Populism & Politics (2024)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55271/pp0036

Populism & Politics (P&P)

Article

Populism and the Extreme Right in Comparative Perspective: The French Rassemblement National and the Italian Forza Nuova

Abstract

Populism, especially "radical right-wing populism," and the Extreme Right are often explicitly or implicitly conflated or at least observed together (see Ignazi, 2000; Mudde, 2000; Rydgren, 2005; Carter, 2005; Griffin, 2018; Stavrakakis et al., 2019). While this contribution acknowledges that these two sets of ideas may occasionally overlap, they should still be understood as distinct concepts. Therefore, any deliberate and forceful conflation of their academic definitions, political histories, or traditions is usually misleading and inappropriate. Although many political scientists have recently attempted to clearly distinguish between the two phenomena by proposing separate definitions, some still suggest that populism and the extreme right are essentially two sides of the same coin (see Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). To shed more light on this issue (or "war of words," as Cas Mudde once called it) and to provide a better understanding of these two important ideologies—one that has greatly impacted the last century and another that will likely continue to influence the current one—this article will compare and contrast right-wing populism and the extreme right from an entirely ideational perspective. This will be done by borrowing from a theoretical framework originally adopted by senior scholar Marco Tarchi (2015) and taking his approach one step further by empirically testing his theories through discourse and manifesto analysis of two contemporary European parties—one supposedly belonging to the populist (or "neopopulist") party family and the other to the extreme right (or "neofascist") family. Specifically, the positions of the French Rassemblement National ("National Rally" - RN) and the Italian Forza Nuova ("New Force" - FN) will be examined to determine whether there are more similarities or differences between the two ideologies. The analysis will focus on the RN's and FN's discourse and policies related to the role of the people, the nation, the state, society, the individual, the leader, the elite, democracy, and the market.

By Amedeo Varriale*

Introduction: Generic Reflections, Theoretical Framework, and Method

Generic Reflections

In 1992, the academic experts Piero Ignazi and Colette Ysmal (1992) wrote that the Italian MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano - Italian Social Movement) and the French Front National (National Front) "are the most significant parties of the extreme right in Europe" (Ignazi & Ysmal, 1992: 101). At the time, this was not only an accurate statement, but it was also an incredibly important and influential one for the field of political science, as it provided scholars with two archetypal case studies that could be empirically treated for reference. Today, this claim would be - to say the least - contentious. One issue is that the MSI no longer exists, and its direct successor(s) AN (Alleanza Nazionale – National Alliance) and FDI (Fratelli d'Italia – FDI) can hardly be categorized as "extreme right" parties. In 2003, AN's leader, Gianfranco Fini, visited Yad Vashem in Israel and repeatedly declared that fascism as an ideology was "an absolute evil in history" (Corriere della Sera, 24 November 2003; Caretto, 2022). Whereas, more recently, FDI's leader, Giorgia Meloni (currently Italian Prime Minister) has clearly stated that her party is incompatible with anyone nostalgic of the fascist regime (also calling them "useful idiots for the Left") and that she is committed to not only democracy but pro-Western, anti-authoritarian, liberal conservatism (Bracalini, 2021; Farrell, 2022). Taking this into account, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, some of the "old guards" of the MSI gradually developed neofascist movements relying on the political vacuum left by the defunct MSI giving birth to much more extreme subjects (see Broder, 2023: 118-141) such as Fiamma Tricolore, CasaPound, and of course – FN (Forza Nuova – FN) which will be later examined in-depth. I shall return to this point in the following sections.

The same argument can be made regarding the French Front National. This party no longer exists under that banner, as it has been recently renamed RN (Rassemblement National – RN) in an open effort from Marine Le Pen to "detoxify" (and expel extremists) from what use to be an extreme right party, in order to turn it into a more respectable "right-wing" populist force (Gaffney, 2012). In fact, some popular commentators argue she has (to some extent) successfully managed this operation (see Murray, 2017). Therefore, not only are the parties Ignazi and Ysmal mentioned and studied no longer existent, but their heirs are usually no longer considered as full-fledged extreme right parties. Not to mention, in Europe there are very few (if any) truly extreme right/neofascist parties that are electorally relevant to this day – the German Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) perhaps being an exception.

Another factor that might challenge Ignazi's and Ysmal's claim, if reconsidered today and applied to the successors of the MSI and Front National by scholars of radical parties, is the emergence of a new populist zeitgeist over the last twenty to thirty years (see Mudde, 2004). This public mood of disenchantment with traditional politics has contributed to the success of several parties that were originally isolated on the fringes of the spectrum. Almost suddenly, once marginalized groups such as the Lega Nord, FPÖ,

and the Sweden Democrats, became electorally relevant and more mainstream (Tarchi, 2002). Their "mainstreaming" makes it considerably more difficult for the "extreme" label to be attached to them. Moreover, not all parties that once belonged to the extreme right can be considered exclusively "right-wing" today; some, like Jobbik, have adopted syncretic populist positions. As the Italian scholar Marco Tarchi (2015) contends, their current populist forma mentis often takes them ideologically beyond the Right-Left dichotomy (Tarchi, 2015: 52). Nonetheless, casting aside those organizations that Luke March (2008: 3-4) classifies as "social populist" or "socialist populist," many of these newly successful parties or rising movements are said to be either populist, or extreme right, or both at the same time (e.g. Backes, 1991; Betz, 1994; Ignazi 2000; Carter 2005; Mudde, 2000; Griffin, 2018).

Taking this into account, it is precisely this ambiguous conflation that has become a problem. In fact, as Mudde (2000) states: "All in all, most definitions of (whatever) populism do not differ that much in content from the definitions of right-wing extremism…with the various terms often used synonymously and without any clear intention" (Mudde, 2000: 13). While extreme right parties that are unequivocally neofascist are largely being ignored in scholarly literature, a growing number of scholars are erroneously labeling populist right parties as "extreme right" parties (for example, see Passarelli & Tuorto, 2018). In any event, the objective of this article is not to engage in an exhaustive - and sometimes counter-productive - debate originating from academic circles which Cas Mudde (1996) famously termed the "war of words." This complex debate has aimed to describe the various political subjects that have monopolized the political space to the right of liberal-conservative forces and to especially determine the most appropriate term to define these "new" populist parties (Mudde, 2000: 11-16). Some of the terms proposed in the past include "progress-hostile forces" (Hartmann et al., 1985), "right-wing extremism" (Macridis, 1989; Mudde; 1995; 2000); "right-wing radicalism" (Oswalt, 1991; Weinberg, 1993), "radical-right" (Sprinzak, 1991), "radical right-wing populism" (Betz, 1993; Mudde, 2007), "post-industrial extreme right" (Ignazi, 2000), "New Populism" (Taggart, 1996), "neopopulism" (Yoshikazu, 2018), "national populism" (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018), and finally, the most misleading of all – "extreme right-wing populism" (Rydgren, 2005; Stavrakakis et al., 2019). If all those terms were utilized to label different parties, such as either the ones that have a substantially populist core ideology and the ones that have a substantially fascist (or neofascist) one, this would by now be a non-substantive issue or a false dilemma. However, over the course of the last decades, all those terms have been applied to the same or a remarkably similar set of parties in Western Europe and the Americas, when in reality populism and extreme right (neofascism) are - ideologically speaking - mutually exclusive (Tarchi, 2015: 117-126). New academic research should instead be dedicated to distinguishing between the parties that belong to either one party family (e.g. the "populist" one) or the other (the "extreme right" one).

Regardless, the objective of this article is to compare the positions of the French Rassemblement National (RN) and the Italian Forza Nuova (FN) from an entirely ideational perspective and offer comprehensive insight on the key differences between the two ideologies. To maintain clarity, I shall utilize the words populism (but I also use "right-wing populism" or "populist right" for the RN interchangeably), and extreme right

(but I also use "right-wing extremism" or "neofascism" for the FN interchangeably) to describe two distinct ideological phenomena. A full-fledged and in-depth analysis of the populist and extreme right ideological positions will be present in the second part of the contribution; however, I will first provide some generic preliminary information that is equally important.

In essence, populism (or even "right-wing populism") and right-wing extremism are not identical. In fact, it has already been recognized that they substantially differ in a number of ways (Taggart, 1996: 35). As a primary example, Paul Taggart (1996) has argued that neofascist parties "tend to have some direct link to the fascist parties of the previous era while New Populist parties appear to lack such a historical link" (Taggart, 1996: 35). This is especially true for active extreme right organizations in countries like Britain, France, Spain, Greece and elsewhere in Europe. For instance, in Britain, the contemporary National Front (NF) is a result of a gradual political evolution that saw the party come into being after a merger of two older extremist factions – the neo-Nazi British National Party (BNP) active in 1960 and the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL). The BNP and LEL were themselves preceded by movements that revolved around pre-war (and post-war) fascist leaders like Sir Oswald Mosley and A.K. Chesterton. Another example relating to the differences between populism (or "New Populism" as Taggart calls it) and neofascism regards the issue of immigration (Taggart, 1996: 36). Certainly, both the populist right and the extremist right are anti-immigration(-ist), however, the former are not as fixated with the issue as the latter (Taggart, 1996: 36). Populists rarely (if ever) resort to ultra-authoritarian policies that may lead to ethnic cleansing or political violence through paramilitarism (Finchelstein, 2019: 45; Eatwell, 2017: 365). Parties like the Lega Nord (Northern League) in Italy serve as a perfect example of this non-violent attitude as they have a vast program that (apart from anti-immigration) also comprises fiscal federalism, anti-tax measures for small business, and the legalization of prostitution (Programma di Governo Salvini Premier, 2018). These are all issues completely unrelated to immigration. Hence, whilst this contribution acknowledges that the two sets of ideas may occasionally appear alike - as scholars like Taggart (1996: 36) recognize - the two should still be understood as overall distinct concepts. Thus, any deliberate and forceful conflation of their academic definitions, political history, or tradition is per se usually misleading and inappropriate.

Theoretical Framework and Method

The most appropriate way to differentiate between (right-wing) populism and extreme right is not by merely providing the most popular definitions of the two ideologies by the most prominent academics. Instead, it is to carefully observe the distinct views both ideologies maintain of politics overall. Disregarding the fact that populism is rather "unpolitical" (refer to Taggart's reflections on unpolitics) and extreme right/neofascism is highly political by design, populist parties (in this case the RN) and extreme right parties (in this case FN) hold specific views on the people, the nation, the state, society, the individual, the leader, the elite, democracy, and the market that make the two ideologies - as we shall see - more incompatible than compatible (Tarchi, 2015: 125). The specifics of this theoretical framework, which were originally put forward in a seminal text on populism by Tarchi (2015), will be discussed throughout the next section. Taking

this into consideration, after briefly touching upon the generic issues surrounding the academic definitions of populism and extreme right and providing a short historical account of both parties under scrutiny, the core of this article will focus on a discourse and manifesto analysis (which will occur concomitantly) of the RN and FN parties, respectively. Subsequently, all findings will be discussed conjunctly, to produce conclusive statements on both populism and extreme right.
For the RN, as for the FN party, the discourse analysis will include statements made by their leaders (Marine Le Pen and Roberto Fiore, respectively) over the course of the last five to ten years. The reason for this is that populist and extremist parties of the right are often structured in a highly centralized manner with a pre-eminence of key individuals (Taggart, 2003: 6), therefore it makes sense to give higher relevance to the statements and opinions of those directly in charge. Regarding the manifesto analysis, the manifestos chosen for analysis are the ones obtainable through the RN's and FN's websites (rassemblementnational.fr and forzanuova1997.it, respectively) as they can easily be located by the reader, and this is beneficial for transparency. Even if they have been released over a year ago, they still largely reflect their current positions. In any event, the RN's manifesto is simply named "Les 22 Mesures" ("22 Measures") whilst FN's one is called "8 punti" ("8 points"). However, as FN's manifesto is much shorter, during the analysis sporadic mention is also made to the party's older political program for the important (post-debt crisis) Italian general election that took place in February 2013. This document (also easily accessible online) was named "Programma Per Le Elezioni Politiche 2013 Di Forza Nuova E Di Nomina Del Capo" ("Program for The Political Elections of 2013 of Forza Nuova and Its Appointed Head"). For clarity, each time I refer to this above-mentioned document using in-text citations I shall refer to it simply as: "FN general elections program, 2013." Overall, the manifesto analysis occupies a dominant position in relation to the discourse analysis, this is because party programs and manifestos in general are "considered to represent and express the policy collectively adopted by the party" (Borg, 1966: 97; see also Anckar & Ramsted Silén, 1981). Fundamentally, not only are manifestos or programs (the second are generally more detailed and promoted before an election) officially endorsed by the members of a party - as Mudde reminds us - but are also widely utilized in academia as a form of data to determine party ideology (Mudde, 2000: 20).

Defining Populism and Extreme Right

Populism

Objectively defining this protean and unusual concept commonly known as "populism" has never been simple. To this day, scholars disagree on whether it is a political strategy, a form of discourse/performance or effectively an ideology (Moffitt, 2020: 25-26), thus, let alone do they agree on a fixed definition. To add to the confusion, some scholars state that "populism has many of the attributes of an ideology, but not all of them" (Taggart, 2000: 1). Notwithstanding, it must be recognized that lately the so-called ideational approach has garnered a significant amount of traction in academia to the point of replacing old economic notions (e.g. populism as state intervention, "overspending," or a set of neoliberal financial policies) of the phenomenon that 20th century scholars (especially in the Latin American cases) insisted upon (Weyland: 2017: 51). This is why

Taggart (2018) argues that today the ideational approach is "winning" from a theoretical standpoint (Taggart, 2018a).

One of the foremost pioneers of the ideational approach is the prominent Dutch scholar Cas Mudde (2004) who defines populism "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', and argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004: 543). Whilst it must be acknowledged that this definition is fundamental to any in-depth and scientific understanding of modern populism, in this contribution abiding by a generic definition of the phenomenon per se is not as important as considering specific aspects of populism which make it a distinct ideology possessing its very own weltanschauung. After all, considering diverse cases globally, contemporary populism appears to have both a comprehensive program of political change and "staying power," making it effectively resemble other "thick" ideologies founded in past centuries (e.g. liberalism, communism, fascism) (Schroeder, 2020: 13, 27-28). Taking this into account, instead of focusing on the ideational approach's concepts of "the people," "the elite," and "general will" alone, we encompass - as mentioned earlier - other elements of its ideological repertoire that go beyond those three.

In summary, at this point in history, Tarchi (2002) contents that populism represents an entirely "alternative model" to the extreme right. According to Tarchi, in populist ideology, the people represent a cohesive and virtuous community which functions as the basis of legitimation for government action (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Whereas the nation is the product of the cultural traditions of a people to whom it provides a stable identity (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Instead, when it comes to the conceptualization of the state, this is understood to be the administrator of the public interest subordinated to the will of the people who must control its action (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Moreover, for populists, society itself is nothing more than the natural context in which the life of the people unfolds, it is autonomous from the state and is prioritized in respect to it (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Populists also have a specific view of the individual, as they believe this is the cornerstone of social life which finds the natural context of its needs within the people (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Whereas in populist ideology the leader is perceived as a spokesperson for the people, an interpreter of their needs, endowed with ordinary qualities in extraordinary measures (Tarchi, 2015: 125). At the same time, the elite is (as expected) negatively regarded as a power block that must be kept under control by the people to protect their rights (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Also, populists hold a definite opinion of democracy, where democracy is considered an ideal regime to be implemented entirely through tools of direct popular expression and without institutional mediation (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Ultimately, the conceptualization of the market is that of something positive, to be tempered through protective measures reserved for the indigenous population – essentially, welfare chauvinism (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Subsequently, it will become clearer how all these concepts directly related to populism will apply to a right-wing populist party like the RN but not to a right-wing extremist party like FN.

Extreme Right

In academic discourse, the term "extreme right" is frequently employed to describe parties or movements encompassing a range of political orientations, which renders the study of this subject particularly complex and nuanced. For instance, scholars - who have observed the phenomenon consistently - such as Elisabeth Carter (2005; 2018), provide a useful minimal definition of the term but are too inclusive (regarding classification), and tend to include subjects that are neither "extreme" nor truly "right-wing" in the party family. To exacerbate the ambiguity, even if only as a secondary element, Carter adds populism in the mix as an element to consider when describing extreme right ideology (see Carter, 2005: 21-23, 56-60). Given the circumstances, the definition Carter provides is an optimal starting point to understand the key features of extreme right ideology – authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism (Carter, 2018: 157). However, if one abides by this definition, it already becomes clear that extreme right politics are not all that similar to populist politics, given the latter does not reject democracy altogether, and does not necessarily have to be authoritarian or exclusionary in terms of nationalism. In simple terms, "populism is pro-democracy but anti-liberal democracy" (Mudde, 2021: 579). Historically, we have witnessed the rise of "liberal" or libertarian populist parties (as well as socialistic ones, see March, 2007) that are only civically nationalist and view forms of plebiscitarian (direct) democracy as a real promise (e.g. PDL in Italy, and Lijst Dedecker in the Netherlands).

More specifically, excessive breadth given to the terminology certainly becomes an issue when you group together (under the same umbrella term "extreme right") parties that outrightly reject the democratic system (e.g. NPD, now renamed Die Heimat) with parties that accept the rules of democracy but want to reform it by making it either more democratic and less statist (e.g. Lega dei Ticinesi, Lega Nord) or less democratic and more statist (e.g. Vlaams Blok, now renamed Vlaams Belang) (see Carter, 2005: 45). Ideally the parties that are anti-democratic and illiberal cannot be part of the same family as those that are illiberal but at the same time still democratic. Also, it is a problem to cluster ultra-authoritarian Neo-Nazi and neo-fascist parties with others that are simply neoliberal (but still xenophobic and anti-immigrant, according to Carter) or "neo-liberal populist" that do not adhere to any form of biological or cultural racism but are - in Carter's own words - "not racist" whatsoever (Carter, 2005: 50-51).

Carter is not the only author who associates the neofascist extreme right with (elements of) populism. Indeed, one of the most renowned scholars of fascism, Roger Griffin (2018), explicitly identifies populism as a distinctive feature of the ideology, defining fascism as a "political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism" (Griffin, 2018: 46). Although Griffin embraces populism in his definition of fascism, he is more careful to not narrow the gap between fascist or neofascist parties and populist parties in his work. Notwithstanding, the distinction to be made between populism and extreme right is an essential one, because although populism is today more often associated with the political right, it is not inherently right-wing but is chameleonic (Taggart, 2003: 9) to the point that it can also manifest itself alongside left-wing ideologies (Hudson & Shah, 2022). Using Tarchi's theoretical scheme, it has been established in the section above what the

generic views of populism are in relation to important aspects of society, such as the role of the state, the role of the elites and so forth. Unlike in populist ideology, in the extreme right the general (elitist) view of "the people" is more negative than positive (Tarchi, 2015: 125). In fact, the people are a mass to be educated under the guidance of the elite and merged with the nation and the nation itself is a spiritual community that has the task of forming and directing the people by assigning them a common destiny (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Also, according to extreme right neofascist ideology, the state represents the embodiment of the principle of authority, the fundamental principle of social organization superordinate to both the people and nation (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Uncoincidentally, it was the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini himself who famously stressed "Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State!" (Delzell, 1988: 127). This would be the exact opposite worldview to that of some neoliberal (pro-capitalism and pro-market) right-wing populist parties present in the European political sphere during the last decades (see Taggart, 1996: 34).

Beyond the state, society is according to right-wing extremists a raw material that must be formed, controlled, and guided by the state to which it is subordinated (Tarchi, 2015: 125). When compared to populism, the extreme right also has a much more negative or pessimistic view of the individual – which is merely considered a component of the nation whose needs must conform to avoid manifesting selfish interests (Tarchi, 2015: 125). In regard to the central ideological tenet of the leader right-wing extremists believe this figure to be the guide of the people and of the nation, to whom he indicates the destiny, and is endowed with extraordinary and charismatic qualities (Tarchi, 2015: 125). When it comes to how they view the elite, it said that these extremists believe the elite is a spiritual aristocracy that supervises the people and directs them to fulfill their duties (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Moving on to their conceptualization of democracy, Tarchi posits that they believe it is a regime that is criticizable because it reverses the principle of authority and is subject to the fickleness of the masses (Tarchi, 2015: 125). Last but not least, the market is deemed as something negative that must be subordinated to the needs of the nation and controlled through nationalizations or state-guided corporatism (Tarchi, 2015: 125).

Rassemblement National (RN): A History

The Beginnings (1970s)

The history of the RN is complex. Or better, the history of the RN's directly related predecessor (Front National) is both long and complex. Nevertheless, it is essential to outline this party's historical background in order to comprehend why today it is more often treated as a "right-wing" populist party rather than an extreme right one by scholars (see Ivaldi & Pineau, 2022; Genga, 2017; Stockemer & Barisione 2016; Tarchi & De Feudis, 2015). Undeniably, the old Front National was an extreme right party (Tarchi, 2022: 12) – which occasionally even made use of esoteric fascist propaganda; symbols, myths, and imagery (Eatwell, 2017: 365). The party was born out of marginalized (and neofascist) Ordre Nouveau movement, when on October 5, 1972 its Mussolini-sympathizing leader Alain Robert joined forces with former Poujadist MP and Algeria War veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen to form what became officially known as the

Front National pour l'Unité Française. As Le Pen had more institutional experience and was perceived as more "moderate" by the public, he would eventually become the sole leader of the political group (Stockemer, 2017: 10). This early Front National was a haven for the whole French extreme right, from miscellaneous nationalists (of Bonapartist, Boulangist, Petainist, Poujadist or even Tixierist extraction) to ex pro-French Algeria "freedom fighters" and anti-system extremists (from the movements Occident, Europe-Action, Jeunesses Patriotes, etc.) who idolized a form of internationalist or Europeanist "new fascism" (Stockemer, 2017: 8-11; Ignazi, 2000: 180-186).

The more than 50-year-old history of the Front National/Rassemblement National can essentially be divided into six phases (which sometimes overlap) – The Beginnings (1970s), The Minor Successes Phase (1980s), The Reaganite-Neoliberal Phase (1982-1993), The Crossroads Phase (late 1990s), The Apex Phase (early 2000s, 2002) and the Dédiabolisation / 'New Front' Phase (2012-). In the first phase, during the whole of the 1970s, the Front was completely marginalized and trapped in what Kurt Weyland (2017) would define as the extreme right "ideological ghetto" (Weyland, 2017: 62-63). In fact, no real electoral gains were made by the early "Le Penist" Front (Ignazi, 2000: 186-190). The 1973 legislative and 1974 presidential elections were a complete failure, with the party counting less than 300 members and never even achieving one percent of the vote. In the 1978 legislative ones, a similar trend recurred, with a mere 0.33% obtained in the first round (Genga, 2017: 36). Throughout the 1970s, the Front only manifested "an ideology that included racism, militarism, anti-democracy, and virulent anti-communism" (Stockemer, 2017: 12). Taking this into account, Le Pen was mainly interested in the small businessmen and craftsmen vote, therefore he combined authoritarian policies on crime, state security, and immigration with a more flexible (not typically neofascist) anti-tax approach on the economy.

The Minor Successes Phase (1980s)

Only in the 1980s, during the second phase, did Le Pen's mixed political positions begin to bear fruit. De facto, in 1983 (more than 10 years after its formation) the Front performed positively in supplementary local elections achieving more than 16% in certain municipalities of northern France (such as Dreux) and as far as 12% in others in a nearby region (Genga, 2017; 38-38). One year later, in 1984, another electoral breakthrough occurred, as Le Pen's party achieved 11% in the European elections (Stockemer, 2017: 16). This was an "outstanding" result for an extreme right fringe party.

Some scholars attribute the (minor) successes of the Front in the 1980s (from 1982-83 onwards) to the bad decision-making of D'Estaing's and Mitterrand's - respectively centrist and socialist governments - on law-and-order (e.g. the unpopular amnesty reforms), a spike in immigration, alongside a heightened sensitivity against Islam and an economic crisis (two oil shocks in 1973 and 1979) that included an increase in unemployment, public debt, and inflation (see Perrineau, 1996; 1997; Genga, 2017). All of these issues, in tandem with Le Pen's recurring invitations to speak on television, helped the Front to reach out to a wider (and less ideologically motivated) audience. By the late 1980s, Le Pen could finally cast himself as the politician to represent the working and middle classes who felt France was changing for the worse. Also, in 1987 Le Pen

publicly stated that "gas chambers were a minor detail in the second world war" (Genga, 2017: 55). Surprisingly, this highly controversial statement did not backfire on him at all, but perhaps attracted even more attention and votes from the angry and disillusioned electorate (Genga, 2017: 55-56). Ultimately, in the important 1988 presidential elections Le Pen garnered almost 14.38 % of the vote in the first-round alone (Stockemer, 2017; Genga, 2017).

The Reaganite-Neoliberal Phase (1982-1993)

It must be noted that between 1982 (after the VI party congress) and 1993, Le Pen began to take a different approach towards fiscal policy, setting aside the state interventionism, economic nationalism, and protectionism that had been ever present within the Front to incorporate laissez faire positions that are alien to the neofascist corporatist and dirigiste tradition (Genga, 2015: 95). The expert Nicola Genga (2015) summarizes Le Pen's views during this period as favorable to a "natural order based on inequality, which justifies the existence of a capitalist system of production" (Genga & Algisi, 2015). During the Reaganite-Neoliberal Phase - which partially overlapped with the 1980s Minor Successes Phase - Le Pen self-described his party as "socially left-wing but economically right-wing" (Genga & Algisi, 2015). Notwithstanding this peculiar (and contradictory) statement, it is evident that this shift was more tactical than ideological given during this period the best way for the Front to succeed was to present itself as a direct alternative to the socialists/communists in power (Genga & Algisi, 2015). To be sure, Le Pen's picture taken with US President Ronald Reagan perfectly encapsulates this neoliberal phase (Tarchi, 2015). Within scholarship, the consensus is that this phase came to an end abruptly in 1993 when Le Pen turned his back on economic liberalism, in order to return to more welfare chauvinist and statist policies (Genga, 2017: 97) that resemble those of his daughter Marine Le Pen today (some go as far as suggesting Marine is a "social populist," see Ivaldi & Pineau, 2022).

The Crossroads Phase (late 1990s)

In the fourth phase, the Front found itself at a crossroads due to internal squabbles (see Déze´, 2012: 125). The (almost) unquestioned chief Le Pen was challenged by the "moderate" wing of the party led by the delegate Bruno Mégret (Taggart, 2002: 78, 87). This politician had an alternative and opposite vision for the future of the party, and convinced part of the membership that the only way forward to achieve serious electoral relevance was to leave the "ideological ghetto" and marginalization once and for all (Stockemer, 2017: 21). Essentially, Mégret argued that only by shifting its attitudes on most issues the Front would become a respectable center-right party that could form alliances with other parties – especially the neo-Gaullists (Stockemer, 2017: 21). As a result, Mégret and other MPs who backed him, were thrown out by Le Pen, and forced to form a smaller party that had no real leverage (Whitney, 1998; Stockemer, 2017: 22).

The Apex Phase (early 2000s, 2002)

This takes us to the Apex Phase. In April 2002, by softening some of his positions

temporarily, and concomitantly reworking his discursive patterns through more populistic and "inclusive" appeals to French people "of all socio-economic backgrounds," "of all religions," and "of all skin colors," Le Pen made it to the run-off of the presidential election (Tarchi, 2015: 135). By this point, he was perceived by the public as the only real anti-establishment candidate who had a chance at the presidency. Strikingly, he managed to obtain nearly 18% of the vote. Although incumbent President Jacques Chirac refused to share a platform with the Front's leader and to officially debate him (see Henley, 2002) he still beat Le Pen. Nevertheless, the year 2002 marked the highest point for Le Pen and his extreme right party.

The Dédiabolisation / 'New Front' Phase (2011 –)

After subsequent years of worse performances, in January 2011 during the Front's Congress of Tours Jean-Marie's daughter Marine Le Pen is finally confirmed as official president of the party after beating her opponent (who was also close to her father) Bruno Gollnisch (Genga, 2017). From thereafter the dédiabolisation era begins, this culminates with Jean-Marie being expelled from the party by M. Le Pen herself after making inappropriate comments regarding the holocaust and WW2 (Genga, 2017: 171; BBC News, 20 August 2015). Synchronously, many more extremist figures (especially deriving from the youth wing) are distanced from the party in the hope to build a new moderate image (Genga, 2017). As M. Le Pen's favorite advisor - the libertarian crypto-technocrat Florian Philippot - had anticipated, this major repositioning proved to be electorally successful (Genga, 2017: 175). Although some (such as political advisor and analyst Patrick Buisson) argue the brand of Marine's party is still far too "toxic" to rule the country (Samuel, 2016), she has still come closer than her father when it comes to winning the presidency. Her electoral result at the 2022 Presidential elections was overall regarded as positive by her supporters, because even if she lost to Emmanuel Macron for the second time consecutively, in the second round she garnered 31.7 % of the vote (Voce & Clarke, 2022). Prior to that, in the run-off of the 2017 Presidential elections she had performed even better, given she obtained 33.9% of the vote against the same opponent (Statista Research Department, March 11, 2024).

Under M. Le Pen, the party's political project took shape as a means to provide French voters with an ideological alternative to the "mainstream parties" – namely (the neo-Gaullist) Les Républicains, the Socialist Party, President Macron's En Marche! (subsequently Renaissance party), and the radical left/green groupings. Whereas some scholars highlight that there has been a degree of continuity between this new party and her father's old Front National (see Mammone, 2015; Stockemer, 2017), others argue there has been a clear philosophical demarcation of the "new Front" from its extreme right past (see Gaffney, 2012; Genga, 2017; Tarchi, 2022). For instance, the specialist on lepénisme Daniel Stockemer (2017) explains that there are specifically three aspects that have improved (or "softened") the party's image as M. Le Pen took over its leadership (Stockemer, 2017: 39-40). First, she has regularly repudiated the "extreme right" label (Stockemer, 2017: 39). The evidence suggests that all intellectual references to thinkers like Maurice Barrès, Charles Maurras, Robert Brasillach and others have suddenly disappeared from the party's discourse (Stockemer, 2017: 39). Second, any comments made by her father that could be deemed as intolerant, antisemitic, or generically racist,

have also been instantly disavowed with fervor (Stockemer, 2017: 39-40). When it comes to antisemitism particularly, M. Le Pen's discreet realignment in favor of Israel on foreign policy speaks volumes about the party's moderation (Abboud, 2023). Third, she has embraced a traditional(-ist) form of French republicanism (a French version of neo-conservative American exceptionalism) that has its intellectual foundations in post-1789 universalist, liberal (although M. Le Pen opposes economic liberalism) and secular thought (Stockemer, 2017: 40). This approach is philosophically distant from the anti-intellectualist and anti-bourgeois ideological mapping of fascism and neofascism that often pushed for a return to pre-French revolution moral codes (see Paxton, 2005; Dagnino, 2016). Amid 2018, the party was officially renamed Rassemblement National in a move to put the organization's distant past and father's legacy behind once and for all.

Rassemblement National (RN): Ideological Profile

Populist, "right-wing" or both?

M. Le Pen's party has a comprehensible ideological profile. Whilst the RN still fails to meet the criteria to be evaluated as a (classical) "center-right" party - as it is not Atlanticist enough nor does it abide to the values of free-market capitalism or consider the liberal rule of law one of its core tenets (see Trippenbach & Johannès, 2022) - the party can instead be classified as "right-wing" populist. If the primary (and paramount) ingredient in the RN's political cocktail is populism, the secondary one is a form of nationalist social conservatism. On one hand, at the center of its ideology and discourse we first find a commitment to popular sovereignty (the will of the people, volonté générale) inextricably linked to a heavy critique of national and international - both political and financial - "corrupt elites." On the other hand, adjacent to its anti-elitist ethos, we also find a strong nationalist rhetoric (although state nationalist instead of ethnic nationalist) that can be simplified by the slogan "Les Français d'abord!" ("The French First!") (see Fraser, 2011). This slogan alone explains the RN's positions against mass immigration and in favor of a strong interventionist state that regularly distributes resources (but to the native French only) in the name of an inter-classist welfare chauvinism.

If one considers the definition Norberto Bobbio (1994) confers to the political right, where he suggests right-wing movements (unlike leftist ones) accept the existence of societal hierarchies and inequalities and may even consider them as positive, both as a premise and as a natural outcome to social and economic competition, then we can deduce that the RN is only partially "right-wing." After all, many of M. Le Pen's statist-interventionist policies (anathema to center-right liberal-conservatives) are quintessential of populist formations with a social conscience that aim to foremostly represent the lower classes and ameliorate living and working conditions for them through redistribution (Moffitt, 2020). This is where the welfare chauvinism derives from a complex ideological synthesis between nationalist populism, cultural conservatism, and economic socialism (see Ivaldi & Pineau, 2022). It is no coincidence that M. Le Pen once said: "we are absolutely not a rightist party; those who believe it make a colossal interpretation error" (Le Pen as cited in Stockemer, 2017: 39).

The People and the Elite

In any event, the RN's populist weltanschauung becomes evident if we consider the nine important aspects from Tarchi's theoretical framework. As explained above, populists view "the people" as a cohesive and virtuous community which functions as the basis of legitimation for government action. This view is coherently reflected in the RN's party manifesto (the "22 Measures" on its website), given we find within it not only the promotion of private property (essentially "facilitation of access" to it), but also that of social housing for French citizens – excluding immigrants (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 17). Government action is justified on the basis that large infrastructure developments, and the construction of 100,000 (plus 20,000 for young people) new social housing units, will only be provided for those struggling citizens who are legally French (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 17). Under these circumstances, immigrants/foreigners are not a priority, as they are considered to be part of an "outgroup" that is neither "cohesive" (as migrants in France may originate from distinct "non-homogeneous" countries) nor "virtuous" (as populists perceive them as a burden to the public resources system). The idea is that regarding economic state protection they do not deserve to have the same rights of the French, who are part of an "organic community" (Zanatta, 2016: 65-80), thus supposedly both cohesive and virtuous at the same time. Moreover, even if M. Le Pen states that she "has nothing against foreigners," her party clearly opposes free education to the children of illegal immigrants (The Guardian, December 8, 2016). Supposedly under foreign influence, French elites (the "UMPS system") have disproportionately provided privileges (such as social housing) to immigrants that should have never been welcomed into France initially (Dézé, 2014: 24).

This takes us to the negative view of the elite these right-wing populists hold. According to M. Le Pen, it is "time to free the French people from arrogant elites" (see Acton, 2017). Even though the RN's manifesto currently lacks explicitly anti-EU statements—aside from the aim to "protect the economy" from "unfair competition" and to revise EU trade agreements—one of its major immigration policies is tied to the inherently anti-elitist principle of direct democracy. Through constant referendums, "the people" will be able to put an end to "settlement immigration/reunification" (of immigrant families), scrap residence permits for those who have not worked for a year and decide whether the processing of asylum applications should (or should not) occur in French territory (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 1). In summary, for the RN, anti-elitism primarily involves "giving people a voice." While the manifesto conveys a positive view of popular decision-making, it simultaneously portrays professional politicians and technocratic elites in a very negative light. As previously mentioned, in populism, elites are seen as a dangerous power bloc that must be kept in check by the people through instruments of direct democracy (Tarchi, 2015: 125).

The Nation and the State

As Tarchi argues (and as we already know), in populist ideology the concept of people and nation are inextricably interconnected though the nation comes after the people (both as "hard-working" individuals and as a "homogenous" collective) given the nation is simply product of the cultural traditions of a people to whom it provides a stable identity

Please cite as:

Smith, Chloe; Bachtiar, Hasnan; Shakil, Kainat; Morieson, Nicholas & de Groot Heupner, Susan. (2024). "Appealing to a Religiously Defined 'the People': How Religion Was Performatively Operationalized in the 2019 and 2024 Election Campaigns of Indonesia's President-Elect." *Populism & Politics (P&P)*. European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS). April 25, 2024. https://doi.org/10.55271/pp0034

(Tarchi, 2015: 125). In other words, it is the people and their cultural traditions that form the nation and not vice-versa. Interestingly, in the RN's latest manifesto the concept of nation becomes conveniently - but also ideologically - almost indistinguishably linked and blurred with that of the state. As outlined earlier, the state is understood as nothing more an administrator of public interest that is entirely subordinate to the will of the people (Tarchi, 2015: 125). In fact, within the manifesto it is the state that works for the nation because a virtuous homogenous community composes the nation: the French people. Thus, the RN's ideal state is people centric. Similarly to the American proto-populist Gettysburg Address – "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." This longing for an active and interventionist state becomes apparent in the RN's policies regarding Islam. In the manifesto, a new strict law is proposed to combat Islamism (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 2). Islam itself is not regarded as French but is instead perceived as alien to the "cultural tradition" of French secular Republicanism (in the sense that this religion cannot be assimilated within it), and therefore is also an enemy to the nation-state (Genga, 2017). Nor is Islam regarded as something able to provide a "stable identity," given populists suspect the presence of Muslims and Christians (as well as atheists) within the country concomitantly may stir religious and racial tensions among the populace. From a populist perspective, a populace should be monolithic and homogenous (Hameleers & Vliegenthart, 2019: 22).

Proceeding to economic matters, all the anti-tax proposals the RN includes in its 22-point manifesto are aimed at French businesses owned by French businessmen (rassemblementnational.fr, Measures 4, 5, 8, and 12). The RN's pledge to "support French families" through the removal of inheritance tax for low-middle income families (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 8), as well as its proposals to increase welfare support for French mothers with one or more children (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 8), is particularly symbolic of a strong state (that intervenes to improve people's lives) for two reasons. The first has to do directly with populism and the second with social conservatism. Firstly, the RN wishes to present itself as a populist party therefore is required to pursue economic policies (such as subsidies and tax cuts) that favor the petite bourgeoisie and especially the working-class (see Kyle & Gultchin, 2018). Although the old Front National (like its successor today) was overall an inter-classist party, experts such as Nonna Mayer (1998) have pointed out that the vote for Le Pen in the 1995 Presidential elections was effectively a "class vote" – with several youngsters moving away from the PCF towards the Front's pseudo-socialist nationalism (Surel, 2002: 143-144). This author later coined the term "worker Le Penism" (Mayer, 1994). Following the same conceptual lead, Pascal Perrineau (1995) referred to this same phenomenon as "left Le Penism" (Perrineau, 1995: 243-261). These observations remain relevant today, as M. Le Pen enjoys broad consensus among the working classes from whom she consistently courts political support. Secondly, the RN is also inherently socially conservative (partially right-wing) and is therefore expected to financially assist single-mothers or larger families with children to promote a "battle for births", which is allegedly necessary to demographically boost the so-called "pure people" (term borrowed from Cas Mudde) of France.

Society, the Individual, and the Leader

Moving on from the populist view of nation intertwined with that of state to that of society, it must be stressed that the RN's positions on this matter are rather specific. M. Le Pen herself has notoriously stated that "multi-cultural societies are multi-conflict societies" (see Viscusi, 2017). This party is known to take a more (typically populist) exclusionary than inclusionary stance when it comes to society and its collectivist communitarian features. Parties like the RN view their country, its rural towns, metropolitan districts, provinces, and regions, as essentially constituting not only a sacred homeland, but also something of a heartland. Taggart defines a heartland as "a territory of the imagination…the heartland is that place, embodying the positive aspects of everyday life" (Taggart, 2002: 95). It is self-evident who belongs and who does not belong to this heartland (and society) (Taggart, 2002: 96-98). In this case, immigrants, religious fanatics, career politicians (M. Le Pen was a lawyer before entering politics), left-wing (anti-RN) activists, plutocrats with internationalist vocations, fifth columnists and foreign bodies, are certainly not part of the populist heartland (Taggart, 2002: 94). As a result, they are not included in the broader vision for French society that the RN upholds.

However, paradoxically, by observing the party's manifesto for an ideal society we are also confronted with a more "liberal" or libertarian aspect of populist ideology. For example, populists recognize that people's lives should often come before politics and the state. People are allowed to flourish economically and intellectually, to unleash their individual potential – "Voila, we're all molded by our personal paths, which forge our sensibilities" argues the RN's leader (see Gourevitch, 2015). M. Le Pen is supposedly pro-abortion (as long as it occurs within 14 weeks of pregnancy), pro-divorce, and pro-gay rights (as long as civil unions do not become marriage) (see Poirer, 2017). Contrastingly, she has also spoken out against a purely consumerist neoliberal individualism from an economic standpoint: "Our project is based on rejecting individualism and the power of money" (Smith, 2018).

Furthermore, closely observing the RN, one can deduce that the party acknowledges individuals are the cornerstone of social life. M. Le Pen ardently defends the civil individual rights of the French people. For instance, unlike Jean-Marie's old Front, the RN's positions are now - to a limited extent - sometimes feminist (see Schurts, 2024). On one occasion, the RN's leader expressed that utilizing a headscarf to meet an Islamic leader (the Grand Mufti of Lebanon) would be in conflict with the values of French republicanism and those of a free (liberal egalitarian) society, where both sexes enjoy equal rights (see Balkiz & Masters, 2017). "I will not cover myself up" M. Le Pen stressed while referring to her meeting, which eventually was cancelled (Balkiz & Masters, 2017). For the same reasons, she proposes a complete ban on headscarves and burkas in public spaces (see France24, April 7, 2022). Populist crypto-individualism also played a role in her decision to not support a ban on abortion – any mention to this issue is absent in her "22-measures" as well as in her self-authored books (Tarchi, 2022: 13). Also, M. Le Pen unequivocally condemned those religious fundamentalists who despise gay people (Wildman, 2017).

Taking this into account, to cast herself as a spokesperson and interpreter of the needs of the people, her leadership style embodies the populist ideal. The policies outlined for the RN not only position her as a leader close to the people, but her personal traits, which emphasize "ordinary qualities" like "common sense" and a "strong work ethic" (see Ivaldi & Mazzoleni, 2019: 1), also resonate positively with the populace. Moreover, in order to appeal to a more moderate base of working-class conservative supporters, she often reiterates that she is (like many others in France) a woman and a mother (Geva, 2020: 13-14). In the eyes of the many, M. Le Pen has become a "woman in a captain's suit," just as popular as Margaret Thatcher and Evita Peron in the past (Geva, 2020: 6,14). In a typically populist fashion, this female politician wants to demonstrate that she has both ordinary and extraordinary qualities that can both represent and lead the populace at the same time. As a natural guide, it is common for her to remind her potential voters that "Peuple de France, l'heure est venue de te lever" (Le Pen, April 21, 2022, Twitter). This is an invitation for "the people" of the French nation to rise-up. To rise not only against the neoliberal elite in France, but also against the diktats of the elite-backed European Union that are supposedly promoting and funding mass immigration, and finally against the traditional parties (neo-Gaullists, socialists, and communists) that are engaged in destroying the social fabric of the "homogenous" French nation.

Democracy and the Market

To conclude this section, the relationship that M. Le Pen's party has with democracy and the market is ambiguous, to say the least. Like all populists, the RN has an impatience with checks and balances (the formalities of liberal constitutionalism – e.g., political mediation and procedural legitimacy) that are an essential aspect of liberal democracy (see Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2017: 327). Nevertheless, this party does not reject representative democracy overall. The RN's view of democracy is simply of one that is direct and majoritarian. In its manifesto, referendums and plebiscites occupy the first position (in terms of "22 measures" to be taken). Accordingly, people will be able to decide on issues that affect their lives, ranging all the way from immigration to social housing and labor regulation (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 1). Regarding the market, the sociologist Lorenzo Cattani (2017) has appropriately suggested that M. Le Pen's party is a "bearer of neoliberal values regarding the national economy but at the same time also strongly critical of globalization and the more internationalist principles of neoliberalism." Following this logic, it can be assumed that even though M. Le Pen's technically opposes both unrestricted free trade and autarky, she still considers the market an overall as "something positive" and therefore advocates for protectionism as a middle-way (Cattani, 2017). Her economic positions have been significantly influenced by the French Eurosceptic economist Maurice Allais (1911-2010), which explains her past critique of the single currency, European integration, and the European constitution. Similarly, M. Le Pen's niece and (now former) important party representative, Marion-Maréchal Le Pen, has very clearly expressed that "a form of protectionism should be enforced at a national level, at least on strategic areas such as agriculture" (The Sydney Morning Herald, August 3, 2013). The RN accepts (and even welcomes) the existence of private property, entrepreneurship, and a social-market economy, given the party is not fully anti-capitalist. Notwithstanding, the core idea is that small and medium businesses should be taxed much less and allowed

to operate under a diminished amount of bureaucracy and regulation (especially EU regulation) whereas large, delocalized business (especially multinationals, a product of so-called "rootless capitalism") should be increasingly taxed and monitored by the state (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 18; see also Cattani, 2017). The latter are suspected to conspire against the interests of the working people (and their small-medium businesses) and the French nation (rassemblementnational.fr, Measure 18). In the RN's rhetoric, the evils of globalized capitalism are juxtaposed to the virtues of national-capitalism (Cattani, 2017), practiced day-to-day by the petite bourgeoisie – mainly craftsmen, tradesmen, fishermen, landowning farmers, and smaller-scale (local) entrepreneurs. They are ultimately considered to be the only "pure people" (to borrow Mudde's term once more) of the nation.

Forza Nuova (FN): A History

The Early Years

Unlike the French populists, the extreme right party Forza Nuova (FN) does not have a particularly long or complex history. True to its name, this party can be considered a "new force" with a relatively brief history. This history is deeply embedded in the tradition of Italian Fascism and appears quite transparent and straightforward to external observers. However, the brevity of its history does not make it unremarkable. On the contrary, being an organization founded by two alleged "terrorists"—Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello (also a musician alongside his political activism)—FN has attracted significant interest from journalists and political analysts who study the European extreme right. In 1980, both Fiore and Morsello fled Italy to seek political asylum in Britain as they were being investigated for the Bologna Massacre (August 2, 1980, which resulted in 85 deaths and 200 injuries), one of the darkest moments in the political history of the Italian Republic (Corriere della Sera, October 10, 2021; Nazzi, 2021).
In London, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Fiore had the opportunity to develop political and economic networks with British neofascist groups, supposedly with the help of BNP frontman Nick Griffin, and to establish successful businesses in the hospitality sector before returning to Italy without facing prosecution (Biondani et al., 2017). Due to these factors, along with the fact that the organization and its leader, Fiore, are openly fascist, FN represents an atypical example of an extreme right party. Founded in late September 1997, on the feast day of St. Michael the Archangel (Nazzi, 2017), FN aimed to reflect a niche form of Italian neofascism that was clerical (and fervently Roman Catholic) rather than secular (unlike CasaPound, another Italian neofascist movement) and traditionalist rather than futurist (Albanese, 2022: 317-318). Thus, ideologically, FN can be unequivocally placed on the ultra-authoritarian extreme right. More importantly, since its inception, FN has refused to adopt the ideological syncretism and flexibility of other 1990s Italian neofascist movements, such as Pino Rauti's Fiamma Tricolore. This is why it positions itself on the far right of the artificial spectrum of Italian neofascism, which, as writer Giano Accame (1990) argues, includes both "right-wing" and "left-wing" elements. In any case, with FN, both Fiore and Morsello—who "cut their teeth" during the dark days of the Anni di Piombo through participation in violent actions of extra-parliamentary groups like Terza Posizione ("Third Position") and the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari ("Armed Revolutionary Nuclei" - NAR)—aimed to project fascism

into the third millennium (Nazzi, 2017; Albanese, 2022: 317).

First Set of Elections: Failure in Pursuit

Like many European neofascists who wish to compete electorally, their primary objective was (and still is, as Fiore is alive, unlike Morsello) to turn their ideology in an "incubator for a new political model based on an old-fashioned design" – as the scholar Matteo Albanese (2002: 321) posits. However, if we solely consider FN's electoral results, and compare them to other contemporary parties who have instead evolved from extreme right to moderate right (such as Alleanza Nazionale or FDI in the recent past) FN failed miserably. The only times it competed at a national level (in 2001, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2018) it merely achieved less than one percent (the highest score was in 2006 with 0.67% in the Chamber of Deputies of Italy) with none of its candidates ever entering parliament (Ministero dell'Interno, Eligendo L'Archivio, 2024). Only in the 2004 European elections, by presenting a joint list of candidates alongside Alessandra Mussolini's (the granddaughter of the Duce) Alternativa Sociale did FN perform slightly better, managing to obtain 1.23% (Ministero dell'Interno, Eligendo L'Archivio, 2024). Notwithstanding, the only seat available in the EU Parliament went to the most prominent figure from the grouping – Mussolini herself.

Alliances, Assaults, and Attempts

However, Fiore eventually managed to become a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) through FN and its alliances, serving in Brussels and Strasbourg from May 2008 to July 2009. Fiore's activism at a supranational level involved consolidating his ties with other European neofascists within the EU Parliament. Together with the notorious Nick Griffin, he founded an ultra-nationalist group called the Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF), which was also pan-European and "anti-Zionist." The APF included the extreme right United Romania Party, the Romanian-Moldovan Noua Dreaptă (New Right), several Spanish Falangist parties, and Neo-Nazi organizations from Germany, Greece, Czechia, and Slovakia (see www.memri.org, April 18, 2024).

Nonetheless, throughout the 2010s, FN remained on the fringes of Italian and European politics. However, the party gained attention after some of its members, including Fiore, were involved in violent acts, such as the assault on the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), the country's oldest and most important trade union, on October 9, 2021. This incident brought FN back into the spotlight, drawing scrutiny from the public, media, police, judiciary, and other authorities (Il Sole 24 Ore, December 20, 2023). As a result, in the winter of 2023, Fiore and others involved were sentenced to over eight years in prison, though FN itself was not disbanded (Il Sole 24 Ore, December 20, 2023; Girardi, 2022). In an interview following a small political gathering in Isernia, Molise, where he was praised by supporters, Fiore stated that despite his criminal charges, FN would attempt to participate in the 2024 European Elections (Fiore, TVI Molise, December 23, 2023). He emphasized the importance of this period for Italy, possibly hinting at a resurgence of fascism with a pseudo-populist tone (Fiore, TeleRegione TV, December 23, 2023). However, FN failed to gather enough preliminary signatures to present a candidates list for the EU elections in June 2024. With Fiore's sentencing, the future of FN and Italian militant neofascism remains uncertain.

Forza Nuova (FN): Ideological Profile

Marginal and Controversial, but not Irrelevant

Forza Nuova (FN) is an extreme right party that is both marginal and controversial in Italian politics. It is marginal because, despite consistently participating in Italian general elections since 1997, FN has never reached the four percent threshold required to enter parliament. It is controversial due to its semi-personalist leadership and historical ties to the militant, violent, and subversive Italian neofascist movement active during the "Anni di piombo" ("Years of Lead") (Biondani et al., 2017). Fiore, the party's leader, openly expresses admiration for Mussolini's twenty-year dictatorship and the Italian Social Republic (RSI), as well as for other authoritarian leaders like Juan Perón in Argentina (Fiore, La7, October 28, 2012). In a 2012 television appearance discussing fascism and neofascism, Fiore admitted, "I've always defended fascism; every time I was asked whether I would have sided with the Americans or the RSI (during WWII), I've always responded – with the RSI" (Fiore, La7, October 28, 2012). Despite differentiating his ideology from National Socialism, he also refused to distance himself from Neo-Nazi movements like Golden Dawn when questioned during the same show (Fiore, La7, October 28, 2012).

Taking all of this into account, FN's electoral marginality does not render it irrelevant in the political arena or diminish its potential threat to a liberal-democratic polity. First and foremost, some party members have engaged in premeditated attacks on immigrants over the years—between November 2012 and November 2013, there were more than fifty racially motivated assaults (Fiano and redazione Roma Online, 2016). Second, in addition to Fiore, two key FN representatives—Giuliano Castellino and Luca Castellini—along with five other extreme right activists indirectly connected to the party, were officially charged for their violent assault on the CGIL in October 2021 (Il Sole 24 Ore, December 20, 2023). This incident was taken very seriously by Italian public opinion, politicians, the judiciary, and other state authorities. Graphic images of the violent protest circulated in the press, raising concerns among parts of the population about a possible resurgence of neofascism, even if on a limited scale.

Authoritarian, Anti-democracy, and Nationalist?

If we reconsider the three/four elements that Carter (2005) argues constitute the ideological core of the extreme right, it becomes clear that FN is unequivocally an extreme right party, as these elements are integral to its ideological repertoire. First, FN is explicitly authoritarian, advocating for the forced repatriation of all immigrants, regardless of their legal status in Italy (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 3). Second, it is anti-democratic because the majority of its policies are impossible to implement within a rule-of-law system upheld by Italian (anti-fascist) constitutionalism, where the parliament plays a crucial role. Third, FN embraces both exclusionary and holistic nationalism. Its recurring propaganda posters, which depict black people as "rapists" or sub-human, exemplify exclusionary nationalism (see Il Fatto Quotidiano, September 2, 2017). In contrast, its calls for an "organic state"—a statist and corporatist model where the state, nation, religion, people, and "blood and soil" are so interwoven that they cannot be separated—demonstrate holistic nationalism (see Vercelli, 2018). Any reformulation that separates the Italian nation-state from its people's religion, culture,

territory, and biological characteristics would, in FN's view, lead to the decay and eventual death of the nation. After all, fascists have always been obsessed not only with the idea of palingenesis (see Griffin, 1996) but also with that of decay or decadence (for a full account, see Schulman, 2006). Moreover, when adapting FN's manifesto and discourse (primarily that of leader Fiore) to Tarchi's (2015: 125) comprehensive scheme that examines nine aspects of party ideology—such as the people, nation, state, and society—it becomes undeniably clear where Fiore's organization stands politically.

The People, the Nation, and the State

To begin this party's analysis by observing its view of the people, it should be noted that - as a party influenced by fascism - FN unsurprisingly does not hold a particularly optimistic perspective of human nature or the masses per se. In Mussolini's words: "The Fascist conception of the State is all embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value…the Fascist State – interprets, develops, and empowers the whole life of a people" (Mussolini & Gentile, 1932: 847). In FN's case, although people are functional to its long-term statist political aspirations, unless they are forcefully guided, either by a charismatic leader or a strong state's elite, they can never be trusted to willingly find their path or positively serve the country. Ironically, it was the proto-liberal Rousseau (in 1762) and not a fascist intellectual that stated, "people need to be forced to be free," still this appears to be FN's idea if we observe its policies such as the nationalization of banks (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 5). If such policy is carried forward, the forzanovisti insist that "all the people of the earth can be free from their usurpers" (Ibid). This phrase is present in their online manifesto and appears to contain an implicit reference to the centenarian Jewish world-domination conspiracy theory. A much more explicit reference can, however, be found in a 2019 la7 (private television network) interview provided from FN's "National Vice-Secretary" Luca Castellini who claims that "they control the world" when Jews are mentioned in relation to a rise in antisemitism (Castellini, La7, October 18, 2019). Another conception of the people that FN's appears to have is that all European nations (hence also Italian people) should be freed from the shackles of the European Union (EU), which is to be replaced with a much more authoritarian confederation loosely based around the ethics of Blut und Boden ("Blood and Territory") but also with inspiration from the Romano-Greek classical model (Fiore, Forza Nuova, YouTube, March 9, 2011). As a proud fascist, Fiore inevitably sees Italy as a direct cultural (and perhaps even political) product of that millenarian historic tradition and perceives Italians as the direct descendants of Ancient Romans and Ancient Greeks (Ibid). In essence, FN's ideal Europe is a "Europe of free peoples" (FN general elections program, 2013, point 18). He goes into more detail throughout an interview closely preceding the 2019 European elections where he states that "we cannot have a liberal-masonic Europe with no values at the heart of it…we cannot have a neo-internationalism which is a re-formulation of Marxism in a European form, we need patriotism, we need religious values, but more importantly: we cannot destroy the family because family is the primary cell for the national and European re-construction" (Fiore, Porta a Porta, May 16 2019).

FN's idea of a (culturally, morally, spiritually and perhaps racially) purified and independent nation explains its decades-old anti-globalist campaign. According to FN,

leaving the EU, NATO, the UN, and other strategic alliances and international bodies means liberating Italy from the influence of inimical foreign powers that do not share the same destiny with Italy (FN general elections program, 2013, point 18). Not merely the Germans and the French who supposedly run the neoliberal and market-oriented EU, but especially the Americans (sworn enemies of the fascists since WW2) who serve the interests of their own military-industrial complex (FN rejects US-led war campaigns abroad) but also prone to the whims of big capitalists (e.g. Wall Street) who are - following an antisemitic conspiratorial "logic" - mostly Jewish (Fiore, ANSA, January 20, 2024; Berizzi, 2023). Nevertheless, a monist homogenous nation cannot exist without a strong authoritative state. FN unapologetically supports corporatism (in all areas of the economy) to "defend workers" (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 8). Also, protectionist measures and economic nationalism in general are recommended by the forzanovisti and its leadership. FN is averse to neoliberalism (both cultural and economic) and condemns the EU for embracing several aspects of the neoliberal economy, especially the third sector which is not regarded as highly as the first (raw materials, agriculture) and second (manufacturing) sectors of the economy (FN general elections program, 2013, point 12).

Society: "God, Homeland, and Family"

Regarding society, the societal vision of FN encompasses the "God, Homeland, and Family" value triad (Berizzi, 2019). This was popularized under Mussolini's regime however the slogan itself is much older as it was coined by the philosopher-activist Giuseppe Mazzini as he and his men forged Italy as one nation (Gnocchi, 2022). God as FN was founded under the supposed protection of St. Michael the Archangel (on the day of the recurring religious feast) with the intent of being a party with a robust attachment to Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church (Albanese, 2022: 317; Il Cittadino, September 30, 2017). FN's online manifesto includes a restoration of the Concordat between Catholic Church and Italian State, where Church and State are not entirely divided, and the former serves the purpose of positively influencing future generations (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 8). In such context, Christianity itself is presented as something identitarian (rather than purely religious) as it is the unifying trait of this morally pure "Europe of the free people." It serves the person of uniting (white) Europeans for a new crusade against everything deemed "Un-European" (see Albanese, 2022: 321). Currently, particularly Islam, but also Judaism. More specifically, Fiore considers Islam excessively "archaic and fundamentalist" (Fiore, Forza Nuova YouTube, March 10, 2011). Homeland is also included in the triad because FN strongly believes that the primary purpose of any Italian political party should be that of fostering Italian culture and defending the rights and access to state resources of all native Italians (viewed as more important and perhaps even "superior") when juxtaposed to (non-European) foreigners (La Gazzetta di San Severo, May 6, 2017).

Last but not least, family occupies an important position in FN's ideology as it is clearly tied to the fascist obsession with national rebirth (see Griffin, 1995). In fact, the term "national rebirth" unequivocally appears in FN's manifesto (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 2). In the forzanovisti mindset, like in the animal kingdom, a people's (or species') survival (and "civilizational greatness") depends on its ability of

reproduction and survival. The Darwinian conception at the core of fascist ideology (see Hawkins, 2009) equates human society with the animal kingdom, where the strong prey upon the weak, and only the fittest survive. This "survival of the fittest" notion was even more pronounced in German National Socialism than in Italian Fascism (see Menton, 1994). In fact, 19th-century Prussian proto-fascists like Friedrich von Bernhardi argued that war was a "biological necessity" (Menton, 1994). As history unfolded, the Nazis began to idolize societies like Sparta, which strictly regulated births (favoring males while rejecting those with congenital defects) and was effectively a war-oriented society—a model admired by Nazi Joseph Goebbels (see Roche, 2013; Sciarri, 2020). Spartans were always ready to defend themselves but were also prone to clash with other civilizations. Similarly, the traditionalist society that FN envisions is one with rigid hierarchies, modeled after the nuclear family unit, where a woman's role is confined to household chores, reproduction, and motherhood (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 2).

The Individual and the Leader

Moving on from society to the individual, it is certain that FN sees consumerism, hedonism, and egotistic individualism (supposedly encouraged by multi-cultural societies like the US) as abnormal and decadent (for an account of FN's "anti-Americanism," see Centin, 2020). Unsurprisingly, from this perspective, homosexuality is also considered abnormal and should be rebuked. One FN local propaganda poster from a small town in Tuscany (Lajatico) reads: "Lajatico needs children, not homosexuals" (La Nazione, February 28, 2023). Moreover, to protect a presumed social "order against chaos" (as another propaganda leaflet states) a country where there is a strong state that limits excess freedoms (especially of those considered abnormal) and individual rights is envisaged (Bologna Today, September 24, 2015). For instance, FN argues that abortions in all circumstances should be banned (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 1). Fiore himself is a devout Catholic and a father to 11 children (Fiore, as cited in Madron, 2015).

This takes us to FN's fascistic idea that, regardless of what the circumstances are, a nation revolves around its leader. In a Weberian sense, as far as his supporters are concerned, Fiore is semi-charismatic. In a British documentary he was defined as "highly charismatic" by British neofascists who knew him personally. He is generally perceived as a virile and stereotypically Mediterranean man who contributed to the national cause by fighting for a "third way" (Eatwell, 2017: 372-374; Bhen-Ghiat, 1996: 293) and a "new state" (a fascist one, purified from the sins of post-war capitalism and communism) and also by producing many offspring. Also, notwithstanding his age, Fiore has shown dedication to his militant street squads as he actively participates in the anti-globalist protests hosted by FN where clashes with groups of anti-fascists (the Italian branch of "Antifa") and the police are expected (Journeyman Pictures, YouTube, December 10, 2018). Naturally, there is a fascistic aesthetic of violence in these demonstrations as FN's representatives like Castellino claim that they use their "bodies as shields" against the political enemy (Castellino, La7, October 17, 2021), namely anti-fascists, communists, but also the Italian police working for the institutions neofascists repudiate.

Democracy and the Market

Given FN's stance on democracy, it's unsurprising that such a relationship is essentially nonexistent. Although FN participates in elections (unlike Fiore's earlier subversive movement Terza Posizione), its leader has publicly stated, "we respect fascism" (Fiore, YouTube, February 19, 2018). This explains the manifesto's policies, which are permeated with nostalgia for dictatorship and aim to eliminate the anti-fascist Scelba and Mancino Laws (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 7). The Scelba Law, established in 1952, was designed to constitutionally prevent the formation of a new fascist party that might attempt to reestablish Mussolini's Partito Fascista Nazionale (PNF) and instill a dictatorship through revolutionary and violent means. The Mancino Law (1993) is broader, condemning any incitement of hatred based on racial, religious, or sexual discrimination. For evident reasons, FN opposes both laws (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 7).

Remaining on the issue of democracy, it's notable that direct democracy and referendums are not mentioned even once in FN's recent party manifestos (see forzanuova1997.it; FN general elections program, 2013). Furthermore, it's evident that the Forzanovisti view freedom of association with suspicion. The manifesto outlines FN's plan to ban all secret societies or sects, particularly those of a Masonic nature (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 4). These groups are seen as being in collusion with internationalist interests, ranging from Jewish financiers to high-end magnates like Carlo De Benedetti and George Soros, and other so-called "corrupt" (anti-Italian) elite groups—labeled as the "traitors of the homeland" (La Voce Del Trentino, August 26, 2022). Despite this, FN, as (neo-)fascists, aim to forge a "new man" and a new elite (Eatwell, 2010). This spiritual aristocracy, based on the theories of the reactionary intellectual Julius Evola, is expected to emerge from Fiore's small but loyal group of supporters, including his close associates Castellino, Cabras, and Taormina (Berizzi, 2021). In fact, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, FN's alarming plan was to form an emergency "shadow government for national liberation," with Fiore as "Foreign Secretary," to replace the elite from the Giuseppe Conte government and potentially put on trial those politicians (mainly left-leaning) who served in it (Berizzi, 2021).

Ultimately, when it comes to the market, FN's positions are - as mentioned earlier - fully protectionist. According to this party, free markets are dangerous, since they are prone to the control of neoliberal elite interests and of the US, through Wall-Street (Fiore, Il Sole 24 Ore, January 20, 2024). Of course, alongside the US, Israel is also a sworn enemy (Berizzi, 2023). These anti-market tendencies are also displayed in FN's 2013 program where it is postulated that there should be a "special court for crimes of financial (banking) nature" (FN general elections program, 2013, point 6). FN's affinity for the concept of economic sovereignty emerges from their anti-ECB, anti-IMF, and anti-international "debt collectors" positions (forzanuova1997.it, point 5). The older 2013 program also states that there should be full state "control of the strategic sectors of the economy" (FN general elections program, 2013, point 4). However, even whilst FN is a pro-state illiberal party that yearns to control the Italian economy thoroughly, it does include in its agenda measures to tackle excessive bureaucracy to please the (national) small-medium businesses belonging to the first two sectors of the economy (FN general

elections program, 2013, points 2, 14). Hypothetically, these anti-bureaucracy and anti-tax policies are listed in the hope of attracting a minority of lower-middle-class voters who remain nostalgic for fascism and the era when the trains supposedly "ran on time."

Discussion and Conclusion: Why Populism and Extreme Right Differ

Discussion

As the emeritus professor Roger Eatwell (2017) appropriately argues "of all the major '-isms', fascism and populism are the most elusive" (Eatwell, 2017: 363). Taking this into account, both are not elusive to the point that scholars would not be able to discern their distinctive and incongruous features. Specifically, as it has been demonstrated in previous paragraphs, even if the RN and FN do hold minor ideological similarities, the two parties have major conflicting views on how the state, society, and other aspects of politics per se should function. For the RN, the people are a cohesive group of free individuals who should always be given a voice, given they are considered to be at the center of political decision-making processes, regardless of whether such processes take place at a national or supranational (e.g. the EU) level. The direct democracy ideal that M. Le Pen's party promotes (see Quencez and Michelot, 2017: 6) is an evident demonstration of the French populist's attachment to a majoritarian form of popular sovereignty and traditional republican principles. "Direct democracy permits a true exercise of democracy itself" is what M. Le Pen exclaimed on one occasion (Finchelstein, 2017). In essence, as right-wing populists harbor a positive sentiment towards the populace, they believe people can be vertically integrated into the legislative and executive spheres of governance (see Mohrenberg et al., 2019). The people are trusted to make the correct ("common-sense") decisions when asked to vote on critical issues concerning the EU, immigration policy, and/or taxes.

Contrastingly, being clearly located on the extreme right fringe of the spectrum, Fiore's FN does not give the same amount of attention to popular sovereignty. In this Italian case, the people are not a primary aspect of politics and are overall viewed in a subtly more negative light. References to direct democracy practices are not present in FN's discourse and electoral manifesto(s). In a classical fascist (but also neofascist) worldview, people (as an indifferent, "plebian and insubordinate mass") can rarely be trusted to make the correct decisions (see Landa, 2018). Fully statist, authoritarian measures, from the "top-down" are usually preferred to the "bottom-up" instruments of direct democracy on a regular basis. It is no coincidence that historically fascists used to ban elections rather than expand them through referenda (Finchelstein, 2017). However, on rare occasions, fascist regimes did support plebiscites when popular consensus was already on their side, in order to further consolidate their power, when in reality important political decisions had already been made from a nationalist elite at the top (Finchelstein, 2017; Ben-Ghiat, 2023). This explains Fiore's intentions to put in place an unelected "emergency government" (with a pre-defined elite taken from FN's ranks) to set the country's direction.

In fact, the elite is fundamental to the extreme right's long-term political project, as it

must dictate the correct path for the masses. Unlike right-wing populists, right-wing extremists do not aim to replace the elite with popular rule and tend to despise any form (primitive or modern) of ochlocracy (Landa, 2018). Naturally, from this perspective, both direct democracy and representative democracy are viewed as dangerous and decadent liberal (post-French revolution) bourgeois inventions. In the past, scholars like Mudde have argued that there are two opposites to populism: pluralism and elitism (Mudde, 2017: 34). For obvious reasons, the extreme right is not pluralist (and under this specific aspect it is similar to populism), but it is instead elitist (Mudde, 2015), and this is where right-wing extremism diverges from right-wing populism.

Furthermore, although it may appear that RN's and FN's idea of nation is similar, as both promote a homogenous community with a stable cultural identity that resists the fast-paced changes of modernity brought about by neoliberalism, multi-culturalism, and social progressivism, even on this matter FN's positions are more extreme. M. Le Pen's party is opposed to multi-culturalism as accordingly there should only be one defining culture in France shared by all French people, and this should directly derive from the country's historical republican tradition (Genga, 2017). Such tradition may be old-fashioned or partially conservative but is also distinctly democratic and anti-fascist. Thus, the cultural traditions of the people occupy a paramount position in the idea of what the French nation should appear like. Instead, FN's vision of nation is necessarily minoritarian, mainly because fascism in Italy (unlike republicanism in France) is not embraced by the majority of the populace, but merely by a small authoritarian minority of dictatorship nostalgics (Senatore, YouTrend, March 24, 2018). Constitutionally, with its many checks and balances, Italy remains a staunchly anti-fascist country (D'Ascenzo, 2018).

Regarding the RN, the "Français d'abord!" slogan essentially implies that second and third generation immigrants who were born in France are effectively part of "the people" and community (or heartland) hence it is not required of them to leave (see Lesueur, 2024). Additionally, whilst under Jean-Marie Le Pen's management the party's principal slogan was "France belongs to the French!" it appears that under M. Le Pen another slogan has become predominant (Fini, La7, November 13, 2015). This would be the more moderate (and somewhat neo-Gaullist) motto "France belongs to those who love it!" (Fini, La7, November 13, 2015). Interestingly, under this aspect the FN differs from the RN as well. It transpires from the agenda and discourse of the former party that even those who were born in Italy to foreign parents should be repatriated, as they are not considered Italian due to their ethnicity (FN online manifesto: forzanuova1997.it, point 3). One can deduce that while right-wing populist parties (as the RN) oppose multi-culturalism but not necessarily multi-racialism (e.g. someone with foreign parents but who is born in France is considered French), extreme right parties (as FN) object to both multi-culturalism and multi-racialism (see Berizzi, 2017). Uncoincidentally, Fiore's party campaigned against the Ius Soli and is only in favor of the Ius Sanguinis when it comes to citizenship (Fiore, la Nuova Provincia, 2013). Slogans and posters of FN (such as those where African males are seen raping women) do not exist in the propaganda of M. Le Pen's RN as this party does not stand for biological racism. Whilst right-wing populists may be "culturist" (see Taguieff, 1993: 101), and believe that some cultures (supposedly Western democratic liberalism) are "superior" to others, unlike right-wing

extremists they will rarely ever express that certain races are (genetically) superior to others. Nevertheless, FN appears less concerned about immigration from white-majority Christian countries perceived to be similar to Italy (Fiore, la Nuova Provincia, 2013).

According to the RN's ideology, the state occupies an important position and should intervene where and whenever necessary. However, in its populist (and "non-fascist") conception, the state is always subordinate to the volonté générale (Tarchi, 2015: 125). In other words, the state should only mediate to ameliorate the living and working conditions of the people (especially working class and lower-middle class citizens) when free market fails to do so. This occurs through "social-populist" measures such as state-funded healthcare programs, public welfare benefits, and state subsidies or tax cuts for poorer families and individuals. Like the RN, FN envisions an actively interventionist state. However, FN takes this concept further, as fascists see the state as superordinate to both the people and the nation. In other words, the state shapes the nation, even artificially, if necessary, as historically seen in classical fascism, and grants the people only a limited set of rights. This is different from populist ideology as in populism the existence of people's rights precedes that of the formation of a state. Unlike in populism – where individuals are expected to remain unpolitical and "get on with their lives" – in fascist ideology the individual (both men and women, in distinct ways) is expected to participate in politics and public life. In fact, Italian fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who wrote one of fascism's foundational texts alongside Mussolini, spoke of an ethical state to "teach core values to the new man, unlike the liberal state with its relativist distinction between private and public spheres" (Eatwell, 2017: 372).

The neofascists of the FN want a corporatist state that controls most (if not all) areas of the economy. Whereas the populists of the RN expect the state to control only certain strategic sectors and support interventionism (under the form of protectionism) in areas such as agriculture supposedly under threat from the EU's bureaucratic regulation. This RN outlook may be considered authoritarian but is not as authoritarian as FN's. After all, as one historian wrote, populism awkwardly lies "between democracy and dictatorship" but is still not dictatorial (Finchelstein, 2017: 175). To be sure, FN does not support globalization and free markets at all. In relation to the market, it takes on a crypto-autarchic (Fiore's admiration for Iceland's economy speaks volumes) and corporatist tradition of economic self-sufficiency (especially in terms of agriculture, construction, manufacturing) that is inspired by classical fascism (Fiore, Porta a Porta, May 29, 2009). As shown before, FN is extremely critical of internationalist capitalism. Instead, the RN's position towards free markets and trade is more flexible and less negative than FN's. However, in similar fashion to FN it does advocate for protectionism and state dirigisme in certain strategic areas of the economy, principally the first sector. Nonetheless, both right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties believe in forms of taxation that cannot be considered fully socialist.

Overall, right-wing populists and right-wing extremists also hold different views when it comes to society. The society RN envisions is more liberal than FN's. Even critiques to immigration (particularly Islamic immigration) derive from a universalist, republican, and partially liberalist standpoint (Genga, 2017; see also Brubaker, 2017, who defines this stance "civilizationism"). For example, the defense of women's rights and those of

the "LGBTQ+" community occupies a relevant position in the RN's political-societal agenda. The same thing cannot be said about FN, a party that - unlike the RN - is not at all secular and is openly hostile to homosexuality. In fact, it is interesting to note that apart from sporadic statements claiming certain aspects of Islam are "archaic" the Italian neofascists do not give much attention to Islam or criticize it excessively. One hypothesis is that they derive this attitude directly from classical fascist ideology. It is known that Mussolini self-proclaimed himself the "protector of Islam" after he was granted a sword from the chief of a Libyan Berber tribe (Alpozzi, 2017). Although there were Muslims detained in Nazi Germany's concentration camps (see Starr, 2020), Hitler, too, was not always Islamophobic, and allowed many Muslim soldiers to be recruited in the Waffen-SS (Trigg, 2012; Bougarel, 2017). In more recent times, FN and Fiore have been strong supporters of not only the pro-Palestine movement (also unapologetically defending Hamas, see Berizzi, 2023) but have also championed countries that are Arabic and Islamic (e.g. Assad's Syria) or not Arabic but still Islamic (e.g. Iran), as they see them as potential allies in the struggle against Americanism and Zionism (Strickland, 2018). In any case, paradoxically, this does not mean that the forzanovisti welcome immigration from Muslim countries (Il Fatto Quotidiano, January 10, 2015). Fiore's FN is vehemently anti-Atlanticist, whilst under M. Le Pen the RN has undergone an ideological mutation becoming less hostile to the Atlantic alliance compared to her father, who supported Reagan's domestic policy (Tarchi, 2015: 123) but not US foreign policy.

Based on the analysis, we can also infer that whilst populism is understood to be a much more communitarian (and sometimes even collectivist) ideology rather than an individualistic one (see Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: Chapter 1). Populists do not expect to control individuals through the state and acknowledge the fact that party and politics should not be involved in all aspects of private life (Taggart, 2002: 97; 2018). As already mentioned, as a peculiar populist party, the RN tolerates abortion, divorce, homosexuality (to some degree) and certain feminist positions (for an account of M. Le Pen's "new feminism" see Shurts, 2024). Instead, as an extreme right and/or neofascist party, the FN accepts none of those things. FN's ideological attachment to the ultra-conservative "God, Homeland, and Family" triad means that if individuals do not actively practice their Christian religion, serve their nation, and engage in heterosexual relationships that through social conformism lead to the birth of children, they cannot ever be a positive "component of the nation." Therefore, they automatically become part of an (unwanted and unnecessary) "outgroup."

When it comes to leadership, both the right-wing populist RN and right-wing extremist FN have semi-charismatic leaders. Evidently, without M. Le Pen in charge, the RN would be a very different party reflecting different positions. It is possible (or even likely) that having a divorced female and mother as leader, the RN has been able to expand its message to attract the votes of French women, but also of those segments of the electorate that do not identify as "right-wing" but are not located on the left either. With her semi-personalist leadership (but also relying on the advice of loyal subordinates like Bardella and Philippot) holds a firm grip on her party (governing with an "iron fist") and determines most of its policies (Stockemer, 2017: 47-48). Currently, she faces almost no challenge from the minoritarian Catholic-Conservative faction of the party that feels closer to her niece Marion-Maréchal Le Pen (Genga, 2017: 209), as since May 2017

Marion has not been part of the RN but has lately joined a rival party on the right called Reconquête! (Darmanin, 2022).

Similarly, within FN Fiore faces no internal competition, and is considered to be (as one of the veterans of the 1970s neofascist militias) the only one able to guide the Italian nation and put an end to its (supposed) cultural and economic decay. However, there is an important distinction to be made, M. Le Pen is understood to be herself part of the ordinary people who as well as possessing ordinary qualities (such as being a mother to three children) is also blessed with the gift of being able to be a political animal and influence France's current affairs – by being a bulwark against the elitist neo-Gaullist and socialist parties. Contrastingly, non-populist extreme right parties like FN are generally unable to attract a large number of followers, therefore rely only on winning over "converts" or "fervid disciples" (see Weyland, 2017: 63-65). Within his organization Fiore (who is understood to possess fascist extraordinary qualities, rather than populist ordinary ones) plays essentially the same role Mussolini played within the 1920s PNF. He is expected to spiritually inspire and guide both the nation and the people to indicate a common destiny for all Italians. A destiny that according to the FN's leader will have to necessarily lie outside the boundaries of the EU and the American (NATO) sphere of influence (Fiore, ANSA, January 20, 2024).

Conclusion

In this contribution, Tarchi's theoretical framework, along with a manifesto and discourse analysis methodology, was utilized to compare the ideological positions of a French populist party and an Italian extreme right party. Results of the manifesto and discourse analysis palpably show that while Forza Nuova (FN) is unequivocally a neofascist party belonging to the extreme right, the position of the Rassemblement National (RN) on the political spectrum is slightly more difficult to discern. While the RN certainly embraces a radical understanding of politics - incompatible with center-right neoliberal and center-left social-democratic parties - it is also undeniably more moderate ideologically compared to the Italian FN. In all circumstances, when it comes to specific attitudes towards the people, the nation, the state, society, the individual, the leader, the elite, democracy, and the market, "right-wing" populism is less extreme than "right-wing" neofascism. De facto, Mudde recently highlighted that populism may simply be "an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism" (Mudde, 2021: 5).

Thus, we can deduce that even if some of the RN's political positions may theoretically be "illiberal" and authoritative (or even semi-authoritarian, particularly on immigrant rights), they are not altogether undemocratic. In contrast, FN is not only illiberal and resolutely authoritarian but also undemocratic. This comes as no surprise, as fascism and neofascism are inherently undemocratic. Nonetheless, under M. Le Pen's leadership, the RN has transformed from an extreme right party to a populist right party in an attempt to become more moderate, even embracing the universalist values of republicanism and democratic conservatism, as stressed by Genga (2017: 176-180). The RN is embarrassed by its "toxic" past and wants to gradually overcome it. On the other hand, under Fiore, FN has maintained an ideological attachment to the political history, culture, myths, and symbols of Italian Fascism, proudly emphasizing its links to the Republic of Salò and

Mussolini's twenty-year dictatorship.

It is apparent that M. Le Pen's party occupies a middle position peculiarly between those European parties like FN on the extreme right and those much more liberal-oriented on the center-right. This relatively new and complex position on the spectrum should today be understood as "right-wing populism" or "radical right-wing populism" (for those who prefer a slightly older or more precise academic terminology) and is occupied not only by M. Le Pen's RN but also by many other parties on the European political landscape, such as the FPÖ, Lega Nord, PVV, Reform UK, Fidesz, and many others. All the parties mentioned are significantly more ideologically "moderate" compared to parties from the extreme (neofascist) right-wing family, such as FN itself, as well as CasaPound, España 2000, the NPD (now called Die Heimat), the BNP, Golden Dawn, Ergue-te and the "National Bolshevik" neo-Nazi groups present in modern-day Russia.

In conclusion, to comprehend the implications for liberal-democratic settings worldwide during and after this new wave of populism, it is crucial to first distinguish how populism differs from its outdated (and more revolutionary) "predecessor," fascism. Future comparative studies ideally could involve detailed analysis of how populist parties and extreme right parties similarly or distinctly affect a democratic country's rule of law and individual rights when in power.

References

--- (2003). “Fini in Israele: ‘Le leggi razziali furono infamy’.” Corriere Della Sera. November 24, 2003.

https://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Politica/2003/11_Novembre/24/fini.shtml (accessed on January 2, 2024).

--- (2013). “La moschea, l’immigrazione, i gay Incontro ravvicinato con Forza Nuova.” La Nuova Provincia. February 18, 2013.

https://lanuovaprovincia.it/attualita/la-moschea-limmigrazione-i-gayincontro-ravvicinato-con-forza-nuova/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2013). “The devil’s granddaughter?” The Sydney Morning Herald. August 3, 2013. https://www.smh.com.au/world/the-devils-granddaughter-20130729-2qthd.html (accessed on July 3, 2024).

--- (2015). “French National Front expels founder Jean-Marie Le Pen.” BBC News. August 20, 2015. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34009901 (accessed on July 2, 2024).

--- (2015). “Charlie Hebdo, Forza Nuova: ‘Fuori Islam dall’Italia.’ Salvini: ‘Ci sgozzeranno’.” Il Fatto Quotidiano. January 10, 2015.

https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/01/10/charlie-hebdo-forza-nuova-fuori-islam-dalli talia-salvini-ci-sgozzeranno/1329474/ (accessed on July 8, 2024).

--- (2016) “Marine Le Pen: no free education for children of ‘illegal immigrants’.” The Guardian. December 8, 2016.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/08/marine-le-pen-says-no-free-education-for-children-of-illegal-immigrants#:~:text=7%20years%20old-,Marine%20Le%20Pen%3A%20no%20free,for%20children%20of%20'illegal%20immigrants'&text=The%20French%20far%2Dright%20leader,measures%20to%20restrict%20state%20services (accessed on July 5, 2024).

--- (2017). “Migranti, polemica sul manifesto di Forza Nuova: utilizza la propaganda fascista del Ventennio.” Il Fatto Quotidiano. September 2, 2017. https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/09/02/migranti-polemica-sul-manifesto-di-forza-nuova-utilizza-la-propaganda-fascista-del-ventennio/3831751/ (accessed on July 3, 2024).

--- (2017). “Monza, Forza Nuova prega davanti alla statua di San Michele.” Il Cittadino. September 30, 2017.
https://www.ilcittadinomb.it/news/cronaca/monza-forza-nuova-prega-davanti-alla-statua-di-san-michele/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2017). Varsavia: l'internazionale dell'estrema destra. La7 Attualità /PiazzaPulita (YouTube). November 26, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6H8sCTZC9g (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2017). "French presidential election results 2017." Statista. April 23, 2017. https://www.statista.com/statistics/887844/french-presidential-election-results/ (accessed on July 2, 2024).

--- (2017). "San Severo – Forza Nuova: Casa e Lavoro Prima gli Italiani!" La Gazzetta Di San Severo. May 6, 2017.
https://www.lagazzettadisansevero.it/san-severo-forza-nuova-casa-e-lavoro-prima-gli-italiani/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2018). "Italy's Fascist Resurgence (Subtitled). Journeyman Pictures." Journeyman Pictures. December 10, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFNbMFxeLMk (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2018). Elezioni 2018 Programma di Governo Salvini Premier. "Lega - Salvini Premier," pp.174.
http://file:///C:/Users/amede/Downloads/Programma_Lega-SalviniPremier_2018.pdf> (accessed on August 24, 2022).

--- (2021) "Roberto Fiore, chi è il leader di Forza nuova arrestato dopo gli scontri." Corriere Della Sera. October 10, 2021.
https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/21_ottobre_10/burgoscorriere-web-roma-c3f573fc-29eb-11ec-bcd6-9bba3a47f3bc.shtml (accessed on July 2, 2024).

--- (2022). "How was Italian fascist Roberto Fiore connected to Nick Griffin of the UK National Front?" Plain Sight Productions. May 4, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAQFZlrnJw0 (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2022). "Le Pen vows headscarf fines in tight French election battle." France 24. April 7, 2022.
https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220407-le-pen-vows-headscarf-fines-in-tight-french-election-battle (accessed on July 2, 2024).

--- (2022) "Storie di ordinaria speculazione che ridurranno l'Italia in miseria." La Voce Del Trentino. August 26, 2022.
https://www.lavocedeltrentino.it/2022/08/26/storie-di-ordinaria-speculazione-che-ridurranno-litalia-in-miseria/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2022). 22 Mesures Pour 2022. RN - Rassemblement National. https://rassemblementnational.fr/ (accessed on July 1, 2024).

--- (2022). Sito Ufficiale di Forza Nuova. 8 Punti. Forza Nuova. https://www.forzanuova1997.it/ (accessed on July 1, 2024).

References

--- (2023). “Assalto alla Cgil, condannati Fiore e Castellino. Forza Nuova: ci bloccano perché puntiamo alle Europee.” Il Sole 24 Ore. December 20, 2023. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/assalto-cgil-condannati-leader-forza-nuova-fiore-e-castellino-grida-aula-faremo-guerra-AFGpAQ8B (accessed on July 3, 2024).

--- (2023). ‘“Lajatico ha bisogno di figli, non di omosessuali”. Volantini choc di Forza Nuova contro il Comune.’ La Nazione. February 28, 2023. https://www.lanazione.it/pontedera/cronaca/lajatico-ha-bisogno-di-figli-non-di-omosessuali-volantini-choc-di-forza-nuova-contro-il-comune-x7d89prd (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2024). “Europee, Fiore (FN): ‘Vannacci? Se sarà contro Nato, Usa e Israele mi accodo’.” Il Sole 24 Ore. January 20, 2024. https://stream24.ilsole24ore.com/video/italia/europee-fiore-fn-vannacci-se-sara-contro-nato-usa-e-israele-mi-accodo/AFRQkdPC (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2024) Eligendo Archivio. Ministero dell’Interno. https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

--- (2024). “Fascist Pan-European Alliance Convenes in Italy, with Representatives from Italy, France, England, Germany, Serbia and Spain.” MEMRI (DTTTM). Memri.org. https://www.memri.org/dttm/fascist-pan-european-alliance-convenes-italy-representatives-italy-france-england-germany (accessed on July 3, 2024).

--- (2024). “‘Ordine contro il caos’: anche Forza Nuova scende in piazza a Bologna’.” Bologna Today. September 24, 2024. https://www.bolognatoday.it/politica/ordine-contro-il-caos-forza-nuova-bologna.html (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Abboud, L. (2023). “Why Marine Le Pen ran to Israel’s defence, unlike her father.” Financial Times. October 31, 2023. https://www.ft.com/content/bff43a72-4d62-4024-809e-1be535d67980 (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Accame, G. (1990). Il fascismo immenso e rosso. Settimo Sigillo.

Acton, G. (2017). “Le Pen says it’s time to Free French people from ‘Arrogant elite’.” CNBC. April 23, 2017. https://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/23/le-pen-time-to-free-french-arrogant-elite.html (accessed on December 21, 2023).

Albanese, R. (2022). “CasaPound Italia and Forza Nuova. Back to the Future.” In: A. Di Michele and F.Focardi, ed., Rethinking Fascism: The Italian and German Dictatorships. De Gruyter Oldenbourg, pp.317-333. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110768619-016

Anckar, D. and V. Ramstedt-Silén (1981). “Relating preferences to policy: three problem areas.” In K. E. Rosengren (ed.), Advances in Content Analysis, Beverley Hills, Sage, pp. 89–108.

Backes, U. (1991) “Nationalpopulistiche Protestparteien in Europa. Vergleichende Betrachtung zur Phänomenologischen und demokratietheoretischen Einordnung.” Österreichische Zeitschrift für.

Balkiz, G. and Masters, J. (2017). “Marine Le Pen in Lebanon row after refusing to wear headscarf.” CNN World. February 21, 2017.
https://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/21/europe/marine-le-pen-headscarf-lebanon-grand-mufti/index.html (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Ben-Ghiat, R. (1996). “Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the ‘Third Way’.” Journal of Contemporary History. 31(2), pp. 293–316.

Ben-Ghiat, R. (2023). “Vote Yes or Else: The Fascist Idea of Elections.” Lucid. January 31, 2023.. https://lucid.substack.com/p/fascists-had-elections-too (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Berizzi, P. (2017). “Milano, all’Arco della Pace i cori di Forza Nuova contro i migranti: ‘No alla società multirazziale’.” La Repubblica. January 14, 2017.
https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/01/14/news/forza_nuova_arco_della_pace_milano-156022719/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Berizzi, P. (2019). “In testa sfila anche Forza Nuova, con gli stendardi ‘Dio, Patria e Famiglia’.” La Repubblica.
https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/03/31/news/berizzi-222944355/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Berizzi, P. (2021). “Forza Nuova, governo di liberazione nazionale ‘per liberare l’Italia dalle mascherine’.” La Repubblica. October 13, 2021.
https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2021/10/13/news/forza_nuova_governo_di_liberazione_nazionale-321978266/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Berizzi, P. (2023). “Da Forza Nuova a Do.Ra, i neofascisti si schierano con i terroristi: ‘Hamas vuole una Palestina come la Svizzera’.” La Repubblica. October 10, 2023.
https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2023/10/10/news/forza_nuova_dora_pro_hamas_palestina-417422469/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Betz, H.-G. (1993). “The Two Faces of Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe.” The Review of Politics, 55(4), 663–686. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500018040

Betz, H.-G. (1994.) Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bickerton, C. and Invernizzi Accetti, C. (2017). “Populism and Technocracy.” In: P. Ochoa Espejo, C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart and P. Ostiguy, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Populism. Oxford University Press, pp.326-341.

Biondani, P.; Tizian, G. and Vergine, S. (2017). “I soldi all’estero del terrorista impunito: i segreti di Fiore, il fascista che odia i giornali.” L’Espresso. December 15, 2017. https://lespresso.it/c/inchieste/2017/12/14/i-soldi-allestero-del-terrorista-impunito-i-segreti-di-fiore-il-fascista-che-odia-i-giornali/22061 (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Bobbio, N. (1994). Destra e sinistra. Ragioni e significati di una distinzione politica. Donzelli .

Borg, O. (1966). “Basic dimensions of Finnish party ideologies: a factor analytical study.”, Scandinavian Political Studies. 1(A1), 94–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.1966.tb00510.x

Bougarel, X. (2017). “Islam, a ‘Convenient Religion’? The Case of the 13th SS Division ‘Handschar’.” In: X. Bougarel, R. Branche, and C. Drieu (ed.) Far from Jihad. Combatants of Muslim Origin in European Armies in the 20th Century, Bloomsbury, London: United Kingdom, pp.362-383.

Bracalini, P. (2021). “Meloni: via i nostalgici. Ma per la sinistra non è ancora sufficiente”, Il Giornale. October 10, 2021.
https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/meloni-i-nostalgici-sinistra-non-ancora-sufficiente-1980915.html (accessed on July 5, 2024).

Broder, D. (2023). Mussolini’s Grandchildren Look Inside Mussolini’s Grandchildren Fascism in Contemporary Italy. Pluto Press.

Brubaker, R. (2017). “Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective.” Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40(8), 1191–1226. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700

Caretto, G. (2022). “Quando Fini disse che il fascismo è il male assoluto.” Policy Maker. September 20, 2022.
https://www.policymakermag.it/fact-checking/quando-fini-disse-che-il-fascismo-e-il-male-assoluto/ (accessed on July 5, 2024).

Carter, E. (2005). The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or failure? Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press.

Castellini L. (2019). L'intervista di Francesca Fagnani a Luca Castellini. La7 Attualità /YouTube. October 18, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8KR8Zs-gVA&t=5s (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Castellino, G. (2021). Forza Nuova, l'esclusiva intervista di Castellino del 2017. Non è L'arena / La7 Attualità / Youtube. October 17, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBzqKjBOumU&t=9s (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Cattani, L. (2017). "Il paradosso della destra 'liberal-protezionista': il caso del Front National." Pandora Rivista. February 12, 2017. https://www.pandorarivista.it/articoli/destra-front-national/2/ (accessed on January 2, 2024).

Centin, B. (2020). "Vicenza, blitz di Forza Nuova: striscioni anti-Usa alla Ederle." Il Corriere della Sera (Il Corriere del Veneto). https://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/vicenza/politica/20_gennaio_15/vicenza-blitz-forza-nuova-striscioni-anti-usa-ederle-b48c35f6-37ab-11ea-9c1f-25022c7f8010.shtml (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Dagnino, J. (2016). "The Myth of the New Man in Italian Fascist Ideology." BRILL. pp. 130–148. https://brill.com/view/journals/fasc/5/2/article-p130_3.xml?ebody=full%20html-copy1 (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Darmanin, J. (2022). "Le Pen's niece reportedly joins far-right rival Zemmour." Politico. March 3, 2022. https://www.politico.eu/article/le-pen-niece-marion-marechal-reportedly-joins-far-right-rival-eric-zemmour/ (accessed on July 8, 2024).

Delzell, C.F. (1988). "Remembering Mussolini." The Wilson Quarterly (1976-), pp. 118–135.

Dézé, A. (2012). Le Front national: à la conquête du pouvoir? Armand Colin.

D'Ascenzo, M. (2018). "L'Italia è una Repubblica antifascista (per legge, non per opinione)." Il Sole 24 Ore, 29 October.

Eatwell, R. (2010). "The Nature of 'Generic Fascism': The 'Fascist Minimum' and the 'Fascist Matrix'." In: C. Iordachi, ed., Comparative Fascist Studies. New Perspectives. Routledge.

Eatwell, R. (2017). "Populism and Fascism." In: P. Ochoa Espejo, C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart and P. Ostiguy, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Populism. Oxford University Press, pp.362-383.

Eatwell, R. and Goodwin, M. (2018). National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy. 1st ed. London, UK: Pelican Books.

Esposito, R. (2022). “Perché Roger Scruton piace tanto alla destra.” La Repubblica. October 26, 2022.
https://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2022/10/26/news/roger_scruton_destra-371838813/ (accessed on July 8, 2024).

Farrell, N. (2022). “Is Giorgia Meloni the most dangerous woman in Europe?” The Spectator World. August 20, 2022.
https://thespectator.com/topic/giorgia-meloni-most-dangerous-woman-europe/ (accessed on July 5, 2024) .

Fiano, F. (2016). “I raid di Forza Nuova contro i bengalesi: ‘Pestaggi terapeutici’.” Il Corriere Della Serra. January 14, 2016.
https://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/16_gennaio_14/raid-razzisti-aggressioni-contro-bengalesi-13-indagati-3a4b47a2-babc-11e5-8d36-042d88d67a9f.shtml (accessed on July 3, 2024).

Finchelstein, F. (2019). From Fascism to Populism in History. University of California Press.

Fini, G. (2015). L’intervista a Gianfranco Fini. La7 Attualità / YouTube. November 13, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiPiA6EoCpE&t=550s (accessed July 4, 2024).
Fiore, R. (2012). In Onda. La 7 / YouTube. October 28, 2012.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DV8k9pFtTLw (accessed on July 3, 2024).

Fiore, R. (2009). 1-Roberto Fiore a Porta a Porta - 28 maggio 2009 (2009). VolontarioDG (YouTube/Porta a Porta). May 29, 2009.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAC6cPbsfGs&t=115s (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Fiore, R. (2011). Forza Nuova e la Nostra Europa. Forza Nuova. March 9, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEpvSV8Yyks (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Fiore, R. (2018). BOLOGNA: Roberto Fiore (FN), “Grandi conquiste sociali con il fascismo” | VIDEO. Pubblisole. February 19, 2018.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmUtq9rChdw (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Fiore, R. (2019). Elezioni europee 2019: Roberto Fiore, leader di Forza Nuova - Porta a Porta. May 16, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAdJdQ7X37g&t=64s (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Fiore, R. (2024). “Europee, Forza Nuova presenta programma. Fiore: ‘Siamo anti-Nato e anti-Meloni’.” ANSA.

Fiore, TeleRegione TV (2023). Forza nuova alle Europee. Fiore ad Isernia - 23/12/2023 (2023). YouTube. 23 December. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO2BFAKpaFA (accessed on July 3, 2024).

Fiore, TVI Molise (2023). ASSALTO ALLA CGIL, FIORE RIPARTE DA ISERNIA (2023). TVI Molise. December 23, 2023.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZOpLTYuEJI (accessed on July 3, 2024).

Forcucci, L. E. (2010). "Battle for Births: The Fascist Pronatalist Campaign in Italy 1925 to 1938." Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe, 10(1), 4–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-5823.2010.00002.x

Fraser, I. (2011). "Les Français D'Abord." ISIS. September 26, 2011. https://isismagazine.org.uk/2011/09/les-francais-dabord/ (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Freeden, M. (1996). Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach. Clarendon Press.

Gaffney, J. (2012). "Marine Le Pen's recent detoxification of the Front National has been at the expense of the party's intellectual traditions." LSE Blogs. April 14, 2012. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2012/04/14/marine-le-pen-front-nationa/ (accessed on July 7, 2024).

Genga, N. (2015). Il Front National da Jean Marie a Marine Le Pen: La destra nazional-populista in Francia.1st edn. Rubbettino (Saggi).

Genga, N. and Algisi, F. (2015). "Il Front National da Jean-Marie a Marine Le Pen. Intervista con Nicola Genga."
http://www.archiviostorico.info/interviste/7101-il-front-national-da-jean-marie-a-marine-le-pen-intervista-con-nicola-genga (accessed on July 7, 2024).

Genga, N. (2017). Il Front National da Jean-Marie a Marine Le Pen: La destra nazional-populista in Francia. 2nd edn. Soveria Mannelli, Italia: Rubbettino Editore

Geva, D. (2020). "Daughter, Mother, Captain: Marine Le Pen, Gender, and Populism in the French National Front." Social Politics, 27(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxy039

Giles, H. and Giles, J. (n.d.) "Ingroups and Outgroups (Chapter 7)." Part II Distiguishing Self and Other.

Girardi, A. (2022). "Niente elezioni per Forza Nuova: ma non è stata sciolta, mancano solo le firme necessarie." www.fanpage.it.
https://www.fanpage.it/politica/niente-elezioni-per-forza-nuova-ma-non-e-stata-sciolta-mancano-solo-le-firme-necessarie/ (accessed on July 3, 2024).

Gnocchi, A. (2022). "La vera storia (non fascista) di Dio, patria e famiglia." Il Giornale. September 20, 2022.
https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/spettacoli/sono-i-valori-mazzini-sinistra-non-sa-2068268.html#google_vignette (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Gourevitch, P. (2015). “Marine Le Pen’s Political Patricide.” The New Yorker. April 14, 2015. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/marine-le-pens-political-patricide (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Griffin, R. (1995). Fascism. Oxford Readers.

Griffin, R. (1996). “Staging the Nation’s Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies.” In: G. Berghaus (Ed.), Fascism and theater: comparative studies on the aesthetics and politics of performance in Europe, 1925-1945. Providence: Berghahn Books, pp.11-29.

Griffin, R. (2018). Fascism (Key Concepts in Political Theory) (English Edition). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity.

Hameleers, M., & Vliegenthart, R. (2020). “The Rise of a Populist Zeitgeist? A Content Analysis of Populist Media Coverage in Newspapers Published between 1990 and 2017.” Journalism Studies (London, England), 21(1), 19–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1620114

Hartmann, U., H. P. Steffen and S. Steffen (1985) Rechtsextremismus bei Jugendlichen. Anregungen, der wachsender Gefahr entgegenzuwirken. Munich, Kösel.

Hawkins, M. (2009). “Nazism, Fascism and Social Darwinism.” In: M. Hawkins ed., Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945. Oxford University Press, pp.272-291.

Henley, J. (2002). “Chirac refuses Le Pen debate.” The Guardian. April 24, 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/24/media.france (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Hudson, A. and Shah, S. (2022). Explainer: Populism - Left and Right, Progressive and Regressive. rep. International IDEA.

Ignazi, P. (2000). L’estrema destra in Europa. Il Mulino/Contemporanea 70.

Ignazi, P., & Ysmal, C. (1992). “New and old extreme right parties: The French Front National and the Italian Movimento Sociale.” European Journal of Political Research, 22(1), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1992.tb00307.x

Ivaldi, G., & Mazzoleni, O. (2019).” Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective.” Populism, 2(1), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02011022

Ivaldi, G. and Pineau, E. (2022). “France’s Rassemblement National: What to Make of the Party’s First 6 Months in Parliament.” Expressions (By Institut Montaigne). December 21, 2022.

Kyle, J. and Gultchin, L. (2018). Populism in Power Around the World. rep. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, pp. 1–40.

Landa, I. (2018). Fascism and the Masses the Revolt Against the Last Humans, 1848-1945. 1st edn. Routledge.

Le Pen, M. (2022). “Peuple de France, l'heure est venue de te lever ! Peuple de France, l'heure est venue pour toi de mettre un terme à la course vers le déclin dans laquelle t'ont entraîné les dirigeants qui t'ont trahi! Twitter. April 21, 2022.

Lesueur, C. (2024). “Le Pen’s RN takes aim at dual nationals and ‘French of foreign origin’.” Le Monde. June 23, 2024.
https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2024/06/23/le-pen-s-rn-takes-aim-at-dual-nationals-and-french-of-foreign-origin_6675497_5.html (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Macridis, R. C. (1989). Contemporary Political Ideologies: Movements and Regimes. Glennview, Scott, Foresman and Company, 4th edition.

Madron, A. (2016). “Gay, Fiore (FN): ‘Ho 11 figli, probabilità che ce ne sia uno? Gli dirò che non è felicità’.” Il Fatto Quotidiano. March 16, 2016.

https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/03/16/fiore-fn-ho-undici-figli-probabilita-che-sia-gay-spiegherei-che-non-e-felicita/350002/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Mammone, A. (2015). “Don’t be fooled by “moderate” Marine Le Pen. Front National’s more toxic than ever.” The Guardian. April 10, 2015.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/10/dont-be-fooled-by-marine-le-pen-front-national-toxic (accessed on July 2, 2024).

March, L. (2008). Contemporary Far Left Parties in Europe from Marxism to the Mainstream? Berlin, Germany, pp. 1–20.

Mayer, N. (1998). “The front national vote in the plural.” Patterns of Prejudice, 32(1), 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.1998.9970244

Menton, D. (1994). The Religion of Nature: Social Darwinism, Answers in Genesis. https://answersingenesis.org/charles-darwin/darwinism/religion-of-nature-social-darwinism/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Moffitt, B. (2020). Populism (Key Concepts in Political Theory). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity.

Mohrenberg, S.; Huber, R. A. & Freyburg, T. (2021). “Love at first sight? Populist attitudes and support for direct democracy.” Party Politics, 27(3), 528–539. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068819868908

Mudde, C. (1995). “Right-wing extremism analyzed: a comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP’86).” European Journal of Political Research, 27(2), 203–224. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1995.tb00636.x

Mudde, C. (1996). “The war of words defining the extreme right party family.” West European Politics, 19(2), 225–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402389608425132

Mudde, C. (2000). The Ideology of the Extreme Right. Manchester University Press.

Mudde, C. (2004). “The Populist Zeitgeist.” Government and Opposition (London), 39(4), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Mudde, C. (2007). Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe. Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C. (2017). “Populism: An Ideational Approach.” In: P. Ochoa Espejo, C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart and P. Ostiguy, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Populism. Oxford University Press, pp.27-47.

Mudde, C. (2017). “The problem with populism.” The Guardian. February 17, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe (accessed on July 4, 2015).

Mudde, C. (2018). “How populism became the concept that defines our age.” The Guardian. November 22, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/22/populism-concept-defines-our-age (accessed on June 4, 2022).

Mudde, C. (2021). “Populism in Europe: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism (The Government and Opposition/Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019).” Government and Opposition (London), 56(4), 577–597. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.15

Mudde, C. and Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2017). Populism: A Very Short Introduction. 1st ed. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Murray, D. (2017). “Is Le Pen really ‘far-right’?” The Spectator. May 6, 2017.

Mussolini, B. and Gentile G. (1932). “La dottrina del fascismo.” Enciclopedia Italiana.

Nazzi, S. (2021). “Da dove arriva Forza Nuova.” Il Post. October 11, 2021. https://www.ilpost.it/2021/10/11/forza-nuova-roberto-fiore/ (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Oswalt, W. (1991). “Definition des Begriffs Rechtsradikalismus/Rechtsextremismus in M. Kirfel and W. Oswalt (eds), Die Rückkehr der Führer. Modernisierter Rechtsradikalismus in Westeuropa, Vienna, Europaverlag, 2nd edition, 28.

Paxton, R. (2005). The Anatomy of Fascism. 2nd ed. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

Perrineau, P. (1996). “Le FN en 1995: une question de droite pose´e a la gauche. In: Aux Sourcesdu Populisme Nationaliste: l’Urgence de comprendre Toulon, Orange, Marignane, La Tourd’Aigues, ed. Jean Viard, pp.67–95. Paris: E´ditions de L’Aube.

Perrineau, P. (1997). Le Symptome Le Pen: Radiographie des Electeurs du Front national. Paris: Fayard, L’espace du politique.

Poirier, A. (2017). “France’s Marine Le Pen: The illusion of feminism.” Al Jazeera. April 30, 2017.

https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/4/30/frances-marine-le-pen-the-illusion-of-feminism (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Politikwissenchaft. 20(1), pp.7-17.

Pozzi, A. (2024). “Mussolini e la spada di Protettore dell’islam. Quando il fascismo era amico dei musulmani.” L’ITALIA COLONIALE. August 8, 2024. https://italiacoloniale.com/2017/08/10/mussolini-e-la-spada-di-protettore-dellislam-quando-il-fascismo-era-amico-dei-musulmani-video/ (accessed on July 8, 2024).

Quenchez, M. and Michelot, M. (2017). THE RISE OF THE FRONT NATIONAL: Taking Stock of Ten Years of French Mainstream Politics. rep. The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), pp. 1–15.

Rafferty, J.P. (2024). “Jus soli: law.” Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/jus-soli (accessed July 4, 2024).

Roche, H. (2013). “‘In Sparta fühlte ich mich wie in einer deutschen Stadt’ (Goebbels): The leaders of the Third Reich and the Spartan nationalist paradigm.” In: F. Rash, G. Horan, & D. Wildmann (Eds.), English and German Nationalist and Anti-Semitic Discourse, 1871-1945 (91-115). Peter Lang. doi:

Rydgren, J. (2005). “Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family.” European Journal of Political Research, 44(3), 413–437. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2005.00233.x

Sainsbury, D. (1980). Swedish Social Democratic Ideology and Electoral Politics 1944-1948: A Study of the Functions of Party Ideology. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist and Wicksell.

Samuel, H. (2016). “Marine Le Pen stands no chance of winning the French presidency next year, predicts Sarkozy’s former key advisor.” Daily Telegraph. November 28, 2016. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/28/marine-le-pen-stands-no-chance-winning-french-presidency-next (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Schroeder, R. (2020). “The Dangerous Myth of Populism as a Thin Ideology.” Populism (Leiden, Netherlands), 3(1), 13–28. https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02021042

Schulman, A. (2006). “PurgePolitik: The political functions of decadence in fascism.” Human Rights Review, 8, pp. 5–34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-006-1013-8

Schurts, S. (2024). “We are Looking for a New Feminism.” In: A.J. McAdams, S. Piccolo, ed., Far-Right Newspeak and the Future of Liberal Democracy. Routledge. London: United Kingdom.

Sciarri, P. (2020). “Il nazionalsocialismo e il richiamo del passato.” Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, 87(1), pp. 105–124.

Schurts, S. (2024). “We are Looking for a New Feminism.” In: A.J. McAdams, S. Piccolo, ed., Far-Right Newspeak and the Future of Liberal Democracy. Routledge. London: United Kingdom.

Sciarri, P. (2020). “Il nazionalsocialismo e il richiamo del passato.” Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, 87(1), pp. 105–124.

Senatore, M. (2018). Quanta estrema destra c’è in Italia? I numeri (2008-2018). Youtrend .https://www.youtrend.it/2018/03/24/evoluzione-estrema-destra-italia-decennio-2008-2018/ (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Smith, P. (2018). “Inside the Mind of Marine Le Pen by Michel Eltchaninoff review – the same racist far right.” The Guardian. March 3, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/03/inside-the-mind-marine-le-pen-michel-eltchaninoff-reviewn (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Sprinzak, E. (1991). The Ascendance of Israel’s Radical Right, New York, Oxford University Press.

Starr, S. (2020). “The Muslims of Auschwitz: tales of tragedy and heroism 75 years on.” National News. January 27, 2020. https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/the-muslims-of-auschwitz-tales-of-tragedy-and-heroism-75-years-on-1.969956 (accessed on July 8, 2024)

Stavrakakis, Y.; Katsambekis, G.; Nikisianis, N.; Kioupkiolis, A. & Siomos, T. (2017). “Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: revisiting a reified association.” Critical Discourse Studies, 14(4), 420–439. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2017.1309325

Stockemer, D. (2017) The Front National in France: Continuity and Change Under Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen. Springer.

Stockemer, D., & Barisione, M. (2017). “The ‘new’ discourse of the Front National under Marine Le Pen: A slight change with a big impact.” European Journal of Communication (London), 32(2), 100–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116680132

Strickland, P. (2018). “Why do Italian fascists adore Syria’s Bashar al-Assad?” Al Jazeera. February 14, 2018.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/2/14/why-do-italian-fascists-adore-syrias-bashar-al-assad (accessed on July 8, 2024).

Surel, Y. (2002). “Populism in the French Party System.” In: Y. Mény, and Y. Surel (ed.) Democracies and the Populist Challenge. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 139–154.

Taggart, P. (2002). Populism. 2nd edn. New Delhi, India: Vivabooks.

Taggart, P. (2003). “The Populist Turn in the Politics of the New Europe.” In: 8th Biannual International Conference of the European Union Studies Association Conference, Nashville, 27-29 March, 2003. Sussex European Institute, pp. 1–20.

Taggart, P. (2018a). Conférence ‘Populism and Unpolitics” animée par P. Taggart, Colloque VISAGES DU POPULISME CONTEMPORAIN EN EUROPE ET AUX ÉTATS-UNIS. Populism and Unpolitics: Core Features and Tropes in Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States, Toulon, France: l’Université de Toulon, 22 June.

Taggart, P. (2018b). “Populism and ‘unpolitics’.” In: G. Fitzi, J. Mackert and B. Turner, ed., Populism and the Crisis of Democracy. Routledge, London, pp.79-87.

Taggart, P.A. (1996). The New Populism and the New Politics. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Macmillan Press.

Taguieff, P.-A. (1993). “From race to culture: the new right’s view of European identity.” Telos, pp. 99–123.

Tarchi, M. (2002). “Dal neofascismo al nazionalpopulismo. La parabola dell’estrema destra europea.” Italiani Europei. September 2, 2002.
https://italianieuropei.it/en/component/k2/item/1045-dal-neofascismo-al-nazionalpopulismo-la-parabola-dellestrema-destra-europea.html (accessed on July 8, 2024).

Tarchi, M. (2015). Italia populista. Dal qualunquismo a Beppe Grillo. 2nd edn. Il Mulino.

Tarchi, M. (2022). “Il sovranismo di Meloni non è il populismo di Le Pen.” Scenari. December 9, 2022. pp. 12–13.

Tarchi, M. and De Feudis, M. (2015). ‘L’intervista. Tarchi: “La Le Pen? Per l’Eliseo non basta essere leader del partito più votato”.” Barbadillo.

Eatwell, R. (2009). “The nature of 'generic fascism': the 'fascist minimum' and the 'fascist matrix'.” In: C. Iordachi (Ed.), Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives. Routledge.

Trigg, J. (2012). Hitler's Jihadis: Muslim Volunteers of The Waffen-Ss (Hitler's Legions). Illustrated Edition. The History Press.

Trippenbach, I. and Johannès, F. (2022). "Marine Le Pen wants to govern by referendum, bypassing Parliament and the Constitutional Council." Le Monde. April 14, 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/2022-presidential-election/article/2022/04/14/marine-le-pen-wants-to-govern-by-referendum-bypassing-both-parliament-and-constitutional-council_5980497_16.html (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Veltrone, A. (2019). La Strategia Della Paura: Eversione e Stragismo nell'Italia del Novecento. Mondadori.

Vercelli, C. (2018). Neofascismi. Edizioni del Capricorno.

Viscusi, G. (2017). "Marine Le Pen calls multiculturalism a weapon for Islamic extremists." The Sydney Morning Herald. April 11, 2017. https://www.smh.com.au/world/marine-le-pen-calls-multiculturalism-a-weapon-for-islamic-extremists-20170411-gvi6vz.html (accessed on July 2, 2024).

Voce, A. and Clarke, S. (2022). "French election 2022: full second round results." The Guardian. April 25, 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2022/apr/24/french-election-2022-live-results-projection-second-round-emmanuel-macron-marine-le-pen (accessed on July 4, 2024).

Weinberg, L. (1993). "Introduction." In: P. H. Merkl and L. Weinberg (eds), Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right, Boulder, Westview, pp. 1–15.

Weyland, K. (2017). "Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach." In: P. Ochoa Espejo, C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart and P. Ostiguy, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Populism. Oxford University Press, pp.48-72.

Whitney, C.R. (1998). "Le Pen Feud with Key Deputy Has French Right in Upheaval." The New York Times. December 13, 1998.

Yoshikazu, N. (2018). "Global Syndrome of Neopopulism: A Symptom of Authoritarian Reaction in the Era of 'After Globalization'." Ritsumeikan Law Review. pp. 75–93.

Zanatta, L. (2016) Il Populismo. 2nd ed. Roma, Italia: Carocci editore.

"PROGRAMMA PER LE ELEZIONI POLITICHE 2013 DI FORZA NUOVA E DI NOMINA DEL CAPO" (no date). Roma, Italia: Forza Nuova Segreteria Nazionale (www.forzanuova.org).

Please cite as: Varriale, Amedeo. (2024). "Populism and the Extreme Right in Comparative Perspective: The French Rassemblement National and the Italian Forza Nuova." Populism & Politics (P&P). European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS). August 12, 2024. https://doi.org/10.55271/pp0036