

ELECTORAL DYNAMICS OF THE EUROPEAN EXTREME RIGHT*

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ELECTORAL SUCCESSES

The recent electoral successes of the Extreme Right in France, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands are a testament to both the growth and the consolidation of movements which have combined many of the ideas of the old Extreme Right with modern populism. Without wishing to invoke the image of a new “march of the brown-shirts or “neo-fascist wave” across Europe, it is nonetheless clear that, despite ideological and contextual divergence, these populist parties are all benefiting from enduring crises in their respective party systems, as well as exploiting similar economic and social dynamics to their own electoral ends. This article considers the institutional bases to the gradual but persistent growth of support for Extreme Right parties in Europe, before looking at the social and ideological profile of the electorate to whom these extremist alternatives appeal.

Despite the considerable presence of such parties for the past two decades, two recent elections caused particular international furore. In the Netherlands, the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), ironically buoyed further by its charismatic leader’s assassination just over a week before the election, took second place winning 17% of the vote and 26 of the 150 seats. Despite the complete lack of political experience amongst most of its members, the LPF is on the brink of entering the new conservative government led by the CCD, together with the liberal VVD. Secondly, leaving aside the trauma caused by Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the French presidential election, the overall score of the Extreme Right in the first round (19.2%) confirmed that a party which had been buried by many commentators since its split in January 1999 was in fact alive and well. The relative failure of Le Pen in the second round and the absence of seats in the June legislatures which followed evidently indicates limits to the party’s influence, but it retains a significant tranche of the French electorate at the ballot box.

These results are certainly not isolated. In Belgium, *Vlaams Blok* (VB) won a spectacular election victory in March 2000 in the Antwerp municipal elections with 33% of the vote, up 5% on the 1994 elections. This party, run by Franck Vanhecke and Filip DeWinter, had already secured its position in the Flanders province with 15% of the vote in 1999. On this side of the Channel, the British National Party (BNP) remains marginal, but a little less so with three local councillors elected in the Greater Manchester area in May 2002. Under the new leadership of Nick Griffin, the BNP has tried to move away from its neo-nazi thug image and has capitalised on racial tensions since the riots of 2001 in Oldham and Burnley.

Whilst these parties still all remain on the rejected margins of mainstream politics, others have managed to play a more decisive role in governmental formation and policy-making. In Denmark, the *Danske Folkeparti* (DF) was able to exploit growing dissatisfaction with the social-democrat government, incumbent since 1993. Pia Kjaersgaard’s movement won 12% of the vote in the November 2001 elections, the older and once successful Progress Party of Mogens Glistrup winning a residual 0.6%. Excluded from Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s liberal-conservative coalition, the Extreme Right can still make its presence felt in the delicate balance of power in the *Folketing* and thus can bring pressure to bear on the new incumbents. Similarly Carl I. Hagen’s Progress Party (FrP) can influence the Norwegian government, given its 14.7% of the vote in 2001, giving it the status of Norway’s third largest party behind the Labour Party and *Høyre*.¹

Finally but most strikingly, the parties of the Austrian and Italian Extreme Right have crossed the crucial threshold of governmental participation, marking a watershed for this type of movement in Western Europe. The Italian elections in May 2001 gave a strong victory to the Right-wing *Casa delle Libertà*, returning the Northern League populists and the ex-fascist National Alliance to government in a more stable coalition than the ill-fated 1994 prototype. In Austria, the February 2000 inauguration of the “black-blue coalition” under Wolfgang Schüssel’s ÖVP was eventually forced to include Jörg Haider’s FPÖ which had won 26.9% and 52 seats in October 1999.

Table 1. Recent Extreme Right electoral successes

Country	Party	Most recent national election	% vote.	Seats
Germany	Republikaner	September 1998	1.8	0/669
Germany	Deutsche Volksunion (DVU)	September 1998	1.2	0/669
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)	October 1999	26.9	52/183
Belgium*	Vlaams Blok (VB)	June 1999	9.9	15/150
Belgium	Walloon Front National (FN)	June 1999	1.5	1/150
Denmark ^E	Fremskridtspartiet (FrP)	November 2001	0.6	0/175
Denmark ^E	Dansk Folkeparti (DF)	November 2001	12.0	22/175
France	Front National (Le Pen)	April 2002 May 2002	16.9 11.1	President. 0/577
France	Mouvement National Républicain (Mégret)	April 2002 May 2002	2.3 1.1	President 0/577
Great Britain	British National Party (BNP)	June 2001	—	—
Italy ⁺	Lega Nord (LN)	May 2001	3.9	30/618
Italy ⁺	Alleanza Nazionale (AN)	May 2001	12.0	99/618
Italy ⁺	MSI-Fiamma Tricolore	May 2001	0.4	0/618
Norway	Fremskrittspartiet (FrP)	September 2001	14.7	26/165
Netherlands	Liste Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	May 2002	17.0	26/150
Sweden	Ny Demokrati (NyD)	September 1998	—	—

Notes:

* Belgium: national result, VB won 15 % in Flanders in 1999

⁺ Italic: *Camera dei Deputati* (Chamber of Deputies)

^E Denmark: excluding Faroe Islands and Greenland (4 seats)

EXTREME RIGHT-WING CONVERGENCE IN EUROPE

Such a battery of successes in a number of European countries naturally poses a number of questions about the nature of this phenomenon, and in particular the extent to which there are similarities amongst political actors which at first sight seem relatively diverse. Indeed, of crucial importance to their very success is the flexibility of their doctrinal corpus and their high capacity for adaptation to political context. Such parties have been seen as the epitome of political entrepreneurship, based upon a solid centralised party apparatus under charismatic leaders whose main talent is being able to adjust their rhetoric according to the issues of the moment. Until now, largely free from the pragmatic constraints which hamper credible mainstream governing parties, these populist movements have been able to reconcile their policy contradictions and U-turns with relative ease.

Looking at the historical roots of these parties or the profile of their elites, one can identify a number of political itineraries.² Since their creation in the 1970s, the Scandinavian Progress Parties were first and foremost a reaction to the atrophying social democratic State; for almost thirty years, the FPÖ formed a Pan German then liberal strand in the Austrian post-war system; *Vlaams Blok* and the Northern League represented separatist or regionalist reaction against the centralisation of Brussels and Rome. Conversely, parties such as the French FN, the German DVU and NPD, the BNP or the Italian MSI have links to the deepest recesses of the historical Extreme Right, in particular the morass of underground neo-fascist groupuscules set up after the Second World War.³

Such diverse backgrounds make a difficult task of a reductionist argument placing this group of parties in terms into one ideological family. In recent years, however, there has been a clear dynamic of convergence amongst these parties which have employed increasingly similar tactics for electoral mobilisation and have reappropriated certain key Extreme Right themes. Beyond their populist style, four themes deserve particular emphasis in this respect.

First and foremost, anti-immigrant feeling and xenophobia have been used more widely as a campaign issue. Without exception, all of these movements now exploit questions of integration of foreigners and immigration policy, whereas past commentators often emphasised the secondary role or indeed absence of anti-immigrant rhetoric amongst some of these parties, especially in Scandinavia. Many have constructed a conception of “national preference”, first popularised in France by Jean-Marie Le Pen. The slogans are clear in this respect: “The French first” (FN); “Vienna for the Viennese” (FPÖ); “*Eigen volk eerst*” [“your own people first”] (VB), and so on. Secondly, in most cases this ethnocentric line has been linked to a strong authoritarian line, common to most parties on the Right of the spectrum: issues such as criminality and insecurity have recently been exploited with great success by the French FN, *Vlaams Blok* the Danish People’s Party and the Dutch LPF.

The third aspect is the gradual convergence of all these parties on a composite economic policy, synthesising the more traditional neo-liberal elements of the 1980s with renewed protectionist welfare state strategies. For example, the Progress Party in Norway has been pushing since 1997 for the hypothecation of North Sea oil revenues into the welfare state; in Austria in 1999, the FPÖ campaigned for public spending increases, against the austerity measures announced by Klima’s SPÖ-ÖVP coalition; in France, the FN has twisted its economic message to promote protectionism of *les petites gens* using anti-capitalist rhetoric previously associated with its more traditional anti-tax message. Even the quasi-personality cult LPF emphasised education, health and social security in its campaign in the Netherlands.

Above all, however, these parties share a common political role, criticising government and the political mainstream and mobilising disaffected voters on this anti-system basis.⁴ In opposing the political establishment as a collection of identical political actors, the Extreme Right has developed a strategy of weakening by critique the role of traditional parties and consequently of undermining their legitimacy. Unlike traditional anti-system parties, such as the Communist Parties of the Cold War era, however, the contemporary Extreme Right does not so much criticise the democratic principles of the existing system, at least in terms of its basic institutional requirements, but instead opposes a State which has been monopolised by increasingly sclerotic coalitions of party actors in recent years. Moreover, they reject (somewhat disingenuously, given their own ideological position) the Left-Right axis in politics which they see as anachronistic and sterile.

THE SEARCH FOR POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES

Analysis of the emergence of new parties in democratic systems has often – and in our view, rightly – placed its emphasis on the dynamics of the party system itself, and in particular on dysfunctional representative elements therein.⁵ Such an approach is useful in underlining the role that the system *per se* can play, rather than resorting immediately to individual issues or voters' attitudes. In this respect, a crucial aspect to consider is the presence or absence of credible governing alternatives offered to the voter in the political supply. In the case of contemporary European systems, two obstacles to this basis for democratic renewal have developed – either a tendency towards over-inclusiveness and cooperation between mainstream parties, or an overly dynamic turnover of governing alternatives.

From this perspective, the success of the Extreme Right can be seen as deriving either from a crisis of consensual politics or from “hyper-alternation”.⁶ In the former case, it can be seen that countries hit particularly hard by the Extreme Right surge, such as Norway, Denmark or Italy fit the “consensual” or “neo-corporatist” model (in Italy's case, prior to 1994), whilst others, such as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, conform closely to the even more cooperative model of consociational democracy.⁷ Throughout the post-1945 period of economic growth and social stability, the mechanisms for compromise and cooperation between moderate parties within governing coalitions aimed to protect the system from exacerbated ideological conflict, and in particular the dangers represented by the antagonistic sub-cultures or pillars. Similarly to Austria's *Proporzdemokratie* or to Italian Christian Democracy's *trasformismo*, the grand coalitions and minority governments of the Scandinavian countries represent another means of restricted control of political conflict, reducing the role of the opposition and further limiting the emergence of new actors. Thus, the search for inter-party agreements itself limits the extent to which voter choice actually has a possibility of influencing governmental formation.

Confronted by issues relating to the transformation of post-industrial society – globalisation, migrant movements, urban violence, social marginalisation, *inter alia* – and socio-economically more unstable contexts, such models of inter-party collaboration and the quest for political stability had eliminated any mainstream governing alternative and hence left the peripheral actors as the only elements of renewal within the system. It is thus hardly surprising that the Extreme Right could benefit from its critique of institutional and political inertia, given that it alone could pretend to provide innovation.

Conversely, in majoritarian systems with more explicitly adversarial institutional arrangements, it is the second phenomenon – “hyper-alternation” – which should be seen as the crucial factor responsible for the rise of the Extreme Right. The main case to date is that of France, which demonstrates very clearly the problems of voters discerning the “value added” from regular – indeed, inevitable – changes of government since the end of the 1970s. Moreover, this has been compounded by the inclusion of six levels of elections in local, regional and national layers, together with three periods of cohabitation. For a growing proportion of the electorate, the resultant confusion and growing impression of political inefficacy on the part of governing elites has promoted the populists' critiques. Constant and rapid shifts between black and white have led to political grey.

Such a mass sentiment of elite failure should be emphasised because it forms such an integral part of the Extreme Right's mobilising strategy. In most West European nations, the transformation of political parties into cartel parties illustrates the anti-systemic role of their extremist counterparts with particular clarity.⁸ Since the Second World War, mainstream parties have effectively monopolised the ensemble of national and sub-national institutions, and in many cases have become almost synonymous with the State itself. This quasi-oligarchical control of the State apparatus by the major players has simultaneously compensated these latter for the loosening of mass-elite linkage with the social groups upon which they have traditionally counted for electoral support. As the roles of mediation and mass representation have been eroded, with a concomitant distancing of the parties from their supporters, so party machines as professionalised bodies of politicians have enabled them to continue to represent themselves as "natural parties of government" but at the same time has detached them from the needs of increasingly alienated masses.

Overall, then, the last thirty years have witnessed a gradual weakening of the role of opposition, compounded in terms of choice by the perceived convergence of public policy tools and growing ideological conformity. This drop in the "quality" of opposition associated with the convergence of governing parties towards the centre of the political spectrum has consequently opened up two areas of political space. In accepting market logic and the rigours of the Maastricht criteria, the Left has abandoned its traditional economic terrain and instead moved to new, social libertarian themes. At the same time, it has abandoned a large section of its traditional, working-class electorate to a more radical Left – and to the Extreme Right. On the Right, this recentring has also opened up space for the Extreme Right to respond to growing demands for a safer, "stronger" State in terms of authority. Finally, the shifting of focus towards Europe has allowed these parties to emphasise the nation as a reference-point, and one to which they have claim exclusive rights.

As such, the growth of Extreme Right movements needs to be seen as one side-effect of the disappearance of mass-elite linkage in terms of this latter's function as a ideological and affective pact linking elites to social groupings with their distinct values and aspirations. The impact of this loosening is particularly visible in those systems where the "vertical by-passing" of social conflict relied exclusively upon elite compromise and hermetic stratification of class, religious and linguistic groups, such as Belgian *verzuijing*, or the Austrian *Lager*.

Such a loosening of mass-elite ties has allowed sections of the electorate to make electoral choices not based upon the old socio-cultural determinants, in particular with votes now increasingly rewarding quality (rather than direction) of government, or sanctioning unsuccessful incumbents, as well as the apparent rise of single-issue voting, protest voting, and so on. The anti-system role played by Extreme Right parties has allowed them to capitalise in particular on the discontent focused on the traditional political class. Previous research on this theme has largely confirmed the important role of protest against the governing parties, linked either to separatist concerns (as in Italy and Flanders), pan-Germanist demands (historically in Austria) or demands for mass direct governance (Le Pen's demand for a plebiscitary VI Republic in France, for instance). However, this characterisation of the phenomenon as one of protest loses much of its impact during the 1990s, firstly because of the appearance of the clearer ideological corpus, and secondly because of the entrance of some of these parties into governing coalitions.

The anti-system role in this narrowest of senses has been enriched by broader social considerations, and in particular via the definition of a new “national solidarity pact”. In short, the Extreme Right now offers a renewed conceptualisation of the State and of citizenship, a collective identity based on the mythical national “us” and granting access to resources on the basis of national preference, excluding the extra-national “them”. In the most marginalised social strata in post-industrial society, the populist project provides a way of rethinking the solidarity pact established in the post-war period, offering to reinforce the welfare state which, in matters of health, education and pensions, has been perceived by these groups as largely having failed since the 1980s. The alacrity with which the ethnocentric message has been taken up by growing numbers of voters in Europe is largely due to the simplistic but effective manner in which it defines those who should and should not have access to a share of the nation’s wealth in a context where State supports and subsidies are lessening and social dislocation is growing.⁹ As we shall see, such “welfare chauvinism” helps to explain the reasons behind the popular anchoring of these parties within their respective political systems.¹⁰

MASS BASES TO EXTREME-RIGHT VOTING IN EUROPE

Beyond the basic protest vote, voters choosing an Extreme Right option somewhat paradoxically often conform to an identification vote, confirmed by the often high levels of loyalty and electoral stability displayed by these voters, who are disproportionately young voters and who bridge between ex-supporters of both the mainstream Left and Right.¹¹ Historically, purely negative reasons for voting, such as the condemnation of the system *tout court*, have always found it difficult to sustain mass support in the long term, as the Poujadist movement in the 1950s or the German NPD in the late 1960s demonstrate. Far from being a flash phenomenon in the way that their Swedish *Ny Demokrati* counterpart was between 1991 and 1994, the contemporary Extreme Right possesses a stable core of voters, to the extent that one might be tempted to predict the development of a specific Extreme Right-wing electorate and even one with a distinct social profile.

Some basic figures illustrate the mechanics of the arrival and consequent stability of the Extreme Right electorate. In Austria in 1999, the FPÖ managed to retain the support of 91% of its 1995 electorate. In France, at the first round of the 2002 presidential election, 90% of Le Pen’s 1995 electorate voted either for him again or, in a small number of cases, for Bruno Mégret. In Italy, AN welcomed back 77% of its 1994 support in 1996, as did *Vlaams Bloke* between 1995 and 1999, and the Danish People’s Party between 1994 and 1998, both collecting three-quarters of their previous electorate. Conversely, the populist protest of *Ny Demokratie* lost 84% of its electorate between 1991 and 1994 before departing from the political landscape in 1998.¹²

Social profile of the Extreme Right electorate

Although still relatively heterogeneous in their social profile, the Extreme Right electorates nevertheless appears to have converged over the past 10 to 15 years upon a certain pattern – male, younger and of low education (see Table 2).

Table 2. Developments in the Extreme Right electorate's social profile

Difference compared with proportion in national electorate	Year	Gender	Age		Education	
	Date of election	% men	% less than 25 years	% 25-34 years	% none / primary education	% intermediate education
Austria	1986	+13.8	+1.0	+4.7	-9.0	+6.5
FPÖ	1999	+10.8	+3.9	+6.5	0.0	+10.8
Belgium (Flanders)	1991	+5.6	+10.8	+2.5	+2.4	-0.6
Vlaams Blok	1999	+7.5	-0.3	+1.2	+7.7	+4.4
Denmark	1975*	+6.6		-4.4**	-1.0	+5.7
FrP-DF [†]	1998	+5.6		-1.1**	+7.8	+5.4
France	1984	+14.3	-3.4	-3.4	-5.6	+0.1
FN [†]	2002	+8.0	+1.0	0.0	N/a	n/a
Germany (West)	1990	+21.5	+2.2	+5.1	+19.1	-9.3
Republikaner-DVU-NPD	1998	+22.5	-4.9	+13.4	+9.6	+3.3
Italy	1992	+6.3	+4.5	-5.4	-22.8	+33.4
Alleanza Nazionale	1996	+3.7	+5.9	+3.3	-3.1	-3.5
Italy	1992	+7.8	+6.2	+5.6	-11.2	+9.5
Lega Nord	1996	+8.7	+0.1	+6.1	+2.4	+8.7
Netherlands	2002a	+12.0	+5.0	-3.0	+10.0	0.0
Lijst Pim Fortuyn‡	2002b	+3.7	+4.2	+1.2	+11.0	+2.8
Norway	1985	+14.9	+14.3	+5.9	-6.6	+0.3
FrP	2001	+14.1	+1.3	-1.6	+3.0	+4.1
Sweden	1991	+10.0	+8.1	+4.3	n/a	n/a
NyD	1994	+9.2	-3.0	-1.9	n/a	n/a

Source : EREPS database (*Extreme Right Electorates and Party Success*) [<http://cidsp.upmf-grenoble.fr/guest/ereps/>]

Notes :

+Denmark : FrP until 1998 ; *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) in 1998

*Denmark : 1975 data due to lack of sociological variables in the 1973 dataset

**Denmark : only one usable age category, "less than 30 years"

†France : presidential election, 1st round, Le Pen candidacy; CSA-France 3, *Le Parisien* exit poll, 21 April 2002

‡Netherlands: 2002a, local elections, 6 March, Rotterdam (*Politieke Barometer* survey, NOS-ANP) ; 2002b, legislative elections, 15 May (Interview / NSS-ANP survey).

The gender gap is evident for all the parties in all periods, with positive coefficients in favour of male voters. This overrepresentation of men is particularly significant amongst the German Extreme Right support (*Republikaner*, NPD and DVU), the Norwegian Progress Party, the Swedish NyD, as well as the Austrian FPÖ, French FN and the Northern League. Although still an embryonic organisation, the same pattern is also seen for the LPF at the local Rotterdam elections and the 2002 legislative elections.

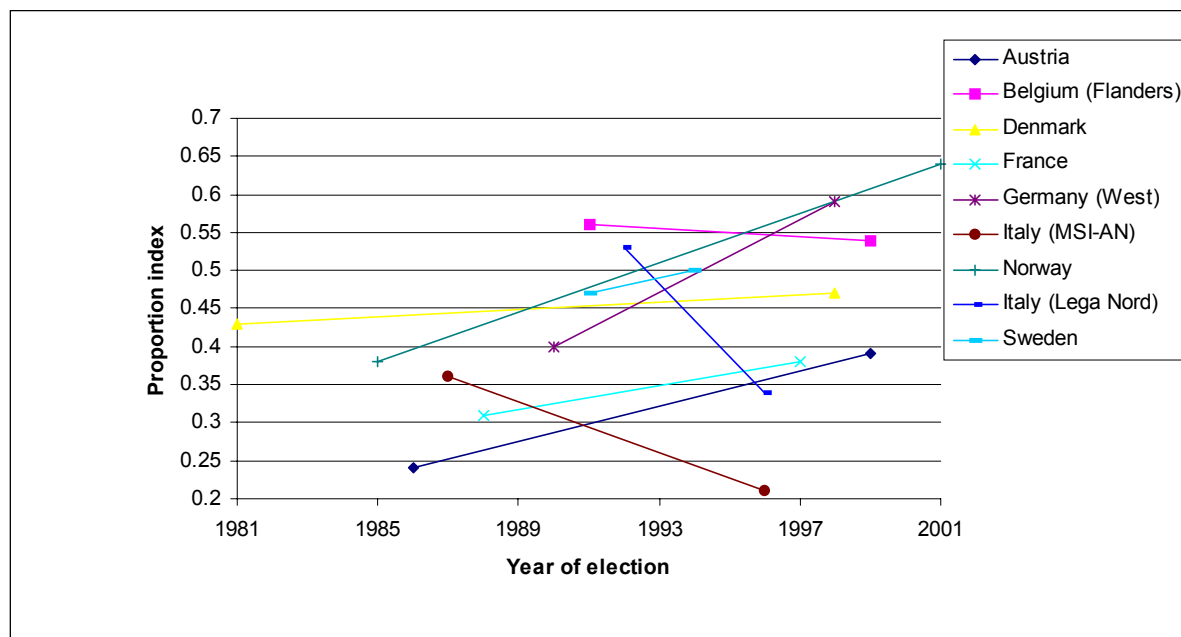
In terms of age, many of these parties have made their electoral gains amongst the youngest voters since the end of the 1980s and thus manifest an overrepresentation of this group. On this point, it is important to underline that these parties are able to recruit amongst the least politically implanted sections of the electorate who on balance are likely to possess the lowest levels of identification with the mainstream parties. This progress is most notable in Austria, Denmark, and Italy and to a lesser extent in France. In the 2002 legislative elections, the LPF

came first amongst Dutch 18-24 year olds, winning over one in five of their votes (SSU NRC *Handelsblad*-Interview ISS). In Flanders, on the other hand, the *Vlaams Blok*'s success was more predicated upon the youngest voters in the early 1990s, but has now balanced out to the national mean amongst this group.

These age and gender characteristics are worth linking to their educational attainment as well. In almost all the countries in question, the Extreme Right parties have seen the proportion of their electorates with low or no education rise significantly. At the most recent elections, the Norwegian Progress Party, *Vlaams Blok*, Danish People's Party, the LPF and the German Extreme Right troika have all seen such drops.¹³ Like youngsters, this educational stratum seems most receptive to the extremist supply in post-industrial societies where the jobs market offers little security for existing but particularly for new workers with no qualifications.

However, the shift in the educational attainment of the Extreme Right electorate is in large part due to the change in the occupational profile of these voters. Looking at occupation in terms of social class, we find a popularising dynamic as unique as other bases to Extreme Right partisan support. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Extreme Right electorate in Europe has changed fundamentally in its growing support from working-class voters, until then the electoral property of the social democratic and communist Left, as well as other marginalised categories, such as the unemployed.

Figure 1. Working-class proportion of Extreme Right electorate



Source : EREPS Database

Note : the dichotomous class variable was constructed from a collapsed six-category Goldthorpe schema, and opposes working class - skilled and unskilled workers - with the four other categories - upper and lower salariat, routine non-manual and independent. Where possible, inactive members of the electorate have been coded according to their most recent profession.

Examining the sociological evolution of the support for the Norwegian Progress Party, the German Extreme Right, the Austrian FPÖ and the French FN reveals the level of proletarianisation of this vote over the past two decades (see Figure 1).¹⁴ The stability in the proportion of working-class support is perceptible in Flanders, Denmark and Sweden. In these cases, then, it is clear that the working-class support certainly does not tell the whole story of Extreme Right success – the historical elements of support for these parties continue to be of importance even when the parties win more support at each election.

The only exceptions to this model are the Northern League and, even more so, AN, both of which have seen a substantial proportion of their working-class electorate disappear over this period. Because its initial rallying cry was “not Left, not Right – Lombard”, Bossi’s party had been able to win support from both sides of the spectrum including the Northern working class. However, the League soon abandoned its ethno-regionalist stance and committed itself more to a *laissez-faire* economic ethos. From 1994, the *rapprochement* with the Centre-Right led to a consolidation of this economic liberalisation and thus deprived the movement of some of its working-class support.¹⁵ Similarly, the loss of working-class support in AN’s electorate should be attributed to the recentring of the old neo-fascist party: the ideological *aggiornamento* imposed by Fini in 1993 and the party’s inclusion in the conservative Right coalition next to *Forza Italia* distanced the party from its traditional popular roots.¹⁶

Ideological profile of the Extreme Right electorate

Thus, the addition of working-class voters has contributed considerably to structuring the shape of the contemporary Extreme Right electorate, reinforcing the traditional petty bourgeois support – artisans, traders, entrepreneurs and the self-employed. Furthermore, this is a novel synthesis, the parties managing to gather together two social groupings traditionally vehemently opposed. This shift in social profile also corresponds closely to the changes in ideological content, in particular the mixed approach to the economy to which we have already alluded. Extreme Right parties have gradually incorporated into their programmes a socio-economic vision oriented more towards the preoccupations of the lower classes and borrowed largely from the protectionist discourse of the old Left.

Initially, the neo-liberal basis to their economic programmes in the 1980s were hardly conducive to mobilising marginalised social groups. The proposed radical cutbacks in the welfare state which were promised to the petty bourgeoisie were never likely – or indeed meant – to mobilise the proletariat. However, the emergence in the 1990s of a growing number of the latter class, together with the petty bourgeoisie, supporting the Extreme Right meant that parties ended up engaging in a highly pragmatic strategy. To the workers threatened by globalisation and a market economy, they offered a strong protectionist State, guaranteeing access to national wealth and reducing inequality; to their more traditional clientele of traders, entrepreneurs and the self-employed, they nonetheless continued to promote the reduction of the State to its symbolic functions, and in particular away from its revenue-gathering role.

The key to the success of many of the Extreme Right parties lies in the fact that this fundamental contradiction in economic policy is hidden by the recourse to an ethnocentric resolution of social problems. The scapegoating mechanism equates immigration with the major socioeconomic problems and satisfies the demands of both strata. Firstly, welfare chauvinism allows the parties to respond to workers’ concerns over competition from foreign

workers, the diminution of welfare state resources and the feeling of abandonment by the Left. Secondly, the authoritarian element to the discourse, together with its xenophobic slant, allows them to address the concerns over law and order and security which worry not just the petty bourgeoisie but also a large proportion of all European electorates. Finally, the question of identity, presented by the Extreme Right as based upon the mythical notion of “*ethnos* as nation”, attacks the current trends towards pluriethnic, multicultural societies in Western Europe.

These various elements provide the key to understanding the nature of issue voting for the Extreme Right. The desire for an alternative in politics; support for the new national solidarity pact based upon ethnic exclusion; worries over employment and social welfare; demands for greater law and order – all have emerged in European nations as motors for Extreme Right success. In 2002, Le Pen’s first round voters expressed as motivation for their vote worries about insecurity (74%), immigration (60%) and unemployment (31%).¹⁷ A similar triptych motivated LPF voters in the Netherlands. In Flanders, the four main issues behind *Vlaams Blok* voting were, in order of importance: immigration, political dissatisfaction, criminality and defence of the Flemish nation.¹⁸ In the 1998 German elections, the main problems cited by *Republikaner*, NPD and DVU voters were similar – unemployment (57%), reduction in the number of foreigners (53%), and job creation (28%).¹⁹ In Denmark, the two main issues for the entire electorate on the eve of the 2001 elections were social protection (62%) and immigration (41%), as they were in 1998 (68% and 35% respectively).²⁰

The relative importance given to each of these issues naturally varies according to the tactics of the individual parties and the state of public opinion at the time. In France, for example, insecurity was the major issue in the media in 2002 and thus overtook immigration in the FN’s rhetoric and in its voters’ minds. In Norway, the Progress Party reduced the salience of immigration in 2001, as compared with 1993 and 1997, in order to take into account its electorate’s overriding concerns of the moment: taxation (56%), pensions (30%) health (21%), and immigration only arriving in fourth place (18%).²¹ Similarly in Austria, the FPÖ emphasised its anti-party rhetoric before the 1999 elections, unlike the 1996 and 2001 Vienna municipal elections, where it put a very hard line forward on foreigners and crime. Predictably, Jörg Haider’s success matches these programmatic adjustments – 65% of his party’s supporters were principally concerned with condemning “privilege and political scandals”, 63% wanted “renewal and change” and 47% voted on the basis of “immigration”.²²

CONCLUSION

Since the 1980s, then, we have seen a process of ideological convergence amongst parties of the European Extreme and populist Right on four major themes – immigration, authoritarianism, composite economic doctrine and anti-system rhetoric. These have been accompanied by the gradual construction of a specific electoral base balanced on the working-class and petty-bourgeois pillars. These developments are all the more noteworthy because they derive from heterogeneous actors whose political trajectories have varied considerably according to the context of their respective political systems.

The institutionalisation of many of these formations shows the limits of analyses which place too much emphasis on simple dissatisfaction or the protest vote. However, it would be premature to go to the opposite extreme and speak of the Extreme Right as forming its own political bloc at this moment in time, distinct from the two broad socio-cultural and political

churches which Left and Right still represent for many. No matter how novel the social synthesis carried out by the Extreme Right, this is not sufficient to prove that a fundamental and long-term realignment of the political system has taken place – the Extreme Right is still firmly “of the Right”.²³ More generally, the evolutions which have brought these parties to their current positions remain contrasting in their future prospects. Undoubtedly, a space for extremist and populist movements exists: many of the key issues, such as immigration, social protection and crime, which pushed these actors to the political foreground will continue to figure in public debate in the foreseeable future. Consequently, there is no reason to think that populist leaders will not continue to exploit these, particularly if the Moderate Right’s gradual return to power across Europe since 1999 turns out to be a failure.

Electoral, however, the Extreme Right’s strategy suffers from a number of handicaps, potentially restricting their future growth. The sociological specificity of their electorate may have brought success, but it also threatens instability in the future, in particular because it is principally based upon two social groupings which are in numerical decline, as well as social and ideological opposition. Like all political parties, the Extreme Right will be forced to try and spread its appeal to the new middle classes. From a tactical perspective, the Extreme Right is already paying the price of its own electoral success and is finding it difficult to rationalise its previous anti-system stance. Where the parties remain marginalised by the mainstream, their electorate remain irrelevant, their votes having little discernible effect on the system. In Belgium, France and Denmark, the electoral impact of these parties has not caused any major changes in the political order. The 2002 legislative elections in France perfectly illustrate the potential effects of this – a return to the mainstream of a proportion of former FN voters who did not want to waste their vote.

Paradoxically, however, where the Moderate Right has allowed its Extreme neighbour into the governing fold, two negative effects can be perceived for the latter party. Firstly, this *rapprochement* goes against the wishes of the hard-line support in the Extreme Right party, and risks alienating this section of the electorate. Secondly – and this is the fundamental future dilemma for many Extreme Right parties – being anti-system, under whatever definition of system one chooses, sits awkwardly with holding power in that system. The Austrian case shows the knock-on effects of this – the FPÖ’s participation in the blue-black coalition since 2000 has already alienated a number of its Viennese supporters, where its support dropped significantly in March 2001. With this first example of an incumbent Extreme Right party losing support in subsequent elections, the 2003 legislatures will reveal the extent to which this was simply a function of the electoral cycle rather than a perception by the electorate that its party has sold out. As a test for the vanguard of these new populist parties, these elections will be a crucial juncture not just for the FPÖ but also for the ensemble of the European Extreme Right.

NOTES

1 With 26 deputies in the Storting, the Progress Party in fact holds the balance of power for the minority Christian People – *Høyre – Venstre* government, which together hold 62 seats. Since November 2001, Hagen’s party has provisionally supported the Bondevik government, for instance voting in favour of the 2002 budget – a matter of confidence.

2 For a more detailed historical account, see G. Ivaldi, *L'extrême-droite en Europe occidentale*, Problèmes Politiques et Sociaux, La Documentation Française, n°849, 2002.

3 The normalisation of the old MSI and the creation of AN by Gianfranco Fini in 1993 nevertheless represented a distancing of the party from its Mussolini heritage and a conversion of the party from neo-fascism to conservative Right. This evolution was approved by the 27th Party Congress in Fiuggi in 1995, despite the secession of the hard Right-wing led by Pino Rauti, who set up MSI-*Fiamma Tricolore*.

4 We take our lead here from Giovanni Sartori's definition of anti-system parties – *Parties and Party System: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 136.

5 See C. Hauss and D. Rayside “The development of new political parties” in L. Maisel and J. Cooper, eds., *Political Parties : Development and Decay*, Sage, 1978.

6 J. Evans and G. Ivaldi, “Quand la crise du consensus profite à l'extrême-droite”, *Le Figaro*, 18-19 May 2002.

7 A. Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*, Yale University Press, 1984.

8 R. Katz and P. Mair, *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies*, Sage, 1994.

9 A. Wimmer, “Explaining xenophobia and racism : a critical review of current research approaches”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20/1, 1997, pp.17-41.

10 H. Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: a Comparative Analysis*, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

11 J. Evans “ Les bases sociales et psychologiques du passage gauche-extrême droite : exception française ou mutation européenne?”, in P. Perrineau , ed., *Les croisés de la société fermée. L'Europe des Extrêmes Droites*, L'Aube, 2001, pp. 73-101.

12 All data are taken from the EREPS database (<http://cidsp.upmf-grenoble.fr/guest/ereps>), and are based upon available post-election survey, with the exceptions of the French case in 2002, where we used the IPSOS-France 2-Vizzavi survey (21 April and 5 May 2002) and the SSU CSA-France 3-*Le Parisien* survey (21 April 2002).

13 In France in 2002, Le Pen won 22% of the lowest educational stratum (none/BEP/CAP/CEP) as opposed to 8% of the highest stratum (IPSOS-France 2-Vizzavi survey, 21 April 2002).

14 For reasons of clarity, we have chosen to begin the Danish curve in 1984 – if we look at the “earthquake” election of 1973, a similar coefficient is to be found (0.43) which confirms the long-term stability of working-class support for Danish ERPs.

15 In the 1987 legislative elections, the League received 20% of the vote in Lombardy, in second place behind the DC.

16 Such a trend away from the Right is not so clear, however – in 2001, *Forza Italia* won the largest proportion of blue-collar support.

17 IPSOS – Vizzavi-*Le Figaro*-France 2, 12 April 2002.

18 M. Swyngedouw, “The subjective cognitive and affective map of extreme right voters: using open-ended questions in exit-polls”, *Electoral Studies* 20/2, 2001, pp.217-241.

19 EREPS Database.

20 *Ugbrevet Mandaag Morgen*-ACNielsen AIM survey, 7-8 November 2001.

21 MMI exit poll, September 2001.

22 G. Ivaldi , “L'extrême-droite FPÖ aux portes du pouvoir. Les élections législatives du 3 octobre 1999 en Autriche”, *Revue politique et parlementaire*, n°1002, 1999, pp.114-125.

23 R. Andersen and J. Evans, “Contemporary developments in political space in France” in J. Evans, ed., *The French Party System: Continuity and Change*, Manchester University Press, forthcoming.