

Capitalism, Consensus, and the Electoral Successes of the Far Right

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Abstract: The electoral success of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and (the late) Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands has sparked immediate speculation that ‘the right’ is coming back into vogue in Europe. Such speculation assumes that the right-left dichotomy is important to understanding the success of groups like the Front National (FN) or the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). We disagree. Using examples from across Europe, we argue that these groups are more characteristically populist than right-wing; that their stance on the structure of political participation is more important to their success than the position they take on distributive concerns; and that programmatic inconsistency is less critical than performative contradiction to their survival in power. Our argument is only slightly at odds with the existing literature, but even this slight change of emphasis—from policy or distributive outcomes to political or participatory process—can offer substantial analytic rewards. By focusing attention on the process elements in populist political programs we can not only anticipate the fate of these movements, but also shed light on the larger political systems within which they operate.

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The center-left coalitions that swept to power in the 1990s are now in retreat. From Belgium and Spain to Austria and Italy to Denmark, France and the Netherlands, the tide of national electorates turning out center-left governments looks unstoppable. Even Germany, which cast aside Christian Democratic Helmut Kohl for the promise of a more Social Democratic ‘third way’ only narrowly missed the election of a deeply conservative Christian Social chancellor.

Of course such a comprehensive transition could be marked down to the periodic alternations of the European electorate—moving from left to right in the late 1970s and early 1980s, from right to left during the mid-to-late 1990s, and from left back to right at the start of 21st century. However, these broad patterns ignore the more troubling undercurrents in the recent political turmoil. What matters is not so much that the right has come to power. Rather what matters is with whom, or, in the case on France, for example, thanks to whom. Whether they operate outside or inside the governing coalitions, the prominence of extremist groups across Europe gives cause for concern.

One purpose of this essay is to focus attention on the role and nature of the more extremist elements in the recent tide of right-wing victories. Hence the first question we ask is whether the popularity of such extremist groups really does indicate a larger shift in electoral affinities from left to right. Do such groups reflect some underlying popular preference for conservative, authoritarian politics, for capital over labor (market over state)? or do they draw upon a critique of politics and political elites that, while it may be right wing or left wing, draws its distinctiveness from an anti-elite, pro-reform attitude to the process of politics? Where much of the existing literature has tended to focus on the right-wing aspect of these populist parties extremism, we find that that such groups, whatever their ideological allegiances, are more revealing in terms of their depiction of the political process.

The second question that we consider is how much we can read into the distinction between program and process, or partisan substance and reform. In this way we soften our focus on right-wing extremists in order to draw a wider range of actors into the analysis. Specifically, we want to include individuals or groups who rely upon a direct appeal to the voters in order to attain political power or office—populist political entrepreneurs. We argue

that the notion of ‘reform’ is a source of strength and weakness for today’s populist political entrepreneurs. It is a source of strength insofar as it allows them to build heterogeneous coalitions while at the same time ignoring intra-programmatic contradiction. It is a weakness insofar as the emphasis on political reform constrains such groups in the practice of governance.

Using this argument, we can achieve two analytic improvements on the more traditional analysis of right wing populism: We can anticipate that populist political entrepreneurs are likely to enjoy short-term electoral success wherever the commitment to political reform is most compelling; and we can also anticipate that such populists—once in government—are likely to suffer rapid and long-term political failure wherever the practice of politics requires the greatest flexibility.

Our analysis is developed in five sections. The first establishes the distinction between strictly ideological and procedural/reform issues in the political appeal of the extreme right. The next two illustrate this substance-process distinction and the central significance of ‘political process’ through two pairs of comparisons: the recent successes of the Freedom Party in Austria (FPÖ) and the National Front in France (FN) and the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in the Netherlands and the National Movement Simeon II (SNM) in Bulgaria. The fourth draws out the implications of our argument for the study of right-wing extremism and populism more generally. The fifth section concludes with our program for further research.

Populism: Substance versus Process?

Any attempt to analyze the politics of right-wing extremist groups without reference to their ideological stance or the substance of their political programs is bound to arouse a certain degree of incredulity. Whether the flash points concern welfare state benefits or unemployment, ethnic conflict or economic chauvinism, right-wing extremist groups break into the news with what they say about how the state should respond to the ills of society. Usually what they have to say is anti-immigrant. There is no denying that unpleasant fact.

The point is that such anti-immigrant rhetoric does not necessarily stem from anti-immigrant motivations, for a majority of their supporters. While, those voters who support right-wing extremists at the polls may not be great supporters of multi-cultural society, the

bulk of sociological evidence suggests that votes cast for right-wing extremist groups are not necessarily—or even often—intended as an assault on immigrants per se (Mudde 1999; Perrineau 1996; Mayer, 1998; Perrineau, 2003). To borrow from discourse theory, immigration is an ‘empty signifier’. The challenge is to understand how ‘immigration’ is filled with meaning that appeals to the electorate, and, perhaps even more importantly, how references to immigration serve as a basic critique of the political; and policy process.

The literature provides two different suggestions for identifying the predominant discourse behind the anti-immigrant rhetoric of right-wing extremist groups—one economic and one political. The economic discourse is pro-market but with an emphasis on chauvinistic conceptions of fairness (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1995), The political discourse is populist and stresses a mixture of suspicion and resentment toward existing institutions, parties, and elites (Mudde 1999: 189). The problem is that the two discourses can be complementary. Indeed, the two messages often exist side by side (Betz 1998, Immerfall 1998).

This combination is of particular interest to us for two main reasons. The first, is that it quite neatly illustrates populism’s capacity to effect a synthesis of somewhat contradictory stances: a small but strongly protective state, able to maintain internal liberalism (with low taxes and little regulation of employment practices), coupled with a political blueprint exhibiting the same sort of contradictions: scaled down institutions able to ensure a direct form of democracy (in part through the use of referendums, in part through the leader’s ‘natural ability’ to read his people and anticipate their needs) all the while minutely regulating political, social and family life through an extensive network of developed welfare organizations and intricate and restrictive regulation of immigration and naturalization law.

The important aspect of this duality for our purposes, is that it is electorally effective and has ensured the broadening of these parties’ support base. Indeed, support for populist parties shows a clear evolution from the mid 1990s onward. Both the FPÖ and the FN initially drew their (timid) support from the traditional right; their supporters were mostly male (this has remained a constant), in late-middle age or nearing retirement, often drawn from the small bourgeoisie (local doctors, successful small businessmen and entrepreneurs). Further, they were drawn from specific regions: in France the South and the East (mainly Alsace), in Austria, Carinthia and Styria.

This support remains, but electoral success for both parties has coincided with the rise in a different type of support, that of younger, more disaffected voters (the FPÖ has become the strongest party by far among the members of younger generations of voters with a share of 35 percent), of lower socio-economic status (only 35 percent of the blue-collar voters opted for the Social Democratic Party, while 60 percent voted for centre-right parties, of which the FPÖ managed to attract 47 percent) and with lower levels of education. Thus to their initial regional strongholds in the comfortably off provinces, the parties have added the more modest suburbs of large capitals and the industrially decimated zones of France and Austria. This vote is no longer strictly the domain of the provinces.

The electoral data shows (F. Plasser et al, 1999, 431; Mayer, 2003), that this new form of support is characterized either by first-time voters with little or no previous political experience, or by voters whose allegiances were previously to the left or the far left (in the case of the FN, there is a notable transfer of votes from the Communist Party's Parisian 'red belt' to the FN). This is of interest to us because it demonstrates the non-partisan nature of the choice for what is a significant proportion of the parties' voters. While these parties are clearly right-wing, it makes more sense in light of these results to assume that while some of their supporters endorse their robust partisanship, their recent electoral support comes from voters who are less swayed by the left/right dimension and more so by their message of reform of a political process from which they feel utterly disconnected.

What is of importance for the argument at hand is the power exerted not by a left/right policy driven discourse, but rather by reform driven rhetoric. This takes us to the heart of the politics of populism, where the operative distinctions in analytical terms are not so much left/right but status quo vs. reform.

Populism: reform or partisanship?

Analyses have more often than not focused on the idea that populist parties of the right were too far right in their policy content rather than on their being too populist in their style. Yet this latter point is of more interest given that, while necessarily stressing policy, populist parties have always emphasized their aversion to the style of mainstream politics (seen as corrupt, divorced from ordinary people's concerns, unreflective of the constituencies of mainstream parties) as much as—if not more so—than their commitment to right/left or far

right/far left ideas. So, while party leaders such as Le Pen, Haider and Fortuyn have repeatedly endorsed a ‘neither right nor left’ approach (with Le Pen going as far as saying – ‘neither left nor right—for the people’) analysts, on the other hand, have focused precisely on the left/right dimension rather than on what those leaders—and their supporters—were clearly signaling as equally, if not more, important. This is not to suggest that one should examine populist parties on the terms they themselves define as important—the partisan nature of the parties is for us to evaluate as analysts rather than for them to describe as actors, nevertheless it strikes us as somewhat counter-productive for our understanding of the phenomenon (defined by its existence on both sides of the policy spectrum on the one hand and by its vehement endorsement of reform of the political process on the other) to gloss over or ignore this fundamental facet of their political message and electoral success.

Examples of this reasoning can be found in a variety of parties and movements. Analyses of a classical populist movement and party such as Poujadism, concluded, for example, that the movement fared badly in parliament because it was cut off from its traditional (small town and rural) power-base, that it lacked the professional expertise required to elaborate policies and that its xenophobia (and galloping paranoia) made it an unsavoury alliance partner (Borne, 1977). Hoffman also notes the importance of the party’s internal organization and its inability to develop from a protest movement, a rebellion against the Republic, into a party (Hoffman, 1956). All of which are important, but skim over the party’s most important aspect: the reform—overhaul might be a more accurate word—of politics it endorsed and promoted and how this affected the party’s fortunes once in the national assembly.

Analyses of the Italian Alleanza Nazionale have also tended to concentrate overwhelmingly on the party’s links with its ideologically fascist ancestor (the Movimento Sociale Italiano) rather than on the PR machine it set in motion in 1993 and the appearance and discourse of its new-look leader Gianfranco Fini. Most authors spent far more time concentrating on whether the Congresso di Fiuggi and its attendant documents constituted a real refutation of fascism (Griffin, 1996; Newell, 2000), or on whether the party could be said to be post-fascist or neo-fascist, far right or ‘new’ right or right-wing at all, rather than on the new populist rhetoric and style of the party. The Northern League fared little better as commentators dissected its stance on the European Union, its radical policy proposals for the

carve up of Italy into three regions—most importantly, analyses took up the League’s policy proposals on taxes, focusing almost exclusively on the movement as a tax revolt rather than on its call for a radically devolved set of institutions, which would bring government closer to the people and take it away from the corrupt lazy and illegitimate Roman elite. While the Northern League was indeed a movement of the rich North against the poorer southern and central Italian regions, the mainstay of its appeal was that it called into question the fundamentals of Italian *partitocrazia* and *trasformismo*—in other words, called into question the illegitimate ‘bargain’ which forms the basis of contemporary Italian politics.

It would be erroneous to argue that the parties to which we refer are about style over substance; it is much more appropriate and accurate to take their concerns over the process and style of modern politics as constituting the very substance of their manifestos as well as the block over which they stumble once in power, when in power.

Using the most useful definitions of populism we can argue that all the movements we examine present the following traits attributable to populist parties or movements: They claim to represent the ‘common man’, the average voter whose voice has long been lost; They claim to be able to return to a golden, more innocent age of politics during which politics and political decisions rested in the hands of those who contribute most significantly to the everyday life of the nation by their labour; They claim to have identified a gap between the leader and the led and that political power has been usurped by an undeserving, spoilt and corrupt elite whose aim is to govern for its own benefit while reaping and withholding the political, social and economic rewards which rightly belong to the people; Above all they abhor what they regard as the gratuitous professionalisation and intellectualisation of the political realm which has led to its corruption and the subsequent exclusion from it of those it claims to represent.

Whether in the case of Le Pen’s rantings against the technocratic and exclusionary Fifth Republic, his calls for plebiscitary politics and extended use of referendums coupled with relentless accusation that the French political elite had ‘carved up’ the governing of France; or Haider’s attacks on the Austrian ‘Proporz’ system which never failed to preserve and privilege the same elite while stripping the average Austrian citizen of what was rightfully his, or Fortuyn’s denouncing of the ‘Polder model’ and the politics of compromise (a system which according to Fortuyn ‘always asked the same people to compromise’)—a

quick scan through the parties' web sites and electoral material yields impressive and relentless similarities regarding their pursuit of reform of the political process and non-consensual style.

We argue that it is the style of these proposals and their pursuit of reform that explains their popularity prior to electoral success as well their difficulties and failure once in power.

Populism and the Far Right: The FPÖ and the Front National

A comparison of the Front National and the FPÖ yields an interesting picture regarding both the parties' similar commitment to issues of political process (more so than to issues that might fall into a left/right analysis) as well as their respective electoral/political fortunes in political cultures shaped by different institutional contexts. While both parties are remarkably similar in their right wing extremism, we argue that they also share basic populist characteristics, and that it is these characteristics that account for their remarkable success. The important aspect of the comparison is that while differences between them exist, they nevertheless both capture the same electorate on the basis of a discourse based on reform and on the claim that they can carry out politics in a different way.

- **Similar beginnings**

The emergence of the FPÖ and the FN offer striking similarities: While the FPÖ's links to Nazism are more pronounced than those of the FN to fascism (most Austrian analysts argue that the FPÖ was founded by former Nazis for former Nazis), it can easily be argued that both parties emerge out of the remnants of extreme right-wing parties or movements discredited by political events. The FPÖ was founded in 1956, its first chairman, Anton Reinthaller, was a former SS-general, and nearly all of its rank and file were former Nazi party members. The Front National was the creation of former members of Ordre Nouveau a French radical right-wing group made up of supporters of fascism in its various guises, supporters of the Algerie Francaise movements of the late 1950s and 1960s, hard-line monarchists and anarchist revolutionaries. Behind the creation of the Front National in 1972 was an attempt to revive the fortunes of these scattered and inefficient groups (many of whom like Ordre Nouveau had been outlawed) and federate them into an electorally viable

political force. Both parties can be seen as an attempt to re-group the forces of the far right in the post war setting. For the FPÖ, this meant re-entering the Austrian political scene marked by elitist, middle of the road, consociational democracy—for the FN it meant carving out a space in the post-colonial, increasingly bi-polarized setting of de Gaulle’s Fifth Republic.

While the parties emerge in post-war climates in which the far right is a publicly discredited political option but a privately viable political preference (neither country goes through the throes of a ‘rehabilitation’ period such as the one experienced by Germany, for obvious reasons), it is clear that they evolve, otherwise, under what are, initially, very dissimilar sets of pressures. The FPÖ emerges in a context in which in order to re-integrate the political scene the only option is to fall in line with a system defined by consociationalism, alliance-making and proportional representation. The general aim is to draw the Austrian party system toward the center, away from left/right polarization, and, as such, throughout the 1960s 1970s and 1980s, the FPÖ tried to change its image: the party redefined itself as centrist and liberal, and in 1983 it formed a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPÖ). However, Jörg Haider was the most outspoken opponent of these changes and upon becoming party chairman in 1986, he reversed this liberal trend.

The FN moved in a somewhat different direction: it initially remained committed to authoritarian, nationalist politics. Le Pen, while already the party’s official leader, held little sway over the organization whose fortunes were still dictated by strategists coming from *Ordre Nouveau* and whose foresight had led them to conclude that the Gaullist republic required a strong, national level political party machine (crucially the SFIO, became the French Socialist Party under Mitterrand in those very same years having come to the same conclusion), but had nevertheless stopped short of pushing them toward the renunciation of a radical right wing program. As such, the FN was abysmally unsuccessful until Le Pen’s more established hold over the party in the early 1980s.

One manner in which this story can be told is that the FPÖ moved from being Nazi in the 1950s and 60s, to more liberal in the late 1960s and 1970s and then back to radical right-wing in the mid-80s; while the FN moves from explicitly fascist in the early 1970s to radical right-wing in the mid-80s. What this version of the story highlights is a resurgence of the far right in Western Europe in the mid-1980s, the date at which both parties begin to accumulate significant political successes. However, there is another story to be told, a story that

underscores, alongside the success of parties of the far right, the success of parties whose main defining feature is the embracing of a populist outlook, critical of the political process and institutional context of which they are a part. The FPÖ's rise after 1986 and the FN's success after 1983 have always been interpreted in the context of the parties' right-wing pasts and presents, yet what we wish to underscore today is their move away from coherent right-wing radicalism to a more subtle (though no less worrying) embracing of reform along populist lines.

- **Politics by non-politicians**

Paradoxically, but in line with the impetus for populist success, both parties benefit from being 'outsiders'. During the (first) grand coalition (1945 to 1966) the FPÖ was the sole opposition in parliament, though this monopoly did not help it increase its votes at the national level. The situation remained largely the same during the years of one-party government (1966 to 1983) and even during the SPÖ-FPÖ government. The pre-Haider FPÖ, which finally had its share of the government, was, to all appearances, stagnant. Haider's access to the party leadership precipitated the return of the Grand Coalition, just as, in many ways, the return of the Grand Coalition paved the way for Haider's further electoral successes as opposition to the coalition grew. The newly established Greens came into parliament as a fourth party, and the FPÖ started a period of rapid growth at the expense of the SPÖ and ÖVP.

While not known for its consociational political process, the transformation of French politics between the 1960s and the 1990s offers similarities with Austria, namely the elaboration of an elitist political scene (symbolized by the creation of the ENA after the war), and, paradoxically, a party system which while increasingly polarized into what Duverger called a 'quadrille bipolaire' (namely the PS and the PCF on the one hand and the UDF and RPR on the other), gave increasing signs of caving in under the pressures generated by institutional dysfunctions and the resulting episodes of cohabitation (1986-88; 1993-95; 1997-2002). This more diffuse, but no less mediatized, sense of convergence between parties of the left and the right illustrated by their uncanny ability to govern together in what looked like a political carve-up amidst accusations of corruption and 'pensee unique' lent the French

political scene an unintended veneer of the type of consensus typical of consociational political systems.

Both systems display what is alternately described as either a long transition toward convergence or a long decline toward elite, status quo politics. The important factor for our purposes is the adjustment within political parties to this movement toward an elite centred system, and the response of the electorate to the increasing populist turn taken by once more straight-forwardly radical right-wing parties.

The argument here is that populist politics and a rhetoric of reform matter more to the success of these parties than their far right platforms (which in many cases can be seen as quite contradictory and as deriving mileage from these contradictions). But, how can we proceed to show that reform of the political process and a new 'style' of politics are to be held responsible for the electoral support garnered by these parties, as well as their failure once in government?

Several factors, which we shall examine in turn, are useful here: we have already alluded to the varied nature of their electoral support which tends to strengthen our view that if support cuts across class and partisan lines, the parties' appeal does the same. But, three more factors are of relevance. The first is the nature of party organization, the second is the parties' u-turns on certain political issues depending on the attitudes of other parties on the same matters and, finally, quite simply, their political platforms and the accompanying rhetoric.

- **A new type of organization for a new type of party**

Both the FPÖ and the FN can be seen as striking examples of 'postmodern' politics characterized by sound-bites, video-clips, and entertainment. Both parties present themselves as parties that fully accept that most voters are not especially interested in politics and successfully appeal to that majority. It is striking that what the leaders play up is their not being 'real politicians'. Both come from 'patriotic' backgrounds (Le Pen makes much of his father's contribution to the war, his being educated as a 'pupille de la nation', a special status conferred upon those too poor to afford proper education but singled out for their family's patriotic contribution, and Haider of his family connection to Nazism) and having borne their share of patriotic duties—up to and including the embracing of national level

politics no matter what the alleged 'personal cost'. However, they are equally keen to highlight the fact that their class backgrounds, education and convictions did not predestine them—indeed rendered them implausible—for national-level politics. The message is that they are different from other politicians, they are not professionals, they are not part of the political class, they are outsiders. The sophistication of the rhetoric (in some instances) and the professional aspects of the party machines while belying the proclaimed amateurish quality of the endeavour, nevertheless point to parties and leaders more in tune with a population that is avowedly a-political. Haider's playboy appearance, sports-cars and attitude of 'frank exchange', much like Le Pen's 2002 election poster (the only one in black and white, all soft edges and close-up angle and looking very much like a Vanity Fair photo-shoot), lewd jokes and bon-vivant image conspire to create the impression of two men embarked not so much on an electoral band-wagon but, rather, on a political adventure based on conviction and enthusiasm.

The parties reflect this at the organizational level: while initially traditionally organized (the FN famously declaring that it had copied the internal blueprint of the rigid, disciplined and membership obsessed French Communist party), both parties moved away from such an organization and adopted outlooks at odds with their national political counterparts. The Austrian ÖVP, for example, is a traditionally structured party. Its membership is high and its internal hierarchy is based on a well organized 'Bünde,' which follow specific patterns of professional affiliations (farmers, employers, employees). The FPÖ, on the other hand, especially since 1986, is a party with no traditional organization. It is striking that while the FPÖ's proportion of vote rose from 5 percent to 27 percent (between 1986 and 1998), it was not able to attract a significant number of new party members. Indeed, during the years of Haider's electoral successes, the FPÖ downsized its party apparatus, while increasing the number of organized local groups. The FPÖ is thus based on a rather unusual structure for Austria: less traditional organization, comparatively little emphasis on membership and intense concentration on voters and elections. The FN's evolution presents similarities and differences. The party also privileged voters over members. Partly, this is the result of the presidentialisation of French politics over the past four decades which has led to enormous emphasis being placed on national level presidential campaigns (thus forcing all parties to concentrate on voters rather than on membership), but

partly it is the result of trying, like the FPÖ, to differentiate themselves from more traditionally organized parties aimed at less volatile, more committed voters who might be tempted by membership to a political party. So, much like the FPÖ, while the FN increased its share of the vote, it did not—and did not aggressively attempt—to increase its membership base.

This can be taken as revealing the party's concentration on a particular type of voter susceptible to a new type of message, a message of reform and about the nature of the political process rather than one situated on a clear left/right line. This, it would seem, can be understood as a way of building up support, but it should also be seen as building support in a manner that was relatively new. Where traditional parties were still trying to attract members, the FN and the FPÖ adopted a strategy of voter recruitment. More importantly, this strategy should be seen as part of an agenda directed against the institutions of representative government—especially parties, organized interests, parliament and the formalized version of democracy represented by parliamentary rule.

- **Remaining the 'outsider' or how to make a U-turn**

The old saying that 'it is a woman's prerogative to change her mind' can easily be applied to political parties of the robust right. The parties with which we concern ourselves have, however, set new records with respect to abrupt changes of heart and policy. While we do not have the time or space to set out all of the policies on which the FN and the FPÖ have U-turned, it seems relevant for our purposes to raise this issue as it points directly to the parties' commitment to reform over consistent partisan policy.

Neither of the parties claim to have a consistent message or platform other than excluding 'them' (especially foreigners) and opposing 'them' (the traditional political class). Such a message gives voice to the protest of those who feel all at once 'in' (as Austrians or French nationals, as non-foreigners) and 'out' (as social underdogs, and as excluded from the political class).

Hence for these parties it is of the utmost importance to remain perceived as going against the grain of mainstream politics. For the FPÖ this tendency to talk itself out of its initial position in order to remain in opposition to the mainstream was illustrated by its U-turn regarding Europe. The FPÖ had been more pro-European than the two other traditional

parties since the 1950s, yet, when the ÖVP started to push for Austria's EU membership in the 1980s and succeeded in convincing the SPÖ of the advantages of membership and, when the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition finally applied for EU membership in 1989, the FPÖ became the most ardent opponent of the EU as an overall concept (the FPÖ-ÖVP coalition was and is thus an alliance of the most actively pro-EU and the most actively anti-EU party).

The FN has been consistently anti-EU (although like the FPÖ it has attempted to use the European arena and held seats in the EP) though its discourse surrounding Europe is similar to that of the FPÖ, a mixture of rejection of EU institutions and bureaucracy and instrumentalisation of Europe as a cultural space and potential fortress against immigration. However, on other matters, the FN has changed its mind and its rhetoric to suit its 'ardent proponent of reform' image. On trade and issues of welfarism for instance, it is very difficult to find any particular FN line; rather, the FN's line shifted in direct opposition to the status-quo. In the past decade and a half given the context of cohabitation and in a country like France, given to demonstrations and strike activity, this has placed the FN more often than not on the side of protesters and strikers and against the political class.

- **A program of reform of the political process**

The above section ends with the most defining features shared by the FN and the FPÖ: while the two parties may exhibit differences—the FN remains a slightly more traditional party given Le Pen's much longer political career and elder-statesman figure, the contexts of France and Austria are so institutionally different that support for the parties translates into very different types of political impact, etc—there are nevertheless overwhelming similarities to which we have already pointed. The most significant of these is without a doubt their shared commitment to reforming the process of politics and the manner in which politics is carried out. We have highlighted above the style of politics they have adopted and their anti-status quo attitudes. Here we conclude with a brief examination of their political programs.

The programs and platforms of the FPÖ and the FN are an identical mix of right wing radicalism and populism. Our argument here is that, while their right-wing radicalism is not in question, their unwavering populism ensures

- a) that they have more in common with left wing populists than with traditional far right parties;
- b) their varied electoral base;
- c) makes for short-lived and turbulent bouts of political power.

More explicitly, while the issues of immigration, law and order and anti-Europeanism are the mainstay of their platforms, this right-wing radicalism is consistently embedded in a discourse of reform of the political process which we hold to be effective in terms of increased electoral support. References to immigration and law and order are constant in both FPÖ and FN campaigns but they are always part of a broader reforming discourse. For the FN this is a call for the dismantlement of the Fifth Republic and the creation of a Sixth Republic, a denunciation of corruption, an appeal to the ordinary voter (as early as 1988 ‘The outsider champions your interests’) and, in the most recent campaigns a denunciation of cohabitation.

The FPÖ’s strategy and rhetoric while in opposition were remarkably similar. Aside from their calls for the curtailment of immigration and naturalization rights and social welfare reforms, their campaign called for the over-haul of the Austrian consociational model. One is struck by the fact that the main message has to do with opposition to the features of the Austrian ‘proporz’ system, patronage, and the extra-constitutional system of neo-corporatism. As pointed out by Luther, ‘there is much evidence to suggest that Haider genuinely sees his and his party’s prime goal as a liberation of the Austrian economy and society from the influence of political parties and the rule of neo-corporatism’ (Luther, 2000, 437). Luther goes on to underscore that, understood in such a way, the FPÖ has less to do with embracing a Nazi past—or even a modernized version of this past—but designed to transform Austria’s post-war settlement.

The parties’ programs were eerily similar as both entered election campaigns (in 1998 for the FPÖ—no campaign as such for the precipitated elections held in November 2002—and 1995, 1998—regionals—and 2002 for the FN). While both made much of their opposition to EU enlargement and pandered to the public’s seemingly endless thirst for measures ensuring law and order (this last theme was central to all parties in both countries), the bulk of the

literature and, indeed, the bulk of the programs, centred on the need for political and institutional reform. These were clustered around the following headings

- a) A call for the global reform of democracy through the fostering of more competition between parties and a reduction of influence for lobbies and established parties;
- b) A specific call for the reduction of the ‘omnipotence’ of political parties;
- c) A call for the end of the bureaucratic state and authoritarian government ‘masquerading as democracy’ (quoted in both programs and various election material);
- d) A call for the curtailment of the influence of the media and the conspiracy of the media against transparent political information;
- e) A call for the curtailment of the powers of professional associations and interest groups which are seen as ‘non-elected para-governments’;
- f) A promise to complement parliamentary government with real, transparent, direct democracy in order to restore trust in the state;

Regarding the comparison between the FN and FPÖ, this is where the comparison ends: while the FN, and more specifically Jean-Marie Le Pen might have come second in last year’s presidential election round (maintaining their now expected score of between 14 and 17 percent of the vote), this was short-lived success followed by disappointing results in the legislative elections that followed in May/June (11% but no seats).

The fate met by the FPÖ once in power is a good illustration both of its inability to deliver on the promised reforms as well as the party’s intrinsically non-governmental non-consensual style.

- **Government in Coalition**

The FPÖ made the most of a volatile electoral market, the cleavages that had long maintained Austrian consociationalism were no longer so pronounced and Haider was able to mobilize across the pillars on a hitherto untapped set of horizontal cleavages—and more specifically the one main populist cleavage between the elite and the people. However, once in power the

FPÖ faced a number of difficulties stemming directly from the strengths upon which it had drawn while in opposition.

The first of these was having to draw on a small party machine once in charge of six ministries. The tale of FPÖ ministers trailing through their rolodexes recruiting from the small pool of party members in order to staff the positions that accrues to it thanks to 'Proporz' is now classic, and sheds some light on the, also classic, difficulties faced by an 'opposition' party once in government.

More tellingly however, for the purposes of our story, are firstly the party's inability to effect the reforms it had promised as a junior coalition partner; and, secondly, much like the Dutch LPF, the disagreements which divided the party's political elite and led to tensions over tax policy and, eventually, to the resignation of Susan Riess-Passer, the impending return of Haider as chairman, the appointment of the moderate Reichhold, his subsequent resignation on the grounds of ill health and the appointment of Haupt (much closer to the Haider radicals in the party) against the background of a fallen government, early elections and poor election results which saw the FPÖ's support drop from 27% to 10% of the vote and their seats decrease from 52 to 18. Though still in coalition (since February 23, 2003—3 months after the November elections), the FPÖ are no longer in a position of strength.

What their presence in the 1998-2002 government illustrated was the impossibility of effecting the transformations they had promised in the political setting in which they were elected. In such systems, defined by alliances and compromise, parties such as the FPÖ can take one of two roads: they can immediately align with their more moderate coalition partner, become a party of government and alienate their supporters; or, they can maintain their electoral line and suffer an ostracism which spells political stagnation and eventually irrelevance. The problem is that parties like the FPÖ and the LPF choose both. By this we mean that their difficulties are compounded by the elite divisions generated by the choice at hand. So while Riess-Passer was contemplating going against FPÖ policy on taxes, the party's elite remained wedded to its program.

Entrepreneurial Critique: National Movement Simeon II and List Pim Fortuyn

Both Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jörg Haider emerged from established positions on the political spectrum. Like it or not, the FN and the FPÖ are right-wing groups. By shifting

their emphasis from substance to process, Le Pen and Haider extended the reach of their appeal (and so broadened the base for their support). But they could not escape the shadow of the past either for themselves or for their organizations.

The same is not true for Simeon Saxe-Cobourg-Gotha in Bulgaria or the late Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands. As the eponymous leaders of their own political movements—the National Movement Simeon II (SNM) and the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)—they did not enter politics with established positions on the spectrum running from left to right. Simeon II was a successful businessman in Spain who, during his childhood, also happened to have been king of Bulgaria. Pim Fortuyn was a sociology professor, a magazine columnist, and an intellectual firebrand. Both men were at times outspoken on political issues—Fortuyn more often than Simeon II. But neither tried to translate their positions into widespread popular support or into a coherent policy program. What is more, those political comments that Simeon II and Fortuyn did make prior to their ‘official’ entry into politics did not fit easily within the context of the tense struggles between the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), or the quiet consensual reform efforts of the Dutch polder model. The king and the columnist were political outsiders in the purest sense.

Simeon II and Pim Fortuyn entered politics in similarly dramatic fashion. To begin with, neither expected to achieve parliamentary success. Simeon II originally desired to run for the Bulgarian presidency but failed to meet the statutory residency requirements. In frustration, he formed the SNM on April 8, 2001 and became the largest political grouping in the Bulgarian parliament only two months later—capturing 43 percent of the vote and 120 of the 240 available seats. Pim Fortuyn was drafted into a small grass-roots populist movement, Leefbaar Nederland (Liveable Netherlands, LN) in order to raise its media profile. However, Fortuyn’s controversial views on immigration soon brought him into conflict with the LN leadership. When the LN asked him to step down from the party, Fortuyn responded by creating the LPF on January 22, 2002. Fortuyn was assassinated before the May elections could take place. Nevertheless, the LPF retained the high level of support that Fortuyn had generated and became the second largest political group in the Dutch parliament—with 17 percent of the vote and 26 of the 150 available seats.

The political context for these dramatic developments included a number of broadly similar elements in Bulgaria and the Netherlands. During the period from 1989 to 2002, both countries experienced high levels of net vote change in each parliamentary election. In part, this volatility was a result of the decline in voter turnout that took place throughout the 1990s. To a large extent, however, the volatility was due to changing preferences of the voters. In Bulgaria, voting preferences alternated between the left-wing BSP and the more right-wing UDF. In the Netherlands, the alternation was between a center-left coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA) and Party of Labour (PvdA) against the more right-wing Liberals (VVD), and a left-right (purple) coalition of PvdA and VVD (plus the post-materialist liberal D'66) against the centrist CDA. The elections contested by the SNM (2001) and the LPF (2002) were similarly unique on all three counts: they generated the highest level of net vote change, they marked a break in the trend of declining turnout, and they resulted in a change in the pattern of alternation. These electoral data are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here.

A final similarity lies in the electoral aftermath for both the SNM and the LPF. Within months of their parliamentary successes, both groups saw a reversal of fortunes at the polls. For the SNM, this reversal came in the November 2001 presidential elections. Simeon II did not name an SNM candidate for the presidency but chose instead to lend his support to the right-wing (UDF) incumbent, Petar Stoyanov. The Bulgarian electorate chose otherwise, giving the left-wing (BSP) candidate, Georgi Parvanov, a 1.5 percentage point lead in the first round of voting and an 8 percentage point victory in the second-round run-off. Given the absence of an SNM candidate, Simeon II could claim some distance from Stoyanov's failure at the polls. Parvanov's victory nevertheless signaled a clear weakening of the former king's popular support.

The failure of the LPF was even more startling. Pim Fortuyn's electoral list joined a right-wing coalition government with the CDA and the VVD during the summer of 2002. However, the LPF never fully made the transition from the ad hoc list of candidates put together by Pim Fortuyn into an organized political party capable of carrying on Fortuyn's legacy. Mis-communication and in-fighting among LPF leaders and members was endemic and within only a matter of weeks a conflict between two LPF ministers

Table 1: Electoral Results in Bulgaria 1990 - 2001 (Vote Percentages)

Political Party or Group	1990	1991	1994	1997	2001
BSP–Bulgarian Socialist Party	47.2	33.1	43.5	22.0	17.1
MRF–Movement for Rights and Freedom (Turkish Minority Party)	6.0	7.6	5.4	7.6	7.5
NS–People’s Union	8.0	3.9	6.5		
UDF–Union of Democratic Forces	36.2	34.4	24.2		
UDF–Union of Democratic Forces				52.3	18.2
BBB–Bulgarian Business Block		1.3	4.7	4.9	
BE–Bulgarian Euro-Left				5.5	1.0
SNM–National Movement Simeon II					47.7
Others (difference between sum of above and 100).	2.6	19.7	15.7	7.7	8.5
Turnout (percentage)	90.8	83.9	75.2	58.9	66.6
Net vote change		20.0	16.4	29.5	48.5

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.de/bulgaria2.html>

Table 2: Electoral Results in the Netherlands 1989 - 2003 (Vote Percentages)

Political Party or Group	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003
CDA-centrist Christian Democrats	35.3	22.2	18.4	27.9	28.6
SGP-Christian conservative	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.6
PvdA-left-wing Party of Labour	31.9	24.0	29.0	15.1	27.3
Groen Links-green left	4.1	3.5	7.3	7.0	5.1
VVD-conservative Liberal Party	14.6	19.9	24.7	15.4	17.9
GPV-Christian conservative	1.3	1.3	1.2		
RPF-Christian conservative	1.0	1.8	2.0		
CU-Christian conservative				2.5	2.1
D'66-left-wing Liberal Party	7.9	15.5	9.0	5.1	4.1
SP-left-wing extremists	0.5	1.3	3.5	5.9	6.3
LPF-right-wing populist				17.0	5.7
Others (difference between sum of above and 100).	1.5	8.8	3.1	3.4	1.3
Turnout (percentage)	80.2	78.8	73.2	79.1	79.9
Net vote change	7.4	21.8	16.1	28.9	15.8

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.de/netherlands2.html>

brought down the government. The Christian Democratic prime minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, called for fresh parliamentary elections to be held in January 2003. And, in these elections, the LPF slumped from 17 percent to just under 6 percent of the vote, losing 18 of their 26 parliamentary seats in the process. Most of the vote gains went to the left-wing PvdA, which increased its share from 15 to 27 percent of the electorate.

- **Common Themes**

The themes that unite the Bulgarian and Dutch cases are economic frustration and political dissatisfaction. Both countries have gone through prolonged periods of adjustment and both display symptoms of increasing popular discontent with existing political elites and institutions. These are the forces which underlie the broad contextual similarities between the two countries and they are also the factors which made it possible for Simeon II and Pim Fortuyn to mobilize such a large percentage of the electorate in such a short period of time. The elections of 2001 and 2002 do not mark a shift to the right. Rather they signal a rejection of the status quo.

The story is most easily told with reference to Bulgaria. The fall of communism ushered a period of surprising political stability. Bulgaria was one of the first transition countries to consolidate a pluralistic party system—hinging largely on the consistent presence of the BSP, UDF and MRF in the parliament. Net vote change was high and yet the alternation between right and left alluded to above constituted a stable pattern. What is more, the Bulgarian case included deep and important continuities with its communist past. The BSP remained largely unreconstructed in its communist leanings and the BSP membership were unrepentant in revealing details about their personal curriculum vitae. Finally, Bulgaria benefitted from stable constitutional structures which—while sorely tested during the 1990s—managed to channel conflict within rather than against the political system (Ganev 2001a).

What the transition to democracy in Bulgaria did not bring was a coherent program for economic reform or market liberalization. Rather, the various governments formed in the early-to-mid 1990s contented themselves with doing very little on the domestic side while nevertheless opening up to world markets. The impact on income and employment was profoundly negative. By 1997 Bulgarian GDP was only 63 percent

of its 1989 level, unemployment was quadrupled, and the economy entered into hyperinflation (Mihov 2001: 401-414; Dobrinsky 2000). The strong shift of electoral support from the BSP to the UDF in the 1997 parliamentary elections was the result.

The UDF government came in with a coherent reform effort centered on pegging the Bulgarian currency, the lev, to the German mark. However, the success of that policy was at best mixed. The government succeeded in tackling the problem of monetary instability but it remained unable to privatize public sector enterprises or to tackle the problem of high and persistent unemployment (Drezov 2000). From an international perspective, the government's success at macroeconomic stabilization was already an important achievement. From a domestic perspective, however, it was simply not enough (Barany 2002).

The two questions which emerge from the Bulgarian narrative are (a) why was it so difficult to implement a coherent economic reform package and (b) what made Simeon II credible as a 'solution' to the problem of blocked reform? The most common answers given to the first question are complacency and corruption. Bulgaria made the transition from communism to post-communism without undergoing a true political revolution and without experiencing a dramatic one. As a result, the important players in Bulgarian politics had existing constituencies who continued to believe in that the benefits of maintaining the status quo outweighed the risks of engaging in radical reform. Hence most government policy focused on shoring up the existing system (for example by subsidizing state owned enterprises) and what little effort was directed at 'liberalization' was actually used to benefit specific groups of elites rather than the economy as a whole. Over time, the 'losers' from the market transition process became ever more conservative and the 'winners' became both more powerful and more selective in directing their attentions (Ganev 2001b).

This argument has two important qualifications. The first is that while the ex-communists were the most prominent protagonists in maintaining outdated institutions while at the same time plundering the country's economic resources, they were not alone in either endeavor. The charge of clientelism was leveled at the whole spectrum of Bulgaria elites. The second qualification is that the 'losers' do have breaking points at which they will rebel against their own complacency as well as against elite corruption

(Koford 2000). The story of failed transition in Bulgaria is tragic and yet it is not irreversible.

The genius of Simeon II as a political entrepreneur was that he recognized both points of qualification. His appeal lay in his refusal to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' elites. The whole of the Bulgarian political establishment was responsible for the crisis of transition and so the solution is to look outside (and to the SNM). Equally, Simeon II argued that his participation in politics should have two lasting effects—it should encourage citizens to vote and it should result in an improvement of their standard of living. The increase in participation should happen regardless as to the electoral outcome. The improvement in living standards would result only if Simeon II were brought to power (Kadiev 2001).

Within this message, the Simeon II's critique was political more than economic. On the economic front, he was willing to concede that 'if we want to remain a democratic country following one and the same path, we cannot deviate more than five degrees to the right or to the left from the current economic policies' (Kadiev 2001). On the political front, however, he emphasized the importance of consensus rather than alternation, coalition rather than single party rule, and competence rather than experience. In other words he rejected what were the hallmarks of Bulgarian politics—left-right competition, relatively homogenous governments, and continuity with the past.

Pim Fortuyn emphasized a similar political break, although along radically different lines. Fortuyn argued in favor of choice and not consensus, alternation and not coalition, leadership and not management. Where Simeon II was soft-spoken and vague, Fortuyn was brash and explicit (often embarrassingly so). The differences between these two figures is as much personal as contextual. Simeon II and Pim Fortuyn were different characters just as Bulgaria and the Netherlands were different societies. The meaningful comparison lies in the similarity of contrasts. Simeon II was as out of place in Bulgarian politics as Pim Fortuyn was in the Netherlands. And being different, Fortuyn tapped into much the same disaffection in the Netherlands that Simeon II found in Bulgaria.

Dutch popular political disillusionment is more difficult to explain than popular disaffection in Bulgaria. Dutch economic reforms are widely regarded as a model of success and not failure. Corruption is almost unheard of in the Netherlands. Political

elites are more apt to downplay their personal status than to flaunt their relative wealth or prestige. And consensus is the norm not just between political parties, but between the state and society as well.

The key to unlocking Dutch political disaffection lies in the relationship between consensus and discipline—both self-generated and externally imposed (Jones 1999). The ‘miracle’ of Dutch economic reform during the twenty years from 1982 to 2002 was under-written by consistent efforts of political elites either to encourage or to impose discipline on various groups in the wider society. The 1982 ‘Wassenaar Accords’ that lie at the foundation of the adjustment strategy were essentially an agreement to trade off wage moderation for productive investment. Had the trade unions and employers not managed to reach such an agreement, the government had already indicated that it would intervene directly in wage bargaining. Self-discipline was preferable to discipline externally imposed. Discipline was essential in either event.

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the challenge for Dutch elites was to maintain discipline without exhausting popular support. This challenge was easier for some politicians and for some political groups than for others. The right-wing VVD was the first to lose support, falling out of the ruling coalition in 1989. The left-wing PvdA entered into the governing coalition as a result. Nevertheless, the shift in the governing coalition from center-right to center-left had little impact on government policy. The PvdA leader was the same trade unionist who negotiated the Wassenaar Accords and the CDA prime minister remained unchanged. If anything, the inclusion of the PvdA in the coalition deepened the institutionalization of consensual self-discipline by implicating the trade unions directly in the success or failure of government policy.

As it turns out, government-led reform efforts were a success—and one that has been heralded throughout Europe. During the early to mid-1990s, Dutch unemployment fell to record lows, growth surged ahead, and the country developed a reputation for macroeconomic stability second only to Germany. Nevertheless, the governing coalition failed to reap any significant benefits from this success. Quite the opposite, the 1994 elections brought losses to both the CDA and the PvdA and resulted in the first expulsion of the Christian Democrats from the cabinet in seventy years. The PvdA led the next government in a bizarre union of right and left (called ‘purple’ because it included ‘red’

socialists and 'blue' liberals) against the opposition of the centrist Christian Democrats. Meanwhile, policy continued to rely on disciplined consensus led by political and economic elites.

The limits of this consensual approach were reached by the end of the 1990s. To begin with most groups in Dutch society had lost income during the course of the adjustment process (Jones 1999). Hence while the country as a whole was celebrated, individual families were not benefitting. This redistribution of income was felt most acutely by the young, the elderly, and the unemployed. However it also affected rural communities and those workers who once held well-paying manufacturing jobs. The old promise that wage moderation would result in productive investment never materialized. Jobs were created. But they were not highly productive jobs and they were often not even full-time. Second, the change in the structure of employment added new stresses to the Dutch welfare state—both financial and expectations-related. Excessive use of early-retirement and worker disability drew down on government coffers even as the extension of employment to women reflected greater responsibilities on the systems for education and health. Of course the Dutch welfare state was no different from any other in requiring major reform. What was different was the fact that the Dutch had already been asked to accept self-sacrifice for almost two decades of economic adjustment.

Going into the 2002 elections, Fortuyn attacked Dutch politics on three dimensions. He argued that consensus is unproductive; that the institutions which underwrite consensus are unrepresentative; and that the discipline required for consensus to work is too constraining. Fortuyn did not need to imply that Dutch elites were corrupt. His charge was simply that they were out of touch with the true interests of the voters and the essential core of Dutch values. His use of 'immigration' was particularly revealing in this regard. First, he claimed that immigration was a problem for which consensus is not a solution. Everyone cannot agree on the issue, full stop. Second, the division of society into different groups—Christian Democrat, Socialist, Turkish, etc.—may be good for promoting consensus but it is bad for encouraging tolerance or assimilation. Third, the Dutch should not tolerate intolerance. Hence if they are to respond to the problem of immigration, they must confront it directly, openly, and decisively, rather than accepting

half-measures or partial 'solutions'. To remain Dutch, the Dutch must break with consensus (Jones 2002).

- **Implications: Specific and Systemic**

Both Fortuyn and Simeon II succeeded in their mobilization against the predominant political formulas in their societies. However, having made the critique is not the same as having provided the solution. For Simeon II, the challenge is to live up to his own commitments. Having promised to use much the same economic policies but to better effect, he must now deliver. The presidential election of November 2001 suggests that the voters already began to have their doubts. Once in power, Simeon II is no longer such the outsider. Once implicated in the policies of the government, he cannot easily lay claim to blanket assertions of competence (or even innocence). The privatization of state owned enterprises is a particular source of frustration and discontent.

Fortuyn never had the opportunity to face the challenge of coming into office. His followers did and failed. Their iconoclastic views proved to be a major inconvenience in the negotiation of the right-wing coalition of VVD, CDA and LPF. However, it was the movement's lack of self-discipline that proved its undoing. Having rejected the relationship between consensus and discipline at the national level, LPF politicians were hard pressed to generate either consensus or self-discipline within their own ranks. This problem was worse among the elites than among the rank-and-file (or even the sitting Members of Parliament [MPs]). And in the conflict between different factions of the LPF movement it is fair to wonder whether the party itself has a future.

Paradoxically, Bulgaria seems to come out of this comparison on better terms than the Netherlands. Simeon II at least has a chance to respond to the latent desires of the electorate for a change in the political formula. The same is not true for either the LPF or other Dutch ruling elites. The 2003 elections resulted in a strong shift from the LPF back to the PvdA. As a result, no coalition on the right is possible except a repeat of the CDA-VVD-LPF combination that failed so spectacularly in 2002. Hence the CDA and the PvdA must negotiate the formation of a government on the center-left that looks not unlike the coalition that ruled from 1989 to 1994 and that ended in the largest net vote change in Dutch history.

Should that coalition come about—and should consensus fail to generate decisive reforms—it is fair to wonder what will happen when the Dutch next go to the polls.

Conclusion:

The recent spate of electoral successes on the extreme right in Europe do not so much signal a shift to the right as they signal disillusionment with politics in general. That is the good news. The bad news is that the populist response is so often inadequate in addressing the problems that gave rise to disillusionment in the first place. Indeed, with weak organizations and little or no political experience, the right-wing populists that come to power often do not survive the stresses and strains of government. This clears the field for a return of the traditional parties. But it also sets the stage of a deepening of disillusionment in the future. Hence the preliminary conclusion to draw from this research project is that the forces behind the recent successes of the right are structural and not distributive. And so long as those forces remain unaddressed the opportunities for populist entrepreneurs will only increase. At the moment such entrepreneurs are content to operate within the democratic system, albeit from the right. This analysis gives us no indication as to where they will align themselves in the future or how far they will choose to push the rhetoric of political reform.

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