly xenophobic or racist slogans, focusing on the idea of [ethnopluralism](#). Nevertheless, both German and Austrian branches of the Identitarian movement attracted the attention of domestic intelligence agencies because of its strong opposition to cultural diversity, which undermines the ideas of human dignity and peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups.

A key characteristic of the New Right is its engagement in providing intellectual support for political claims. This intellectual work has accompanied the movement from its inception in the late 1960s and is marked by the mix of inspirations from both conservative, rightist thinkers as well as those associated with the political left. “Big narration, inspired by the left and decorated with right-wing ideas” ([Schellhöh 2018](#)) was developed by a range of intellectual circles, think tanks, and institutions throughout the years – also in Germany. One of the heirs of this tradition – the Institute for State Politics (Institut für Staatspolitik) – drew special attention in 2021.

Considered a think tank of the German New Right, the Institute was founded in 2000 with an office in Saxony-Anhalt, and is addressed in the aforementioned report of the *Verfassungsschutz*. In October 2021 it was disclosed that the Institute is also categorized as extremist by regional authorities in Saxony-Anhalt, which justifies monitoring the Institute and its members. The authorities’ rationale was not only the

worldview espoused by the Institute, but also its important role in the consolidation of the far-right scene in Germany. It has been called a ‘spiritual centre of gravity’ for the New Right ([Bingener 2021](#)).

Inclusion of the New Right in the newest *Verfassungsschutz* report suggests that this phenomenon presents a growing cause for concern to the Federal Ministry of Interior and the Federal Office of the Protection of the Constitution. The fact that organizations and institutions connected to this movement were listed among other extreme-right groups suggests that the New Right, although softer in its tactics and therefore seemingly less threatening, is treated as comparably problematic to the German liberal democratic order as other right-wing phenomena. It should be noted that despite mistakes in radicalisation prevention and counter-extremism activities in previous years, German authorities [quickly react](#) to the developments on the far-right scene. Consistent with the approach of other European countries, like France and Austria, they are now paying more attention to various and nuanced radical activities. Authorities acknowledge new threats both online and offline, and respond accordingly within respective political and legal frameworks.

THE USELESSNESS OF THE "NEW PARTY FAMILY" CATEGORY TO CLASSIFY RADICAL-RIGHT PARTIES

ALESSIO SCOPPELLITI

Lipset and Rokkan reached a major milestone in the political sciences publishing a seminal work on the *cleavage theory* in 1967. The Lipset-Rokkan thesis seeks to elegantly explain the genesis of *cleavage structures* that have been predominant in Western European societies in the 1960s looking to their historical roots since the Middle Ages. The authors identify four classical cleavage structures (State vs. Church, Centre vs. Periphery, Urban vs. Rural, Employers vs. Workers), which are anchored to the societal realm and, eventually, find political expression through political parties. To this end, a cleavage structure can be defined as a socially and culturally rooted conflict that shapes antithetical positions in societies through political parties. A major contribution from Lipset and Rokkan's theory is one of the main tasks of comparative researchers in party politics: the categorisation of party families. Scholars, therefore, employed the Lipset-Rokkan thesis in order to categorise party families according to their founding cleavage structure. Accordingly, if a political party is founded on one of the four classical cleavages, it should be linked to its corresponding party family². Nevertheless, since the late 1980s, scholars were increasingly interested in identifying the emergence of new cleavage structures. Among others, Kriesi and his colleagues³, Norris and Inglehart⁴, Hooghe and Marks⁵ identify three new cleavage structures (the integration/demarcation cleavage, the cultural backlash cleavage, the transnational cleavage) that differ in terms

² Such as the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats, the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Agrarian and the Regionalist parties.

³ Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2008) *West european politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European public policy*, 25(1), 109-135.

of the logic of the conflict (economic, cultural, institutional), but are similar in identifying the radical right as the party family that mostly mobilized these new ideological divides.

For this reason, the radical right party family is often categorised by the academic literature as a *new party family* (including the greens and the radical left).⁶ Chronologically speaking, the radical-right party family was developed and shaped by a group of intellectuals in the 1970s who criticised and rejected both communist and Western European social democratic values.⁷ This group of intellectuals founded GRECE (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne*, or 'Group of research and studies for European civilization'), which became a fountainhead developing and spreading the ideals of the New Right (*Nouvelle droite*): nativism, authoritarianism and illiberalism. In the 1980s, scholars would define the New Right as neo-Nazis or neo-Fascist, recalling the not-so-distant European dictatorships in Germany and Italy.⁸ Since the early 1990s, however, the radical-right parties (RRPs) have been distinguished from extreme right-wing parties and they are now identified as the *new cleavage parties* because they belong to a *new party family*.

However, the definition of "new party" is highly contested in the literature. When establishing the threshold between new parties and established parties, some authors do not consider the origin (or founding cleavage) of a party because "all parties experience frequent changes, though often to a very limited extent, in their ideological positions and platforms, but this does not make them necessarily new even to their habitual voters."⁹ Accordingly, although the RRPs are founded on a new cleavage structure, it is still a matter of debate whether all RRPs should automatically be defined as new. Indeed, the *novelty* of a party is often evaluated on whether it is organisationally

⁶ Emanuele, V., & Sikk, A. (2020). Party crashers? Modeling genuinely new party development paths in Western Europe. *Party Politics*.

⁷ Taguieff, P. A. (1993). Origines et métamorphoses de la nouvelle droite. *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 3-22.

⁸ Kaplan, J., Jeffrey Kaplan, A., Weinberg, L., & Weinberg, L. G. (1998). *The emergence of a Euro-American radical right*. Rutgers University Press.

⁹ Emanuele, V., & Chiaromonte, A. (2018). A growing impact of new parties: Myth or reality? Party system innovation in Western Europe after 1945. *Party Politics*, 24(5), 475-487.

new. Thus, I will propose two alternative factors to categorise parties that consider the organisational aspects of these complex organisations: *stability* and *age*.

Starting from the party stability, some authors suggest a broad definition of new parties¹⁰: they can be naturally formed after the establishment of previous parties or formed from other circumstances such as by merger, split, or reorganisation of former parties.¹¹ Since then, however, other research applies a narrower definition: for instance, Simon Hug¹² agrees with Peter Mair¹³ that there is a substantial difference between new parties created from the merger of separate entities and new parties that are founded as consequence of a split. In the first case, the party should not be considered new because established parties have merely reorganised in order to survive. In the second scenario, by contrast, the party should be considered new as it usually arises as challenger of its former party, the aim of which is ultimately to influence or, eventually, replace it. Still, other researchers impose stricter parameters for 'new parties'.¹⁴ Bartolini and Mair¹⁵ claim that new parties that are generated from splits or mergers of previous parties should not be considered new. Similarly, Sikk¹⁶ defines new parties as "not successors to any previous parliamentary parties, having a novel name and structure, and not having any important figures from past democratic politics among their major members".

Moving to party age, scholars also identify established parties according to how long these organisational forces have been readily known by the voters. For instance, when examining Lipset and Rokkan's work, the authors defined parties founded on the classical cleavage structures as *established* because "to most of the citizens of the West

¹⁰ Emanuele, V., & Sikk, A. (2020).

¹¹ Harmel, R., & Robertson, J. D. (1985). Formation and success of new parties: A cross-national analysis. *International political science review*, 6(4), 501-523.

¹² Hug, S. (2001). *Altering party systems: Strategic behavior and the emergence of new political parties in Western democracies*. University of Michigan Press.

¹³ Mair, P. (1990). *The west European party system*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

¹⁴ Emanuele, V., & Chiaramonte, A. (2018).

¹⁵ Bartolini, S., & Mair, P. (2007). *Identity, competition and electoral availability: the stabilisation of European electorates 1885-1985*. ECPR Press.

¹⁶ Sikk, A (2005) How unstable? Volatility and the genuinely new parties in Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research* 44: 391-412.

the currently active parties have been part of the political landscape since their childhood or at least since they were first faced with the choice between alternative "packages" on election day¹⁷. As such, one can argue that a party is to be considered as established because it has existed in the lifetime of at least two generations of voters, including those who witnessed the rise of the party and those that have always lived with the presence of this electoral choice. Therefore, the "established" status, that some parties rather than others have, should not be determined by the founding cleavage of the party¹⁸ (whether it is a classical or a new cleavage), but it should instead be determined by how long a party has existed in the life of voters.

Table 1 displays Western European political parties that were elected in the 2019 European Parliament Elections, grouped by founding cleavage (columns) and the novelty of parties (rows). The operational definition of founding cleavage is drawn from Mair and Mudde's¹⁹ focus solely on party origin, while the operational definition of novelty of parties can be qualified by the interplay of the two factors discussed above: party stability²⁰ and party age²¹.

¹⁷ Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: an introduction*. Free Press.

¹⁸ Gallagher, M., Laver M. and Mair P. (2011) *Representative government in modern Europe*. 5th edn. New York: McGraw-Hill.

¹⁹ Mair, P., & Mudde, C. (1998). The party family and its study. *Annual review of political science*, 1(1), 211-229.

²⁰ As regards party stability, I will follow Sikk's definition.

²¹ As regards party age, I follow Lipset and Rokkan's observation of existing parties of the 1960s referred as young parties in comparison with those parties founded in the 1920s (a timeframe of 40 years). Similarly, the established parties are those founded before the early 1980s, and the new parties founded from the late 1980s onwards. This is another reason why I am excluding RRPs from Eastern Europe as they were founded after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Type of parties	Countries	Founded on classical cleavage	Founded on new cleavage
		a	b
Established parties	Belgium	<i>Flemish Interest</i>	-
	Denmark	-	-
	France	-	<i>National Rally</i>
	Germany	-	-
	Greece	-	-
	Ireland	-	-
	Italy	<i>League</i>	-
	Luxembourg	-	-
	Netherlands	<i>Reformed Political Party</i>	-
	Portugal	<i>CDS – People's Party</i>	-
	Spain	-	-
	United Kingdom	<i>Democratic Unionist Party</i>	-
New parties	Belgium	-	-
	Denmark	-	<i>Danish People's Party</i>
	France	-	-
	Germany	-	<i>Alternative for Germany</i>
	Greece	-	<i>Greek Solution, Golden Dawn</i>
	Ireland	-	-
	Italy	-	<i>Brothers of Italy</i>
	Luxembourg	-	-
	Netherlands	-	<i>Forum for Democracy</i>
	Portugal	-	-
	Spain	-	<i>Vox</i>
	United Kingdom	-	<i>Reform UK</i>

Table 1 Distribution of RRP_s in Western European parties elected at the 2019 European Parliament elections Notes: The highlighted parties belong to the radical right party family according to ParlGov.

Scholars on the radical right can analyse a plethora of case studies that belong to this party family all over the European continent. From the Southern Europe to the Scandinavian Europe and from the Western Europe to the Eastern Europe, the radical right parties (RRPs) have become increasingly successful, having political implications at the national and international levels, with unpredictable long-term impacts. However, among all these European regions, the Western Europe can still provide a new niche in the literature on the radical right that has been neglected and refuses the "new party family"-category to classify RRPs, which is the study of the established RRPs. Indeed, when examining Table 1, you can observe that established and new RRPs are (almost) equally distributed (6 established RRPs and 8 new RRPs). Moreover, as you can notice, most of the established RRPs (except the National Rally) are founded on one of the four classical cleavages originally identified by Lipset and Rokkan. By recognizing this, the

identification of these parties paves the way toward other promising areas within the social and political sciences, such as electoral and public opinion research and the study of parties' strategies to adapt into new political contexts. Hopefully, this will open new avenues for the understanding of the contemporary radical right and how it has developed over the decades.

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