

Blue Sky Policy Brief 001 – Major EU state elects neo-fascist leader

Possible interpretations

There are different readings of such a wild card, for example: the failure of mainstream politicians to respond effectively to current challenges and to engage with shifting populations; the growing power of communicational platforms (e.g. social networks, Internet, tabloid press) making it possible for political narratives of far-right to prevail and gain momentum; the success of some far-right political parties in targeting and promising the 'rule of the young', the growing need for redistribution of resources, political and economic power, among others. Another possibility is the emergence of coalitions founded very much on the notion of threat from alien enemies – at present, Islamists are the prime candidates, but European neighbours could find themselves targets (e.g. consider the claims of some Greeks about German superiority and enmity).



Key actors

Key actors related to this wild card, include:

- **Scanners** or “early warners” such as social and political scientists like the Extreme Right Electorates and Party Success Research Group (EREPS) and investigative journalists;
- **Shapers** (i.e. enablers/inhibitors) such as the education system, mainstream political parties (potentially entering into coalition with the far right, and/or adopting similar policies and programmes), right wing populists, social movements, youth organisations, (trans)national civil society organisations (e.g. Human Rights Watch), and the media; and
- **Stakeholders** positively or negatively impacted such as national governments, civil society, NGOs promoting human rights and minority welfare, the police and law enforcement agencies, among others.

Potential impacts

The impacts of a major EU state electing a neo fascist leader could include: the rise in xenophobia and fears (and associated responses) on the part of minorities and affected groups such as women; the European Union turning inwards (i.e. reducing trade and cooperation with Asia and other regions, including North America); the rethinking of many human rights, including the right for political asylum, in Europe; the development of a “strong state” with punitive policies in social welfare, schools, the justice system, etc.; the intensification of discrimination and lack of tolerance nationally and regionally; the development of national oriented politics; the loss of credibility in the democratic system; the rise of new forms of resistance (including wars), for example.

Potential actions

A neo fascist government in Europe would probably lead to new legislation (criminalising some activities now legal, for example), intensive media campaigns proposing “new” welfare solutions, the rise of groups defending basic human values and, at the same time, an increased number of extremists on all sides promoting conflicts and social polarisation. For that reason, a number of *early actions* (pre-wild card) and *early reactions* (if the wild card occurs) should be considered:

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- **Policy actions**

Early actions: To make far-right movements more visible (e.g. including lessons from history in education); To reduce social polarisation in education; To enhance democratic participation and consensus building practices; To provide real and practical solutions to problems such as poverty and inequality; To promote community integration programmes;

Early reactions: To avoid radical changes in legislation; To avoid drastic changes in police and law enforcement policies; To defend minorities law; To use soft power to negotiate with far-right regimes; To concentrate power within government alliances; To welcome the displaced and dispossessed.

- **Business actions**

Early actions: To promote corporate social responsibility; To use business power to promote equality and human rights; To make sure equality and human rights are respected in the workplace; To research into integration models.

Early reactions: To continue promoting the above and making sure that that racist/neo-fascist discourses do not dictate their practices; To continue trade with countries outside of EU.

- **Research actions**

Early actions: To promote research on mass media, political discourse and electoral census analysis; To increase research on the current and future effects of migration; To research the roots of far-right wing support and, in contrast, or openness and tolerance and how they may be fostered; To review lessons of authoritarian personalities; To identify and analyse social mechanisms hampering democracy; To explore new ways of addressing inequalities and delivering social change;

Early reactions: Continued research focus on the issues named above. Research community would need to continue presenting research findings that would promote understanding of immigration, inequalities, multiculturalism, tolerance and human rights.

Weak signals

There are several signals warning us about the probability of occurrence of such a wild card. Some of these are related to the political environment, for example: the domination of right wing parties in the last elections to the European parliament; the break away from mainstream parties to the far right; the political momentum gained by the recently created Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), which up to now brings together far-right parties in nine countries (Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and the UK); and the power gained by far-right parties in recent elections in terms of new Members of the European Parliament (MEP) with 3 MEPs for the French National Front (FN), 3 for the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) and 2 for the British National Party (BNP). Distrust in, and disaffection with, established political parties and elites is a major contributory factor, and is associated with a more general distrust of many experts and their claims – e.g. about climate change. Intimately linked to these political signals, we can see major achievements in terms of media coverage (e.g. the BNP leader was able to reach more people after his appearance in BBC's main current-affairs debate programme Question Time) and the growing number of alternative media, blogs, tabloid press and newspapers endorsing some far-right policies and politicians. Among the socio-economic signals, we can include: the popular backlash against the spread of globalisation; the shift back to nationalism across the EU, which in some countries translates into resentment of outsiders and Islamophobia; the growing concerns about large and uncontrolled population movements (e.g. migration and refugee situations); and the negative impacts of the financial crises (e.g. reduction of public and private investment, loss of jobs, increase of poverty and revival of historical controversies polarising society).

Recommended research

Thematic area

Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) and Security.

Research topic

Future changes in Europe's political landscape.

Recent electoral results in various member states demonstrate a gradual shift to right wing and nationalistic politics. Members of far-right wing and extreme nationalist parties are also winning seats in local, national and EU governmental institutions. The reasons for the shift by voters to the far-right could be attributed to, among other factors, the increasing power of global actors (i.e. loss of the national vision/agenda) and increasing migration. Recent history has demonstrated the consequences of unbridled right wing extremism and research is vital to determine the cause of recent shift toward this ideology so that appropriate response can be formulated.

Objective

Research could focus on shift in public perception which gives rise to far-right electoral shift by studying the roots of right wing support. Research could, for that purpose, focus on analysing mass media and political discourse in order to understand attitudes towards far-right ideology. Research can be both backward and forward looking in that it examines past and contemporary far-right support as well as the future of far-right support in Europe. Research could focus on challenges such as poverty, inequality and immigration to determine their role in public support for far-right ideology.

Expected impact

Research should a) determine the scale of the shift towards far-right political ideology; b) determine variations and commonalities between far-right movements in Europe c) devise strategies for appropriate policy responses across EU; d) inform common legislation and regulation across EU; e) inform educational strategies that will increase democratic participation and teach the history of far-right movements and their influence on European history.

Importance for Europe

Europe has seen, in recent history, the devastating effect of extreme far-right support. It is vital that policy responses which aim to monitor and respond to this shift are informed by research which aims to understand this attitude shift as well as predict foreseeable implications these changes may have. It is furthermore important that EU forms a coherent legislative response that could guide member states in forming their legislation.



iKNOW is a Blue Sky foresight and horizon scanning research and technology development (RTD) initiative aimed to advance knowledge and tools for the early identification and analysis of events and developments potentially shaping and shaking the future of science, technology and innovation (STI). **iKNOW** is run by an international consortium lead by the University of Manchester and sponsored by the European Commission Directorate General for Research. By supporting Blue Sky RTD the EC aims to create more proactive European research policies that will be capable of anticipating challenges and opportunities associated to emerging issues, wild cards and weak signals (WI-WE). **Wild Cards** are situations/events with perceived low probability of occurrence but potentially high impact if they were to occur. **Weak Signals** are unclear observables warning us about the probability of future events (including Wild Cards). They implore us to consider alternative interpretations of an issue's evolution to gauge its potential impact.