

Anti-Immigration, Populism and Security Discourses: The Rising Far-Right in Europe

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Abstract

This section examines the rise of far-right political movements in Europe in the context of anti-immigration, populism, and security discourses. Focusing particularly on developments in France and Germany, the rhetorical strategies, social responses, and the relationship of these strategies with the security policies of far-right parties are analyzed. It evaluates how far-right actors have been legitimized and institutionalized with populist and exclusionary discourses in both countries following the post-2015 refugee crisis. The study is guided by a robust theoretical framework shaped around populism, securitization, and anti-immigration, which provides a clear structure and methodology for the case studies. This study addresses the rise of the far-right not only as a political transformation but also as the construction of a cultural hegemony.

1. Introduction

The emergence and subsequent proliferation of far-right political organizations across Europe, especially after 2015, which marked a significant turning point in political dynamics, has represented one of the most difficult challenges facing democratic systems on the continent. The complex interplay of social and economic repercussions stemming from globalization, increasing skepticism towards multiculturalism, and the increasing phenomenon of immigration has contributed to creating a particularly favorable environment for the growth and maintenance of these far-right movements. This situation is further exacerbated by the intertwining of anti-immigrant rhetoric with security policies, a key factor

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in the normalization and legitimization of far-right ideologies within mainstream political discourse.

As scholars, students, and policymakers interested in political science, immigration, and European studies, your understanding and analysis of the rise of far-right ideologies is crucial. The study does not aim to examine the discursive strategies of the rising far-right in Europe, particularly through the examples of France and Germany. However, it focuses on analyzing how populism, security discourse, and anti-immigration are articulated, what discursive tools are deployed in this process, and the political consequences of this situation. The main questions are: Why is anti-immigration expressed through a security-oriented discourse? How do far-right parties construct and legitimize this discourse? How do these strategies differ and resemble each other in the cases of France and Germany? This analysis examines the rise of far-right ideologies through the lens of anti-immigrant sentiment and security-focused rhetoric, as illustrated in the detailed examples of France and Germany, and highlights the discursive and political aspects that characterize this rise. The research argues that populism should primarily be understood as a distinctive style of political communication that effectively resonates with specific voter bases while at the same time arguing that the discourse surrounding security is inherently linked to a broader narrative that frames immigration as a significant and imminent “threat” to social stability. In this sense, the cases examined in France and Germany, with their rich historical contexts and the dynamic political landscapes that shape their societies today, offer an opportunity for comparative analysis.

2. Theoretical Background

“Borders are no longer just geographical lines; they have also become symbols of security, identity, and cultural belonging” (Huysmans, 2006, p. 51). The increasingly harsh anti-immigrant policies and populist discourses in the last decade on the European continent are reshaping foreign policy, security, and the social immune system. This urgent issue, particularly since the 2015 refugee crisis, has led to immigrants being represented as “victims in need of assistance” on the one hand and “potential threats” on the other. This dual form of representation serves the construction of a robust security discourse that mobilizes public opinion and directs political decision-making processes.

The rise of far-right parties in Europe is not only in the context of economic or identity politics but also related to the ideological redefinition of the security concept. While populist right-wing actors frame the “securitized”

immigrant figure as a “threat to national identity,” the media and political discourse carry this threat into daily life. This situation brings with it a period in which policies towards immigrants and democratic norms, the rule of law, and the understanding of human rights in Europe are being tested (Wodak, 2015).

2.1 The Rise of the Far-Right and Political Culture

The rise of the far-right in Europe is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by economic, cultural, and political factors. This trend is characterized by the increasing popularity of nationalist and anti-immigration parties that challenge the liberal-democratic order of the European Union. Theoretical frameworks investigating this rise often focus on the interaction between economic crises, cultural identity, and political disillusionment. These frameworks suggest that the far-right exploits social insecurities and cultural tensions to gain electoral support.

Economic crises have been crucial to the rise of far-right parties. The global economic downturn has exposed weaknesses in the structure of the European Union and led to increased support for parties promising radical economic solutions (Cremona, 2010; Xiong, 2023). Economic inequality and the perception of an unfair system have often driven voters toward far-right parties that propose protectionist and nationalist economic policies (Xiong, 2023). Financial crises and unemployment have increased xenophobic sentiments as far-right parties frame immigrants as economic threats (Özcan & Kaya, 2024). The far-right exploits cultural tensions, portraying multiculturalism and immigration as threats to national identity and social cohesion (Camus et al., 2017; Akbari & Mujadidi, 2024). Political culture, religiosity, national pride, and intolerance of minorities also appear to be important factors influencing far-right party voting behavior (Sunaçoğlu, 2014). Far-right party narratives engage in a cultural war against perceived globalist and leftist ideologies, promoting a narrative of cultural homogeneity and nationalism (Cedillo, 2023). Disillusionment with traditional political institutions and the perceived democratic deficit within the EU has increased support for far-right parties. Voters often feel alienated from mainstream politics and are driven to support parties that promise to challenge the status quo and restore national sovereignty. The decline in trust in political institutions and the rise of anti-establishment sentiments are critical to understanding the appeal of the far right (Sunaçoğlu, 2014). Migration is a central issue for far-right parties, who frame it as a threat to societal security and national identity. The securitization of migration has legitimized policies of exclusion and influenced political discourse across

Europe, thus challenging the EU's principles of integration and human rights (Akbari & Mujadidi, 2024).

The rise of far-right movements in Europe in the 21st century is notable for their electoral successes and the hegemony achieved at the level of social perception and discourse (Mudde, 2019). According to Cas Mudde, the "far right" can be defined as a combination of populism, authoritarianism, and nativism. While nativism celebrates the idea that the nation should be "ethnically homogeneous," populism establishes a moral opposition between "the people" and "the elite" (Mudde, 2007). These movements remained marginal in the post-Cold War era but began to move into the political center of Western Europe in the 2010s. Economic crises, the questioning of the democratic legitimacy of the EU, and especially migration crises have created an environment that legitimizes the arguments of the far-right (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). While the rise of the far-right in Europe is often attributed to economic and cultural factors, it is important to consider the broader political and social context. The cyclical nature of far-right popularity suggests that these parties thrive in times of crisis and uncertainty, exploiting public fears and anxieties. However, the diversity of far-right parties in Europe suggests that their success is not uniform and is shaped by specific national contexts and political cultures.

2.2 Populism: Definition, Strategy and Discourse

Populism is a multifaceted political phenomenon characterized by its appeal to ordinary people and opposition to elites. It is often seen as a rhetorical and strategic approach that aims to polarize society by offering simple solutions to complex problems. This approach, which can manifest itself in both left-wing and right-wing political contexts, has the potential to reshape public debate. This potential urgency of the issue should not be underestimated, as it can significantly influence democratic processes.

Populism is an approach that focuses on style rather than content and is found across both right and left political spectrums (Laclau, 2005). According to Ernesto Laclau, populism transforms people into integrative subjects in the face of a system that does not meet the people's demands. Far-right populism, on the other hand, implements a strategy of exclusion by targeting immigrants and minority groups as the "other" in this process (Wodak, 2015). Populism is fundamentally centered around "the people" as a unified entity instead of elites. This is a common feature in various populist movements where leaders claim to represent the authentic voice of the people (Grattan, 2014; Leeuwen & Vliet, 2019). Populist rhetoric significantly

impacts the social integration of immigrants in multicultural societies by promoting division and undermining efforts toward inclusiveness. This rhetoric often frames immigrants as threats to national identity and social cohesion, which can exacerbate xenophobia and discrimination. The portrayal of immigrants, especially Muslims, as unable to integrate due to cultural or religious differences is a common theme in populist discourse, which can hinder their social integration and acceptance in host societies. This divisive rhetoric influences public perception and policymaking, often leading to restrictive immigration policies and social exclusion. In populist discourse, immigrants are presented not only as an economic threat but also as a cultural and security threat. This strategy strengthens the discourse of national identity by sharpening the boundary between “the people” and “the foreign” (Betz, 1994). While populism is often criticized for its potential to destabilize democratic institutions and encourage authoritarian tendencies, it raises important questions about political systems’ responsiveness to ordinary citizens’ needs and concerns. By emphasizing the disconnect between elites and the people, populism can catalyze political reform and greater democratic participation. The challenge, however, is balancing the populist call for direct representation with the need to maintain democratic norms and pluralism, a complex issue that requires careful consideration.

2.3 Securitization Theory

Increasing population mobility and globalization have placed migration at the center of contemporary political and social discussions. In this context, migration has ceased to be merely an economic or humanitarian issue; it has become a phenomenon intertwined with national security, social cohesion, and political stability. Especially in the post-9/11 period, “securitization” has emerged as a key analytical tool in understanding migration in the international relations literature.

Securitization is an approach developed in international relations, especially by the Copenhagen School. This approach, pioneered by Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, argues that security is a discursive construction rather than an objective situation. In other words, the fact that a phenomenon becomes a ‘security’ issue is not related to its inherent danger but to the fact that political actors present it as a threat. This process is defined as the ‘securitizing move.’ When an issue is presented as an ‘extraordinary threat’ in political discourse, it is taken beyond normal political processes and legitimizes extraordinary measures. The issue of securitization of migration begins with the presentation of immigrants or refugees as a threat. This perception of threat is usually based on various justifications such as national

security, public order, access to economic resources, or the protection of cultural identity. In this context, migration becomes a sovereignty issue through the right of the state to protect its borders. Especially in Western countries, immigrants are securitized by associating them with problems such as terrorism, crime rates, and unemployment. The media plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions. For example, Bourbeau (2008), examining the example of Canada, states that states support their immigration policies with technological control tools (such as biometric data) and classify immigrants as ‘potential threats’ (Bourbeau, 2008). In this framework, migration is coded as a socio-economic issue and an identity threat. This discourse, constructed particularly through the media and political actors, legitimizes taking extraordinary measures. In the examples of France and Germany, which are the two focal points of our study, it is seen that immigrants are presented under the threat of ‘radicalization’ by being criminalized over time and associated with Islam. At this point, the perceptual and discursive success of the media cannot be ignored. The discursive success of the far-right has been strengthened broadly through representations in the media. Van Dijk (1998) emphasizes that the negative images constructed by the media about immigrants create permanent prejudices in the public sphere. This situation makes it easier for political parties to normalize anti-immigrant discourses. In the process, mainstream right-wing parties have also adopted the far-right discourses and entered a ‘competitive securitization.’ It is observed that the CDU in Germany and Les Républicains in France have occasionally shifted to a similar line with far-right discourses (Mondon & Winter, 2020).

3. Far-Right, Security Discourse and Anti-Immigration in France

A significant change has been observed in political discourse in France since the beginning of the 21st century. Especially with the rise of far-right parties, the issue of immigration has begun to be discussed more in terms of ‘security.’ In this context, anti-immigration, emphasis on national identity, and security discourses have become the main mobilization tools of the far-right. The discourses of parties such as Rassemblement National (formerly Front National) in this direction have a profound effect not only on the political ground but also on social perceptions. The rise of the far-right in France, especially the National Front (FN), is closely linked to the securitization of immigration and the spread of anti-immigration discourse. This phenomenon is based on the portrayal of immigration as a threat to national security, social stability, and economic prosperity. The FN has effectively capitalized on the public’s fears and anxieties by framing immigrants as disruptors of social homogeneity and contributors to crime and unemployment. This narrative

has shaped public opinion and significantly influenced political discourse in France and Europe, making the audience aware of the powerful influence of far-right discourse on societal perceptions.

3.1 From Front National to Rassemblement National: Rebranding Strategy

The transformation of the far-right in France from the National Front (FN) to Rassemblement National (RN) represents a significant shift in political strategy and public perception. This evolution is marked by the strategic repositioning of the RN, led by Marine Le Pen, who has sought to distance the party from the more radical image associated with her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen. The RN has managed to maintain its core nationalist and conservative values while adopting a more mainstream approach, allowing it to appeal to a broader electorate. This adaptability has been a key factor in the RN's rise to become a dominant force in French politics, as evidenced by its electoral successes in recent years.

The most prominent representative of the far-right movement in France is the Front National (FN), a party founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972. However, since Marine Le Pen took over the party leadership in 2011, the FN has undergone a significant ideological, rhetorical, and visual transformation. This process was crowned with the party's name change to Rassemblement National (RN) in 2018 (Ivaldi, 2018), a move influenced mainly by Marine Le Pen. Her leadership has been interpreted as a departure from the radical rhetoric of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, as she pursues a 'diabolization strategy to soften the party's image and expand its sphere of influence (Shim, 2022). The rebranding from FN to RN in 2018 was a symbolic move that marked a new era for the party, aiming to shed its extremist past and present itself as a legitimate political alternative (Carvalho, 2022). This change can be seen in the fact that the RN now has a more moderate stance on specific issues, supporting public schools and opposing cuts in education spending, in contrast to its previous market-oriented approach (Ferhat, 2023). Marine Le Pen's strategy has been to transform the party away from its 'racist' and 'anti-Semitic' image into a populist party that appeals to a broader audience. During this transformation, anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric have been blended with concepts of national identity, security, and secularism (Stockemer, 2017).

3.2 Security Discourse and the “Islamic Threat” Built on Secularism

Security discourse in France cannot be considered separately from anti-immigration. Issues related to the Islamic religion, in particular, have been securitized through secularism (*laïcité*). The Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015, the November 13 Paris attacks, and the subsequent terrorist incidents have directly turned Muslim immigrants into security threats in French political discourse (Fassin, 2018). Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French National Rally (formerly the National Front), has been an important figure in French politics, known for her strong anti-immigration and anti-Islam stance. Her rhetoric and political strategies have influenced the discourse on these issues in France. A mix of nationalism characterizes Le Pen’s approach, fear-mongering, and cultural protectionism, which she uses to appeal to a wide range of voters concerned about national identity and security.

Marine Le Pen managed the Paris attacks very well and based her discourse on the axes of “fighting terrorism,” “protecting French values,” and “cultural assimilation.” Immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, were presented as “another who can never integrate,” and the suburbs were labeled as “dangerous areas” (Bowen, 2007). During this process, Le Pen frequently used the term “Islamisme radical,” associating security threats with certain religious practices. For example, this strategy includes advocating a headscarf ban in public spaces and presenting religious symbols as contrary to the “secular character of the French Republic” (Camus & Lebourg, 2017). Marine Le Pen’s stance on Islam significantly affects her political agenda, primarily through the dissemination of anti-Islamist rhetoric and the portrayal of Islam as a threat to French national identity. Her approach is characterized by the use of complex sentence structures and political propaganda to emphasize the perceived dangers of Islamism, thereby shaping public opinion and increasing her political electability. This strategy is part of a broader trend in French politics in which Islam is frequently politicized, contributing to cultural tensions and the proliferation of far-right ideologies.

3.3 Media Representations and Public Perception

The portrayal of immigration and Islam in the French media is a complex issue deeply intertwined with historical, cultural, and political factors. French media often use secularism as a tool to shape narratives around immigrants, especially those of Muslim origin. For instance, the concept of *laïcité*, or secularism, is often invoked to justify the exclusion of religious symbols in

public spaces, a policy that disproportionately affects Muslim immigrants. This results in a paradoxical and biased portrayal. This portrayal is influenced by a variety of factors, including historical legacies, political ideologies, and societal fears, which collectively contribute to a media environment that often frames Muslim immigrants negatively compared to their non-Muslim counterparts.

French media has often represented immigrants as sources of social problems, vectors of radicalization, and security threats. In television programs, issues such as suburban violence, gangs, drugs, and terrorism have often been associated with immigrants of immigrant origin (Rigoni, 2012). French media have not hesitated to use secularism to create different narratives for immigrants based on their religious background. Here, Muslim immigrants are often portrayed negatively as invaders or a disciplined group, while immigrants of Orthodox Christian origins, such as Ukrainians, receive more positive portrayals (Song et al., 2024).

The rise of Islamophobia in France is not a new phenomenon; it has been exacerbated by events such as the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War, which have led to increased immigration and fears of terrorism. French media have historically framed Islam as a significant event in French history, often portraying it as an activist reality that challenges secular values. The influence of right-wing political movements such as the National Front has significantly fueled anti-immigration and anti-Islam sentiment by using Islamophobic narratives to gain political influence.

On the other hand, Marine Le Pen's media strategy relies on social media and traditional media. Aiming to reach voters directly via Twitter and Facebook, RN shared content that influenced public opinion with data that did not reflect the truth about immigrants increasing crime rates in France (Käihkö, 2021). Over time, these statements have seeped into the discourse of the center-right in France, shaping public perception of immigration and Islam. For example, the "national identity" discussions implemented during the Nicolas Sarkozy era and the increase in security-centered immigration policies even by Emmanuel Macron in recent years show the impact of this discourse.

3.4 Political Success and Institutionalization

The political rise of the far-right in France has increased significantly in recent years. The vote share that Marine Le Pen received in the 2017 and 2022 presidential elections (33% and 41%, respectively) shows that the RN has become a protest party and a potential candidate for power (Ivaldi,

2022). In the general elections of June 2022, the party won 89 seats and formed a strong group in the parliament, using the discourse of “the true representative of the people” to adopt an anti-elite and nationalist position, making anti-immigration central to this position. In the 2024 European Parliament elections, the RN rose to first place with 31.4% of the votes, and this result caused President Emmanuel Macron’s party to fall below 15% of the vote, leading to the decision to call early general elections. The fact that the RN came first in the first round of the early general elections held in June 2024, with approximately 33% of the votes, shows that the party’s influence in French politics is increasing and is getting closer to power.

As a result, the RN’s electoral successes in recent years demonstrate the far-right’s significant presence in the political arena, offering a potential alternative to the government. The French case is a clear example of how the far-right’s rise is intricately linked with economic crises, cultural concerns, identity politics, and security discourses. The RN’s rise concretely manifests how anti-immigrant security discourses can legitimize populism.

4. Far-Right, Populism and Security Discourse in Germany

In 2015, Germany faced the most significant influx of immigrants since World War II, while social fault lines began to deepen. These fractures not only took shape around immigration policies but also triggered a profound transformation in Germany’s political center. Far-right and populist discourses, blended with security concerns, have influenced public discourse and institutional politics. This section analyzes the rise of the far-right in Germany through immigration and security discourses and examines the institutionalization process of the AfD, the role of social movements such as Pegida, which stands for ‘Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West’, in shaping public opinion, identity politics within the framework of the East-West divide, and the transformation of center-right parties. All these dynamics shed light on how the far-right has transformed from a marginal movement to a force gaining political legitimacy.

In recent years, the proposals of Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz to prevent irregular migration, supported by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, have been the focus of criticism that the CDU has shifted from its traditional center position to the right (Zick & Küpper, 2022). These developments indicate a change in party strategy and a transformation that paves the way for far-right discourses to gain political legitimacy in Germany. The electoral successes of the AfD in states such as Thuringia and Saxony show that the convergence of center-

right parties at the level of discourse strengthens the far-right's position rather than diminishing its influence (Arzheimer, 2019). At the same time, increasing terrorist attacks in Germany and rising security concerns in public opinion have led to a hardening of anti-immigration policies. This has facilitated the transformation of parties' discourses, such as the AfD, from a mere protest language into a systematic policy proposal (Lees, 2018). In the media and digital platforms, discourses that identify immigrants with crime have deepened social polarization and increased the distance between political poles. German business representatives frequently emphasize that this rise threatens Germany's economic stability and social harmony (Hafez, 2017).

In this context, the German example provides a concrete example of how far-right and populist actors gain political legitimacy through security policies and anti-immigration discourses.

4.1 The Rise and Transformation of the AfD

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) entered the political scene in 2013 as a conservative party founded with anti-EU and anti-euro discourses. However, this beginning is far from the party's current radical right identity. Following the refugee crisis in 2015, the AfD's political agenda and discourses changed significantly; anti-immigration, anti-Islam, and security-based discourses were brought to the center (Lees, 2018). This transformation has paved the way for the far-right in Germany to become not only an opposition element but also an actor within the system.

Angela Merkel's open-door policy, epitomized by her statement "Wir schaffen das" (We will succeed), has been a prime target of the AfD's criticism. The party has labeled this policy as "ignoring the borders of the nation-state" or even as a form of "cultural suicide" (Hafez, 2017). With statements like "Islam does not belong in Germany" (Der Islam gehört nicht zu Deutschland), the AfD has not only highlighted cultural differences but also constructed an "other" that is perceived to threaten Germany's national identity directly (Şahin, 2025, 98).

Throughout this process, the AfD's discourse has increasingly intertwined with securitization strategies. Immigrants have been portrayed not only as culturally incompatible but also as a source of internal security issues, effectively criminalizing them. In this context, the AfD has emerged as the carrier and transformer of the far-right in Germany, both politically and ideologically (Arzheimer, 2019).

4.2 Pegida Movement and Radicalization in Civil Society

The rise of the far-right movement in Germany has resonated not only on a party level but also in civil society; it has become massive, primarily through street movements and protests. One of the most visible examples of this process, the Pegida (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes – Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) movement, has become not only a protest network but also the harbinger of a new form of “civil radicalization.” Pegida first attracted public attention with the marches held in Dresden in 2014. The weekly demonstrations, which quickly reached hundreds of thousands of people, found a broad base, especially in the eastern states of Germany. This movement served as a “voice” for groups that felt underrepresented by the center of politics; it became a mass expression of anti-immigrant, Islamophobic and anti-system sentiments (Rucht & Teune, 2016). One of the most important functions of Pegida is to legitimize populist and far-right discourses in the civil society sphere. Although a significant portion of the participants do not define themselves as “racist” or “far-right,” the ideological framework of the movement is ethno-nationalist mainly and exclusionary. This contradiction can be explained by Pegida’s populist strategies: The claim to speak on behalf of “the people” establishes a binary opposition against the ruling elites and immigrants, thus conveying radical discourses to a broader audience (Mudde, 2007). Digital media has significantly increased Pegida’s mobilization capacity, and social media platforms have rapidly disseminated the movement’s discourse. Calls organized through Facebook and YouTube and disinformation content spread through alternative media channels have deepened anti-immigrant fears and security concerns (Froio & Ganesh, 2019). In demonstrations organized especially after terrorist attacks, security, and migration themes were intertwined, and the discourse of “Islamist terror” became one of the movement’s main mobilization tools.

Pegida’s influence was not limited to the streets; it directly influenced the discourse repertoire of many political actors, especially the AfD. Pegida’s demands eventually echoed the AfD’s election campaigns, and an indirect discourse partnership was formed between these two actors. This situation reveals the permeability between the institutional and civil dimensions of the radical right (Minkenberg, 2018).

In summary, the Pegida movement should be evaluated as an important structure that contributed to the rooting of the far right in Germany at the party and societal levels. This movement represents new forms of

radicalization in civil society and is central to spreading populist security discourses in the public sphere.

4.3 East-West Distinction and Identity-Based Fractures

One of the most distinctive features of the far-right movement in Germany is how the cultural, economic, and social differences between West and East Germany are reflected in far-right discourse. In East Germany, the traces left by the socialist past before reunification play a decisive role in strengthening today's far-right movement. These regional differences are critical to understanding how far-right parties and street movements shape their rhetorical strategies.

The years following German reunification caused people living in East Germany to continue to have reservations about seeing themselves as part of the “Western” system. This situation, in addition to the economic inequalities in the region, was perceived by West Germany as an attempt at cultural assimilation (Oesch, 2008). The AfD used this sentiment to target voters in East Germany, in particular with its discourse of the “forgotten German people.” The AfD’s rhetoric, which constructs the figure of an “other” who “replaces” immigrants, found greater resonance in these regions. These discourses, combined with the historical sense of exclusion and economic deprivation in East Germany, have been an important driving force in the rise of the AfD.

The language used by the AfD in its election campaigns targets not only economic demands but also identity-based fears. Immigrants have often been described as either “sexual predators” or “sources of unemployment and social assistance” (Arzheimer, 2019). This discourse has deepened the economic and cultural gaps between West and East Germany while also increasing the acceptance of the far-right among the public. Those living in East Germany believe that economic deficiencies are related to immigrants, which has allowed populist security discourses to gain strength.

The strong presence of the AfD in East Germany is directly related to this region’s social identity and economic structures. After reunification in the 1990s, people in East Germany felt a sense of economic backwardness and a desire to “belong to the West” culturally. This sense of exclusion has made far-right discourses more acceptable and increased the importance of identity politics. By emphasizing this identity-based fracture, the AfD has positioned itself as the defender of the “real German people” for voters in East Germany.

Moreover, unlike far-right movements in West Germany, the far-right in East Germany has generally emphasized cultural and ethnic homogeneity, clearly excluding the perception of “foreigners.” While far-right discourses in West Germany tend to be more diverse in economic and cultural issues, discourses in East Germany focus more on national identity and cultural integrity. This demonstrates the role of regional identity-based differences in strengthening the far-right.

In this context, strengthening the far-right movement in East Germany reflects economic inequalities and is part of rebuilding social identities. This process has ensured that the AfD’s rhetorical strategies and anti-immigrant policies are accepted on a broader basis.

4.4 Institutionalization and Political Influence

While the AfD initially existed only as a protest actor in the political scene, it gradually integrated into the political system in Germany and became an institutional force. This transformation shows that the far-right shapes the social and political structure through street movements and their activities in institutional politics. This AfD process reveals the far-right’s effects in Germany, which is no longer only marginal but also in mainstream politics.

The institutionalization process of the AfD gained significant momentum, especially during the 2017 and 2021 federal elections. In the 2017 elections, the party entered the federal parliament (Bundestag) and won the first far-right representation in Germany’s history. This success showed that the party was not only a protest group but could also become a permanent element in the political structure of Germany (Zick & Küpper, 2022). In the 2021 elections, the AfD achieved a tremendous political impact by reaching over 20% of the vote in the eastern states. The fact that the party has become the first party in the 2024 local elections, especially in states such as Thuringia and Saxony, shows that the party is gaining strength and has received broad support from different segments of society.

The institutionalization of the AfD is not limited to its electoral successes. Over time, the party has ceased to be just a protest movement. It has also become an actor that can carry right-wing populist discourses in Germany at an institutional level. After the 2017 elections, the AfD began to have a greater say in the political agenda and has also shown its influence in various local governments. This process has legitimized the far-right politically and made right-wing populist discourses more widespread.

One of the most striking aspects of the AfD’s discourse is the institutional acceptance of its arguments on the themes of security and immigration.

By particularly emphasizing security concerns, the party has combined the increasing terrorist incidents following the refugee crisis with a discourse that associates immigrants with crime and has legitimized this approach. Thus, it has developed an effective strategy in street movements and political platforms (Hafez, 2017). The institutionalization of the AfD shows that right-wing populism in Germany is becoming a long-term trend and is part of the normalization of the far-right. These developments show that far-right and populist discourses in Germany have gained broad social acceptance through street movements, digital media, and institutional politics. The successes of the AfD at the federal and local levels show that the party's ideological hegemony and social influence will continue to grow and can create lasting change in Germany's political structure.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The rise of the far-right in France and Germany, two examples with common points under the titles of Populism, Securitization, and the "Immigrant Other," has been shaped around similar themes. However, the social and political contexts in both countries show significant differences. In both countries, far-right parties have generated legitimacy through the dichotomy between the "people" and the "elite" through populist discourses and strengthened their political positions through threats to social security and national identity. Immigrants have been presented not only as an economic and cultural threat but also as a serious threat to national security.

The National Front (RN) in France and the AfD in Germany have positioned immigrants as a threat to social order and national identity, primarily through the media and public debates. These discursive strategies create fear and insecurity in society, paving the way for adopting more authoritarian, exclusionary, and protectionist policies. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's securitization theory (1998) provides an important theoretical framework, explaining how immigrants are treated as a security issue. In both France and Germany, anti-immigrant discourses have gained strength not only at the social level but also at the political level.

In addition, the themes of secularism and historical burdens emerge as dynamics that differ for the two samples. In addition to the similarities between far-right discourses in France and Germany, there are also different dynamics on which these discourses are based. In France, the concept of *laïcité* is particularly at the center of anti-immigrant security discourses. This produces a discourse in which security concerns are expressed through the religious practices of Muslim immigrants in order to protect the secular structure of the French Republic.

In France, secularism is presented not only as a state policy but also as a national value; immigrants become a threat to these values. Muslim immigrants are targeted mainly through practices such as headscarves, mosque construction, and halal food, and this is used as a tool to reinforce security discourses. In Germany, the experience of Nazism and the Holocaust has historically caused the far-right to use its racist discourse more carefully. However, following the 2015 refugee crisis, securitization discourses have also strengthened in Germany, and direct anti-Islam and race-based discourses have become more widespread.

A comparison of the institutionalization processes of far-right movements in France and Germany reflects the differences in the political structures of both countries. The National Front in France has gained significant social and political legitimacy over the years; it has become a force that can make it to the second round of the presidential elections. In Germany, the AfD has emerged as a new actor, rapidly gaining power, especially in the eastern states, and has become effective in local governments.

The RN in France nominated a presidential candidate in the 2017 elections and gained significant social support. The party is no longer just a marginal movement but is now considered an influential force in French politics. In Germany, the AfD rose more rapidly in the process of institutionalization and managed to enter the federal parliament in the 2017 and 2021 elections. This shows that the far-right is shaped by street movements and its effectiveness in institutional politics. In both countries, the far-right has ceased to be marginal and has become a force within the system.

Ultimately, this study, which analyzes how the far-right's anti-immigrant discourses are legitimized through securitization processes using the examples of France and Germany, can say that far-right parties have gained social acceptance and political power through populist discourses and strategies shaped around security concerns. However, this process is related to economic and cultural concerns and deepening fears about national identity, security, and social order.

The rise of far-right movements in France and Germany is a process fed not only by a perception of economic or cultural threats but also by security and identity-based concerns. This creates a political environment in Europe where multiculturalism is being questioned, social polarization is deepening, and democratic values are being eroded from within. The combination of populism and securitization processes explains the success of the far right and reveals the fundamental crises facing liberal democracies. The future of Europe depends on how these threat perceptions and security discourses take shape.

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