

Examining the Social Basis of the Far-right Parties in Europe

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Abstract

Far-right parties have been increasingly spreading throughout Europe since 1980s; they have attracted the attention of many voters, especially the youth and the workers by campaigning against immigration and multiculturalism. Through an anti-establishment approach, these parties have become mainly mistrustful of the mainstream politics articulating themselves as the true voice of the people and the only alternative to the status quo; the far-right parties have been able to distance themselves from traditional fascism and adopt a populist approach and have become a rising force in many European countries. The current paper aims to explore the status of far-right parties in European countries; it studies both the electoral victory of this movement and its consequences, and compares the condition of these parties across the European countries. Finally, the social status of far-right parties will be examined together with demographic variables of age, gender, social class and education.

Keywords: elections, Europe, far-right parties, immigration, neo-fascism.

Introduction

Considerable victories by far-right parties, especially in countries such as France, indicate that they are no longer marginalized. Rather, following their major successes in local and national elections, they are waiting to win power and implement their own policies. Nevertheless, this movement does not follow a coherent and unified structure as a party family thereby having different features based on the condition of each European country; such that it has a populist and anti-EU approach in some countries, while having a racist neo-fascist or anti-Muslim element in others. Meanwhile, there seems to exist a lack of correct understanding of European far-right movement in Iran; different and paradoxical comprehensions, however, exist of this movement and no distinction is usually made between its various levels such as racist activities of underground groups and formal and powerful parties such as the National Front (France). Accordingly, the growing power of far-right parties in Europe and their consequences for the Islamic Republic of Iran is an issue which calls for further investigation; the anti-minorities approaches and policies of this party, which consist of putting pressure on Muslim immigrants in Europe, have driven Iran toward opposing them and supporting the rights of Muslims living in these countries. On the other hand, and anti-hegemonic, anti-American, and anti-Zionist nature of these parties can turn them into a potential ally to advance the foreign policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The current study aims to provide an impartial scientific understanding of the political status quo of European far-right party, its social status in European countries and their supporters.

Contrary to popular perception, the success of far-right parties in Europe is not transient; nor does it spring from poor economic conditions. It is, however, caused by more important social and political reasons. Some analysts see the main reason

behind the success of far-right movements to be economic crisis and an increased unemployment rate; interestingly, it should be noted that the far-right extremism appears to have gained seats in countries such as Austria and Denmark, which were not affected by economic crisis; such that during the 2014 European Parliament election, for example, the Danish far-right party could snare 24% of the vote thereby becoming Denmark's first party. On the contrary, this movement gained no success in economically-troubled nations such as Spain, Portugal and Ireland; therefore, the main reason behind its victory in countries such as Denmark and France seems to be the people who are discontent with the mainstream political parties. It can therefore be claimed that the situation has become appropriate for the far-right parties in the gap left by the absence of real opposition and in a situation where many traditional left- and right-wing parties act alike in many policies.

The current study examines issues such as ideological position, party situation, as well as electoral successes of far-right parties based on the gained votes or seats. Nevertheless, this paper does not address a full description of the effect of the far-right movement spread throughout Europe. Finally, this research analyzes the social status and the nature of far-right movement proponents, and using the existing data in various elections, answers the following question: why do working class citizens support the far-right movement?

Far-right parties appear to have been able to take advantage of political discontent and introduce themselves as the only alternative for change by considering the dominant policies including left and right to be alike. In this way, they have made the biggest gains in local and national elections while strengthening their position among the young and the working class.

Literature Review

Concerning the far-right movement in Europe, no comprehensive study has so far been conducted in Persian; existing works have structural and conceptual weaknesses and mainly consist of short articles or a section/ chapter of a larger work. No complete book, however, has been addressed the issue of far-right movement in Europe in Persian. One obvious problem concerning the research done on this issue in Persian is associated with researcher's mistake in perceiving the concept of the far-right movement. In other words, the two concepts of conservatism and center right rather than far-right are used in many cases and the terms "right-wing" or "nationalist" have been used to refer to the far-right movement. Šokuhi (2013: 95, 98, 103, 106), for example, applies the terms conservative and right-wing to describe the far-right movement. In addition, Torābi (2012: 53) examines the center right parties such as the German Democratic Christian Party (CDU) as a far right party, showing that some researchers do not make the distinction between conservatism and the far-right. Yet, the latter has sharp differences with right-wing conservatism and it is therefore incorrect to use the two concepts interchangeably.

Another contradiction mainly seen in Persian newspapers and articles associated with the far-right, is that the author considers no distinction between fascism and far-right; rather he/she tends to regard the latter as the re-emergence of fascism. However, these two issues are significantly different from one another and the majority of successful far-right parties distance themselves from traditional fascism and those few current neo-fascist parties are marginalized not gaining significant electoral success.

Finally, the majority of Persian resources view the far-right phenomenon as created by European, pro-Zionist governments, whereas in some countries, such as Germany and Hungary, due

to their diversity, the far-right has preserved its anti-Semitic nature; it even supports Holocaust deniers and Muslims and also is supportive of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

This article, according to the limitations associated with Persian references, aims at employing reliable English language sources. These works can be generally classified into two groups including: case studies and comparative studies. Concerning case studies, many research efforts have been made involving different levels of analysis including: national level of analysis, party level of analysis, and individual level of analysis of voters and proponents. Among the case studies, one can refer to the studies of Germany, conducted by Betz (1993), Lubbers and Scheeper (2000), Chapin (1997), Minkenburg (1992), and Westle and Niedermayer (1992) who concluded that unemployment rate and immigration are effective in increasing the popularity of far-right parties.

In a comparative study, the researcher examines several countries and generalizes the results, which are some times criticized for lack of accuracy. Notably, since the far-right performance and structure is not the same across different European countries, it is difficult to present a comparative study of these parties across various countries and foreign researchers have tried to provide a comparative study of limited level of this movement. In a research of a group of European countries, for example, Betz (1994), Husbands (1992), and Kitschelt (1997) concluded that the co-existing influx of immigrants and high unemployment rates are the main factors contributing to the rise of the far-right parties over the past decade. Moreover, Jackman and Volpert (1996), in their comparative study of several European countries, argue that the existence of various parties in electoral systems makes a difference in far-right support in elections. In a survey about far-right parties, titled "Right

Response” published by Chatham House in 2011, Matthew Goodwin (2011b) suggests that national identity and European values are the main factors of tendency towards far-right parties. Goodwin (2011b) argues that, rather than economic concerns, their voters’ main motivation to vote to the far-right is cultural anxiety about the influence of immigration on national identity. He also examines the social status of the far-right, concluding that the far-right voters are mostly the less educated and the working class who feel threatened by immigration. A strong point of this study is the fact that the author presents a sociological examination of the far-right voters based on various elections over different years. Concerning the literature review of the far-right parties, it should be mentioned that different definitions presented for the concept of success have caused problems in the understanding of the movement. The success sometimes refers to obtaining a certain number of votes in an election, while at other times, it refers to the average number of votes obtained during a specific time period; in some cases, the number of seats gained in a Parliament is intended, whereas in others, the influence of one party on other parties is considered to be the success criterion. Furthermore, most English sources have a section mainly concerned with strategies to deal with the far-right in their countries, which is not necessary to address for non-native researchers.

Historical and Theoretical Framework

The far-right, as the name implies, stands for an ideology and special position within the political realm. The political terms “left” and “right” were coined during the French Revolution: those who sat on the right were the supporters of the monarchy, while those on the left opposed it. Since then, the conflict between the right and the left has repeatedly appeared within European political contexts. The wars of right and left came to a head in the Dreyfus affair in France in the 1890s, which divided

France into right and left. However, the origin of the far-right movement can be tracked to the Fascism and Nazism of the 1930s; today's far-right movement is, however, significantly different from these two extremist movements; in fact, the current far-right movement is practically a new phenomenon in today's politics.

At the end of WWII, and after the defeat of fascism, stable political systems were established across different European countries. Within these political systems, the far-right parties were strongly marginalized, though they did not completely disappear. Anti-fascist victory, economic growth, lower unemployment rates and discrediting racism all worked against the far right parties. However, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, new political movements managed to receive significant levels of support (Hainsworth, 2008: 1). Moreover, anti-fascism was further weakened after the May 1968 events in France when the students accused their earlier generation of abusing anti-fascism in order to legitimize their power, and thereby ridiculing their actions. These students called the existing governments, with no exception "fascist" thereby making this term lose its meaning (Passmore, 2011: 134).

Michael Minkenberg has divided the development of the far-right into three phases:

- a) Starts at the end of WWII and coincides with the emergence of McCarthyism in the United States, Poujadism in France, Socialist Reich Party in Germany (SRP), Deutsche Rechtspartei (DRP) in West Germany, and Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) in Italy.
- b) Starts during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the Wallace movement in the United States, the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Germany, in West Germany and in the British National Party (BNP).

- c) Starts during the 1980s until the present time, during which almost all far-right parties appeared across European countries (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011: 41).

Characteristics and classification of the far-right parties in Europe

The far-right parties have different features including populism, nativism, xenophobia, anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism and emphasis on national culture and values, opposition to European Unity and European Integration, opposition to the dominant structure and the mainstream, opposition to representative democracy, anti-globalization, anti-democracy and authoritarianism, hatred of the present time as the period of decline and nostalgia for the golden age of the past, Islamophobia, and anti-Roma approach. Meanwhile, some of these features such as anti-immigration are seen in all far-right parties; however, concerning other features including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, these parties have different approaches. On the one hand, some of these features are in harmony with each other: for example, nationalism and nativism emanate from opposition to the principle of equality of human beings; in some cases, they may even lead to racism. Besides, anti-immigration gives rise to violence and xenophobia against the immigrants. Moreover, these parties view the European Union as a threat to themselves and a reason for loss of national boundaries, loss of cultural identity and an increase in crime. From another perspective, the far-right populist parties try to pitch themselves as the true voice of the people; they try to go forward with a referendum in all matters while opposing representative democracy. Finally, opposition to structure is viewed as the most important feature of this movement. This feature, along with people's discontent with the mainstream parties, provides an important opportunity for far-right parties;

thereby many individuals get attracted to the far-right with no ideological and intellectual attachment. Leaders of the far-right parties usually have a charismatic character and attract the public to the party. Typically, these leaders are opposed to the development of the European Union, calling for their withdrawal from their country and they focus on this issue in their speech (Smith, 2003: 9).

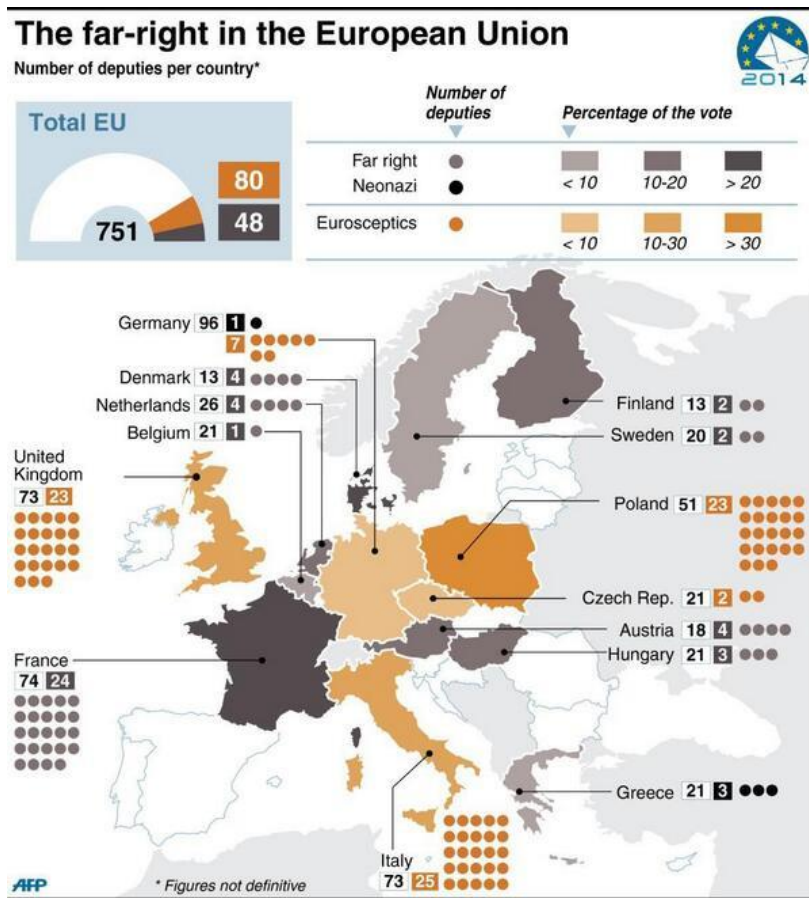
Table 1. Classification of European far-right parties

Traditional far-right parties		
The Italian Social Movement	MSI	Italy
German National Democratic	NPD / DVU	Germany
British National Party	BNP	Britain
Center Party 86	CP'86	Netherlands
The post-industrial far-right parties		
Austrian Freedom Party	FPÖ	Austria
Flemish Interest/Belgian National	VB / FN	Belgium
Progress Party	FRPd	Denmark
National Front (France)	FN	France
Republicans	REP	Germany
Center Democrats	CD	Netherlands
Progress Party	FRPn	Norway

Source: Ignazi (1995: 10)

The far-right parties are various in types: while some are rooted in explicitly fascist and anti-democratic ways, others demand *more* democracy as well as the protection of individual rights. While some support the free market, others advocate economic self-sufficiency and mercantilism. Finally, some target immigrants and Muslims, populist extremist parties in Central and Eastern Europe devote more energy to mobilizing public hostility towards Jews, the Roma and the European

Union (EU) (Goodwin, 2011b: 12). These variations have led analysts to distinguish between different ‘types’ of the far-right parties: Some draw a straightforward distinction between the far-right parties that remain wedded to interwar fascism and those that eschew this tradition. Others divide the far-right parties on the basis of their attitudes towards immigration (Carter, 2005).



Source: AFP (2014)

Paul Taggart (1995) considers the far-right parties as new populist parties and classifies them on the basis of their anti-establishment strategy. Nevertheless, Ignazi (1997) divides the

far right into two groups: the first group consists of old traditional parties, which have at least minimal ties to fascism or its heritage. The second group consists of new parties. In the first group he includes the MSI of Italy, the BNP of Britain and the DVU of Germany; in the second group, he includes post-industrial parties such as the Front National (FN, National Front) in France, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Flemish Interest and the Republicans in Germany. The second group, while preserving its values, rejects fascism (Hainsworth, 2008: 17). Although some neo-fascist parties are grouped in the far-right party family, the term neo-fascist cannot be used as synonymous with the far-right, since neo-fascism represents only a small percentage of the ideologies of these parties. Moreover, many far-right (new) parties exist with no fascistic nature (Ignazi, 2002: 24-25). Yet, most of these parties emerged and developed in the post-WWII context, during which no suitable time existed for nostalgia toward the period (Schain, 2002).

Political status of the far-right parties in Europe

In response to the question “what is the political stance of far-right parties in European countries?”, a model was observed revealing 1) the group of countries with strong radical far-right parties and a weak movement sector, including Austria, Belgium, France, and Italy, and (2) a group of countries with weak radical far-right parties and a strong movement sector, including Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Mikenberg, 2008). Moreover, countries with strong radical far-right parties are predominantly Catholic whereby Islam, considered as a non-Christian religion, constitutes the second largest religion of the country. In contrast, countries with weak radical far-right parties and a strong movement sector are predominantly Protestant and they have an ethnic view towards the notion of nation, historically.

In Italy, the main parties associated with the far-right

movements include the National Unity, the Northern League and the Italian Social Movement. The Flemish Interest represents the far-right party in Belgium and the Freedom Party is considered as the Austrian far-right party, which entered into a coalition government. The Progress Party Norway, the Progress Party Denmark, and the Danish People's Party exist in Scandinavian countries; moreover, the People's Party in Switzerland and the Freedom Party in the Netherlands are representatives of the far-right movement in these central European countries (Hainsworth, 2008: 6).

In 2010, the Netherlands, the efforts of democrats to achieve better results gave rise to a 5% success and the achievement of 20 Parliament seats in the elections. In the same year, the PVV party in the Netherlands (for freedom) became the third largest party in the parliament, along the same lines, the PS party in Finland became the third party of this country by gaining 19% of the vote share (Goodwin, 2011b: 3).

Wilders, the Dutch far-right leader, calls Islam a totalitarian ideology and compares the Qur'an with Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* (Bjurwald, 2010: 17). The votes of this party rose from 5.9 in 2007 to 15.5 in 2010, gaining 19 seats in the parliament (van Kessel, 2011). Following the 2007 elections, the SVP far-right party, with an emphasis on issues such as immigration, European Union, refugees and Islam made substantial electoral gains by gaining 29% of the votes and 62 seats in the parliament (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 6). This party is an example of successful far-right parties. In the 2005 elections, the Norwegian anti-tax, anti-immigration, anti-establishment and populist Progress Party gained a 22% electoral success and 38 seats in the parliament. In the 2010 elections, the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB)- the largest far-right party in the country- won 15 seats out of the 150 seats of Belgian parliament with 8.7% of the votes. This party calls for Finnish independence and preservation of Finnish traditional values (Ahmadi Lafuraki et al., 2013: 71).

Table 2. Important electoral successes of far-right parties in Europe

Country	Party	Vote	Election Year
Switzerland	SVP	28.9	2007
Austria	FPÖ	26.9	1999
Romania	PRM	19.4	2000
France	FN	17.9	2002
Belgium	VB	16.8	2003
Hungary	Jobbik	16.7	2010
Italy	AN	15.7	1996
Netherlands	PVV	15.5	2010
Denmark	DF	13.9	2007
Poland	LPR	8.0	2005

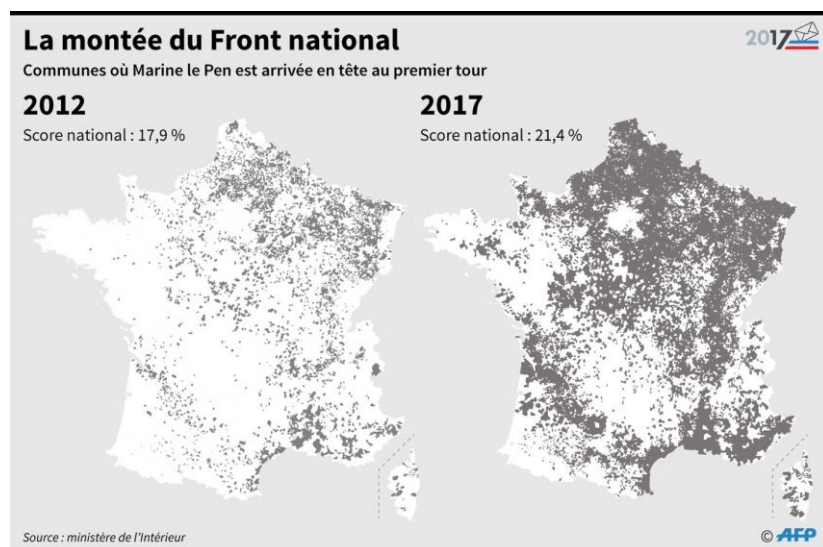
Source: Harrison & Bruter (2011)

Electoral success appears to be an important opportunity for developing the far-right parties. Direct elections of the European parliament are among such opportunities. The British National Party, for example, won two seats in the European parliament in 2009 (Goodwin, 2011a). One key feature of successful far-right parties is to distance themselves from Fascism. Accordingly, failure of the far-right parties in Germany and Britain can be justified on the basis of their traditional nature as well as their support from neo-fascism (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 8). Many believe that, to date, the victory of the Freedom Party of Austria, led by Haider, has been the greatest victory for the far-right party in Europe (Pedahzur & Brichta, 2002: 31). In the 1999 elections, this party could enter the country's parliament and win 52 seats with 26.9% of the votes; in the 2008 elections, the LN party in Italy entered parliament and won 52 seats with 8.3% of the votes (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 6). Inside Germany, comparing the situation of Eastern and Western States, one realizes that the far-right movements in east-predominantly protestant or non-religious- are more significant

than the westerners, and the parties are stronger in the West (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011: 47).

On the other hand, far-right parties in some European countries have experienced temporary success and have never been centralized; these parties include the Republicans, the DVU and the NPD in Germany and the BNP in the United Kingdom. The British National Party was founded in 1982 from the remnants of the old National Front. In the 2010 elections, it won 1.9% of the votes despite introducing 300 candidates and in 2009, it won two seats in the European parliament. However, its successes are limited to insignificant, local elections (Ahmadi Lafuraki, 2013: 64). The far-right parties of the United Kingdom and Germany are two unsuccessful examples of these parties, where the traditional far-right parties gain only a small vote share, usually less than the required amount to get to the parliament. Moreover, the media has put the far-right activities of these two countries under intense scrutiny (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 7). But in recent years UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Alternative for Germany (AfD) have become two examples of successful right-wing populist parties which many consider them Eurosceptic parties and not the Far Right. During the French presidential election in 2017, the far-right Ms Le Pen secured more support among young voters than any other age group. By contrast, she was backed by just 20 per cent of over 65s. (Independent: 2017) Front National secured its greatest ever election performance on the first round, taking 7.6 million votes– or 21.4% of the electorate. It was the first time since 2002 that a National Front candidate continued to the second round and the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic that the runoff did not include a nominee of the traditional left or right parties. (Sud-Ouest: 2017) although in the second round of voting, Le Pen was defeated 66.1% to 33.9% by her rival Emmanuel Macron of En Marche, it has secured itself as one of the largest political forces in France.

Evolution of the votes in the first rounds of the presidential elections in 2012 and 2017



AFP (2017)

Underlying reasons for development of the far-right

Answering the question: “what are the reasons behind the success of the far-right parties across different European countries?”, one can say that influential reasons include the rising support for the far-right, the overall discontent with the mainstream political parties, and distrust towards the official institutions of Europe. For example, political researchers believe that the votes for Jean-Marie Le Pen in the 2002 elections of France were “protest votes” trying to protest the country’s mainstream political parties. Although democracy is a form of government accepted by the majority of the European people, most of them are discontent with the way this democracy is being presented by their government.

Another important reason for the development and popularity of the far-right parties in Europe concerns the issue of

immigration; in fact, many voters have become discontented with the mainstream parties' politics toward immigration and European convergence. During 1997-2010 in the UK, for example, many voters believed that the Labor Party was to blame for the presence of immigrants in this country. Similar situations exist in other European countries: during 2001-2003, about 75% of people became mistrustful of the political parties and 60% were discontented with the performance of their government toward the issue of immigration. Moreover, about 50-60% of the people were discontented with the performance of their country's parliament regarding immigration. In such conditions, the radical populists were provided with a good opportunity; therefore, during elections, people were more attracted to a party which, they felt, was more responsive to their demands and needs (Goodwin, 2011b: 21). The far-right takes advantage of the condition in which the voters feel discontented with the performance of mainstream parties and articulates itself as the only alternative to change the status quo. As a matter of fact, from the far-right perspective, other political parties- regardless of their name and political affiliations- are portrayed as "all the same" and the far-right considers itself on the other side (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 4).

As Betz writes, a majority of citizens in most Western democracies no longer trust political institutions since the existing institutions are unresponsive to the ideas and wishes of average citizens and incapable of adopting viable solutions for the society's most pressing problems. In his view, it is within this context of growing public pessimism, anxiety and disaffection that the rise and success of the far-right in Western Europe finds at least a partial explanation. Based on protest-vote theories, electoral support from the aforementioned parties may be due to other reasons such as dissatisfaction with governments' performances, unemployment, decreased welfare measures, education, and non-strict immigration policies and services. In this regard, lack of public trust in democratic

institutions and political parties, is called loss of social capital by Robert Putnam (Norris, 2004: 1-7).

Goodwin (2011:9) argues that a large percentage of the far-right votes belong to citizens who are dissatisfied with the political system and distrustful of the mainstream elites; therefore the populist extremist parties are a by-product of political dissatisfaction and public disenchantment, and so will disappear when the underlying sources of these protests are addressed. This protest model, however, is not backed by convincing evidence. It is, however, not to deny that the populist extremist parties voters are politically dissatisfied, and it is wrong to completely link these parties to dissatisfaction. In his research “Radical Right”, Pippa Norris argues that dissatisfaction and distrust in main political parties and the representative democracy play an important role in supporting the far-right; he points out that in explanation of electoral support for the radical right in Belgium, France, Denmark and Netherlands, the theory of protest-vote and distrust has been more concentrated than in other West European countries (van der Brug et al., 2000). The far-right puts the political system under constant attack by delegitimizing both “established parties” and the party per se, and considers the system itself and its elites as corrupt, replacing the dominant values with pain of the masses (Ignazi, 2003: 215).

The main reasons for the emergence of the extreme right party since 1980s include changing class structures, the rise of post-materialist values, loss of traditional loyalty to party, the growth of globalization in economics and culture leading to the growth of unemployment and loss of identity which increased the support from the far-right among middle class and the working class (Eatwell, 2000), changes in ideologies and the strategy of debunking fascism, biological racism and direct anti-democracy (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011: 5). Many believe that the emergence of the current extreme right is the

result of transition to the post-materialist era (Dalton et al., 1984; Gallagher et al., 2005; Kitschelt, 1997). According to Ignazi (2003: 217), 'The post-industrial extreme right parties are the by-product of a dissatisfaction [with] government policies on issues such as immigration and crime and, at a more profound level, of growing uneasiness in a plural, conflicting, multicultural, and globalizing society.' Other reasons include decreased role of social class and religion in electoral behavior. Ignazi believes that post-war economic and cultural interactions reduce class features and traditional ties. Within this new context, the ground is prepared for the growth of new parties such as the far-right, green parties and different EU movements; among these new parties, the far-right has been successful in attracting the losers of modernization (Hainsworth, 2008: 27).

The social basis of the far-right

In this section, an attempt will be made to answer the following questions:

“Who are the far-right proponents and what is the social basis of this movement?” The data obtained from the far-right voters suggest that the proponents do not have unified traits and they have various characteristics in many respects. In general, it was found that support for the far-right is concentrated among the older and younger generations, the less educated working-class men living in the declining industrial towns, cynical of their economic future (Ford & Goodwin, 2010; Arzheimer, 2010). The research conducted by Chris shows that during the early 1990s, the most electoral support for eight far-right parties across seven western European countries has been concentrated among less-educated farmers, artisans and workers. The obtained results from studies conducted by Rodrik and Mudde based on International Social Survey and World Values Survey Data suggest that in developed democracies of Western Europe, less-educated workers who live on less income with no job

security support the restrictive and strict immigration and trade policies and vote for these parties. In contrast, highly-educated citizens, working in high-earning professions support the free trade and do not usually vote for these parties (Swank & Betz, 2003). In fact, research shows that these people do not feel threatened by the immigrants, the cultural diversity and globalized post-industrial economy, and thereby are not attracted to the far-right groups (Ahmadi Lafurki, 2013: 56).

Mayer (1998: 18) presented a case study of those who voted for the French Front National. In an investigation of six parliamentary elections (1986-1997), he concluded that most support was concentrated among the shop-owners and blue-collar workers. A similar study on the Progress Party Norway and the Danish People's Party suggests that most support for these parties was concentrated first among those who opposed paying taxes, including small business owners or petty bourgeois, followed by a significant number of blue-collar workers (Andersen & Bjorklund, 2000). In a case study of Switzerland, the obtained results suggest that the SVP supporters consist of traditional middle-class men in rural regions on the one hand, and less-educated blue-collar workers living in big cities on the other (Skenderovic, 2011). First, the NF voters, more or less, included the bourgeois class, the previous generation, Catholics, conservative and socialist opponents for whom, party plans were consistent with their demand to improve government control over economy and return to free market economy. However, over the next years, the NF found supporters among all social classes. Most interestingly, the NF recruits most of its support from young working-class men; more precisely, less-educated, unemployed young men living in the industrial suburbs of large cities. Surprisingly, National Front got 30% of the vote from the workers in the 1995 Presidential Elections; that is, more than those who voted for socialists and communists. These

characteristics of the NF can also be found in other far-right parties (Passmore, 2011: 137). Like other parties, the National Front announces more or less exaggerating numbers of its supporters. Studies show that women are less interested in this party and they make up only 18% of its proponents. In addition, 85% of the party's supporters describe themselves as Catholic, 25% of which are strict Catholics. Finally, independent workers make up about 36% of the party Ayubi (1389 [2010 A.D]). To precisely identify the nature of far-right proponents, it is best to examine each country separately; however, the overall status of these proponents can be studied compared to proponents of other parties using the existing data based on the following components:

1. Gender

Studies show a high ratio of male to female the voters who support the far-right parties (Harrison & Bruter, 2011). In general, it can be said that men tend to make up the majority of far-right supporters, thereby being at the opposite side of the Green parties' supporters. In case of the National Front (France), for example, there has always been a difference between gender percentage of male and female voters. In the 1984 European elections, the FN took 12% of the male vote and 9% of the female vote. In the 1988 Presidential elections, Jean-Marie Le Pen won 18% of the male vote and 11% of the female vote. In the 2002 elections, the gap between men and women voters still existed despite reduction in the difference, such that, the FN took 19% of the male vote and 15% of the female vote during these elections (Hainsworth, 2004; Mayer, 2002; Perrineau, 1997). This is true about other European far-right parties as well: the Austrian Freedom Party won 10% of the vote share in 1986- 12% male vote and 7% female vote. In the 1999 elections, when the Austrian Freedom Party became one of the three big parties in this country by winning 32% of the total vote share,

the male vote share was about 32%, more precisely, of every three men in Austria, one voted for the Freedom Party; however, the vote share for women was 21% - i.e. 1 out of every 5 women in Austria (Hainsworth, 2008: 91). Based on another research, it was determined that men make up 67% of the far-right vote share in Denmark and Norway (Andersen & Bjorklund 2000: 214-216). Another study conducted in different countries in 2005 revealed that the far-right took 82% of the male vote in Germany, and 67% in Denmark, 66% in Norway and 60.5% in Belgium (Minkenberg & Perrineau, 2005). Only an estimated 10% of far-right members (NPD, DVU, and REP) are female; different viewpoints have been presented to explain the reason. One points out to the fact that the far-right parties are usually anti-feminist, describing the ideal of woman as a housewife, responsible to give birth to more children and responsible for the education and upbringing in order to reduce birth rate problems. Generally, it can be said that views and needs of many female voters of today's worlds contradict with the far-right principles (Hainsworth, 2008: 93).

2. Age

Studies suggest that far-right parties attract a wide range of young voters. In the 1986 Parliamentary elections, the FN won 10% overall, which was equal to 14% of the votes aged 18-24-year-olds. This ratio is apparent in other elections as well. The anti-immigration policies advocated by these parties play an important role in attracting young individuals suffering from unemployment (Declair, 1999). In a case study performed in the United Kingdom, it was revealed that one third of individuals aged 18-25 who participated in the 2003 local elections in three northern cities in the Great Britain voted for the BNP (Hainsworth, 2008: 102). Moreover, based on another research, in the 2002 elections, Le Pen won the highest vote share from among the individuals aged 18-24 (Guiraudon & Schain, 2002); this vote share, which was about 2% was almost twice as that of

other candidates (Jusepin won 12%). On the other hand, studies show that the majority of far-right voters are first the young and then the old. Jean-Marie Le Pen, for example, was also successful in winning the votes of individuals aged 45-64 and obtained the second largest share of the vote (winning 19% of the vote share) in the 2002 Presidential elections which placed him after Chirac (Harrison & Bruter, 2011: 159). In addition, the poll results in 2002 revealed that the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) has become the most popular party among the young (Goodwin, 2011b).

3. Education

Low education level is usually attributed to far-right supporters and voters, which is especially apparent in comparison to other parties' voters. As a matter of fact, it can be said that less-educated, unemployed individuals are potential far-right supporters attracted to this party by slogans such as "national priority" and "immigration control" (Hainsworth, 2008: 94). An investigation of the education level of Belgium's far-right supporters (VB) revealed that 34.6% of them have very low education and 30.5% of them have average technical education. It was also understood that the more poorly educated individual is, the more likely he or she is to vote for the far-right party (Swyngedouw, 2000: 139). Another example can be the 2002 Presidential elections in France, where the FN got 7% of the educated and 24% of the non-educated vote share (Ivaldi, 2004: 57). The majority of the performed studies indicate that there is an inverse relationship between higher education and the far-right vote share. In another study, researchers found that people with more education tended to have less xenophobic attitudes and that higher education increases attachment to liberal values (DiGusto & Jolly, 2008). In his study of the FN, Mayer (2005) concluded that FN voters are far less educated than other voters.

Table3. A comparison of far-right voters in six European countries

Occupation	Total	Self-employment	High-level officials	Manager	Employee	Industrial worker	Jobless or retired	student
Germany	9.3	11.4	9.4	12.8	7.6	11.6	8.7	4.8
Belgium	9.1	6.2	25.0	12.9	7.0	8.9	8.9	6.0
France	9.8	28.3	10.6	14.0	8.8	6.1	11.1	2.5
UK	8.7	10.3	8.5	11.6	4.6	7.0	1.06	8.3
Austria	9.0	7.9	1.4	5.9	8.6	7.7	13.3	6.4
Italy	15.8	17.2	18.2	10.7	19.2	10.9	15.1	16.4

Source: Eurobarometer 53 (April–May 2000)

4. Social Class

Social class is another feature attributed to far-right voters and supporters; i.e. the majority of them belong to the working class, such that some describe these parties as the contemporary “labor party”. In some countries such as France, Belgium, and Austria, the far-right parties have been far more successful in attracting workers than the mainstream parties. The Austrian Freedom Party, which gained 27% of the vote share in 1999, took 48% of Austrian workers’ vote share; however, 63% of workers supported social-democrats in 1979 when the workers’ vote share for the Freedom Party was only 4 percent (Hainsworth, 2008: 95). In the 2002 French Presidential elections, Jean-Marie Le Pen won 26% of workers’ vote share which was a considerable share with respect to the large number of candidates- a vote share which was twice as the one won by Chirac and Jusepin (Bell & Criddle, 2002). Even in countries such as the United Kingdom, where the far-right parties gained no success, workers’ support for the parties is completely apparent. For example, the British National Party gained most of its supporters from working-class neighborhood in London and cities such as Lancashire and Yorkshire which are industrial regions.

In France, the FN could take the place of Communist party in attracting workers’ vote share; also in Denmark and Norway, the Progress Parties obtained a considerable vote share of the working class in comparison to other parties. In general, the far-right was successful especially in attracting blue-collar workers; however, it is among the middle class and employees that the far-right has lost ground (Hainsworth, 2008: 98). The far-right parties have adopted contradictory economic policies in order to attract the votes of other classes and keep them satisfied, such that they support both the free market and the national economy. Given the working class character of much of its electorate, it is not surprising to see the far-right perform well in urban, big-city settings. The FN, for instance, has polled particularly well in

cities such as (Greater) Paris, Marseille, Toulon and Strasbourg. This issue is obvious in other countries as well. Along the same lines, Church (2004) points out to the movement of the SVP in Switzerland, which is mostly centered in Zurich. Germany's Republikaner made its most significant electoral showing in 1989 in the city of Berlin; in the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn (LPF) performed particularly well in Rotterdam in 2002. The FPÖ's performances in Vienna have been notable also for strong electoral performances in 2002 (Church, 2004: 64).

Regarding income, no significant relationship can be found as that of education; the results are different across various countries, an issue which is also the same regarding occupations (Harrison & Bruter, 2011). The question raised here is that "why do blue-collar workers with low income, who expected to be left-wing supporters, support the far-right, whereas the far-right parties are generally in favor of reduction in taxes and welfare costs, and their demand is clearly in contradiction with those of the blue-collar workers? The answer is that economy is the second priority for these individuals and the reason they vote to the far-right is that the far-right ideology is based upon values and identity issues rather than economy (Rovn, 2009).

The reason for the working-class support of the far-right

In general, the far-right has the strong support of the working class and the lower middle classes including artisans, shopkeepers, farmers, and skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers. The FN managed to attract petty bourgeois and industrial workers; in fact, Jean-Marie Le Pen did well in attracting many workers who were previously supposed to support the left-wing and became the most popular party among the working class (Goodwin, 2011b: 6). The importance of the far-right support by workers is seen in other examples as well. In Denmark, the far-right supporter is usually an industrial worker with primary education. The Danish far-right party

received the highest support from the workers during 2001-2007 and became a working-class party. This change was at the expense of the Social Democratic Party, traditionally considered supportive of workers (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011).

Workers have been twice as likely as middle-class voters to support the far right in Austria, three times as likely in France and Belgium, and four times as likely in Norway. These numbers indicate that the far-right parties have benefited the most from political and economic developments and those who managed to attract several social classes have been the most successful. In general, the far-right supporters include: the lower-middle class, the industrial and blue-collar workers who feel threatened by immigration and rising diversity (Evans, 2005). In contrast, the BNP has consistently failed to make inroads with its neo-Nazi tendencies. The BNP failed to attract the middle-class and established its social basis on angry white men; that is, a group of less-educated working-class men pessimistic about their economic future (Ford & Goodwin, 2010).

In explaining the far-right votes by workers, three issues are taken into account:

- a) Workers are attracted to these parties due to the economic threat, wage reduction and jobs occupied by immigrants.
- b) Workers feel threatened by the presence of immigrants, which endangers their national identity and threatens their culture and social values and moralities.
- c) Workers consider the only way to show their dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties to be voting to the far-right parties (Nurbaxš, 2013: 140).

Nevertheless, among the above factors, Oesch (2008) finds that workers' support for the far-right is generally for issues of identity and culture. Contrary to what was supposed, the far-

right voters in Belgium, France and Germany, compared to social-democrat and socialist voters are more leftists (Rovn, 2009). As a matter of fact, it can be said that successful far-right political parties, in effect, have replaced the old communist parties as the 'workers' party in certain countries (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012: 13). Some researchers believe that the far-right votes are given by two different classes (workers and petty bourgeoisie), the coalition of which is impossible (Harrison & Bruter, 2011: 156). It can be said that over the recent years many individuals who traditionally voted for left parties unexpectedly turned to the far-right (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011:13).

Martin Lipset argues that because native unskilled and semiskilled workers experienced new cleavages in the West, they are less likely to vote for left candidates and socialist parties; instead, they turn more to the far-right parties; therefore, it is very unlikely that the Social Democrats will regain their hegemonic position they once held. Betz and Swank and Betz (2003) believe that increased welfare measures from the governments, prevention of irregular immigration, improved living conditions of indigenous workers, job creation, reduced inflation, and performing nationalist economic policies can increase relative satisfaction of indigenous workers and prevent expansion of these parties (Sardār Niyā, 2007: 195). Moreover, during the 1990s, socialist and communist parties in Western and Eastern Europe largely abandoned their former radical policies. Nowadays, the gap between the left and the right has been reduced and all parties generally speak on behalf of those who have benefited from economic developments and the losers remain with no representative. Leftists have turned to xenophobic populism. They ensure the voters that they will be strict towards immigrants in order not to be left behind. Anti-immigration policies have become valuable and the far-right ideologies have become relevant (Passmore, 2011: 139). According to Norris, coalition between different classes indicates that we should pay close attention to the theory holding that the rise

of far-right is merely a phenomenon among urban workers. In fact, the socio-economic basis of the far-right is more complicated than we thought (Norris, 2005). The far-right supporters usually feel threatened by the process of globalization and cheap labor; hence, they are easily influenced by the far-right nationalist and anti-globalization slogans (Rovn, 2009).

Conclusions

An examination of the far-right history indicated that the status quo of these parties results from the third wave of this movement since the 1980s. These parties are active in most European countries and have gained governmental and administrative positions in some cases and have become an influential factor in the political arena of European countries. In the classification of the far-right movement, there are two levels including the legal group and organization parties and the individual parties, while the latter commits violent acts as well. Researchers have different views concerning the classification of the far-right parties including traditional parties with neo-fascist tendencies and modern parties with populist tendencies. As mentioned, the traditional parties have not been successful, but modern parties have gained significant achievements in countries such as France, Austria, Italy, Netherlands and Switzerland with a modern approach abandoning fascism.

There is no consensus among researchers in explaining the definition of the term “far-right”; this is due to the diverse and complex nature of this movement. Different experiences of European countries about issues such as immigration, on the one hand, and different memories and historical experiences of fascism and WWII, on the other, seem to be the reason why these parties have more appropriate condition for growth in some European countries.

As clarified, legal far-right parties have not been successful in traditional and racist examples; however, populist parties such as the FN by concentrating on issues such as anti-multiculturalism and anti-immigration have been quite

successful in obtaining the youth and the working class votes. On the other hand, in countries such as France with a powerful far-right party, we do not witness the far-right terrorism and underground groups; in countries like Germany, however, with no far-right success, we witness strong presence of illegal layers and violence of diverse far-right underground groups.

Concerning social basis, the majority of far-right voters often appeared to correspond to the following characteristics: most of them are male, usually too young or too old; they are not highly educated; they are from lower-middle class or working class, and they are not economically secure. In general, results show that far-right support is not much among the middle-class citizens and educated people with suitable jobs. These people do not feel threatened by immigration and cultural diversity due to globalized economy. The research findings suggest that the far-right parties gained a good position in the political arena of European countries by concentrating on socio-cultural problems resulted from immigration. Meanwhile, many traditional voters to communist or social-democrat voters are attracted to the far-right. When in 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the FN entered the second round of the French Presidential elections, he faced the strict response of all political parties and a large number of people participated in a rally against the party. Today many people are oblivious of this fact and some are even satisfied with it. According to the existing prospect, it can be said that these parties are not marginalized and have been influential in many socio-political aspects. In other words, the Center Right parties try to shout slogans in opposition to multiculturalism and immigration in order to attract far-right supporters and the leftists will be strict towards illegal immigrants in order to achieve their votes. Currently, what seems to suggest a growing future of this movement in Europe is that the far-right parties are in a real opposition and are looking for an excuse to attract the views of European citizens and gain power.

Appendix 1. List of far right parties in Europe

Abbreviations	Original name	English equivalent
ATAKA	Национален съюз Атака,	Attack
BNP	British National Party	British National Party
DF	Dansk Folkeparti	Danish People's Party
DVU	Deutsche Volksunion	German People's Union
FN	Front National	National Front
FPD	Fremskridtspartiet	Progress Party Denmark
FPN /NPP	Fremskrittspartiet	Progress Party Norway
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	Austrian Freedom Party
Jobbik	Jobbik Magyarországt Mozgalom	Movement for a Better Hungary
LN	Lega Nord	Northern League
LPF	Lijst Pim Fortuyn	List Pim Fortuyn
MNR	Mouvement National Republicain	Mouvement National Républicain
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano	Italian Social Movement
ND	Nationaldemokraterna	National Democrats
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands	German National Democratic Party
PRM	Partidul România Mare	Greater Romania Party
PS	Perussuomalaiset	True Finns
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom
REP	Die Republikaner	The Republicans
SRP	Sozialistische Reichspartei Deutschlands	The Socialist Reich Party of Germany
SVP	Schweizerische VolksPartei	Swiss People's Party
VB	Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang	Flemish Interest

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