THE RECENT RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN EUROPE: CAN IT BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE MIGRANT CRISIS, THE EUROPEAN DEBT CRISIS, EUROSCPTICISM, OR SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY?

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Abstract

This study aims to determine if the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, and Euroscepticism are major factors contributing to the rise of the far-right throughout Europe. In order to answer this question a comparative case study is conducted with three case study countries: Italy, France, and Sweden. Each country was chosen for geographical, social, and economic reasons; then each countries respective far-right party was examined by their election results. The result of this study found that there is a positive correlation between the migrant crisis and the rise of the far-right in Italy, France, and Sweden. It also found mixed results when looking at the European debt crisis and Euroscepticism. It must be concluded that more research is needed on other European countries, more election results, and more variables to fully understand the resurgence of the far-right in Europe.

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Introduction

There has been perhaps no greater recent political rise throughout Europe than the wave of far-right wing political parties currently sweeping the region. Some are new; while others are older with little past success to boast of, until recently. The last two decades have been very opportune for far-right candidates and they have used recent events to improve their election results. Many far-right wing political parties throughout Europe are seeing a steady rise in their percentage of popular vote, total votes, and number of parliamentary seats won in recent years. For example, in 2006, Hungary’s far-right wing party, Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) had statistically gained 0.0% during the second round of voting for the Hungarian National Assembly in single member constituencies.1 Then in 2010, the party earned 12.3%; 2014 brought 20.4%; and 2018 gave them an even bigger percentage at 23.2%.2 This shocking rise in election results for Jobbik becomes a little less shocking when you examine the rest of Europe. You will see that Hungary’s recent far-right successes are a norm and not an outlier. To demonstrate this phenomenon, this paper will assess the recent successes of Italy’s, France’s, and Sweden’s far-right wing political parties.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this research study is to ascertain whether recent events have helped the far-right rise to prominence. In order to achieve this objective, a research question was first proposed, and it continues to be the foundation by which this study was built on. This research question is: Far-right wing political parties are on the rise

2 Ibid.
throughout Europe. Which factors can be most attributed to this rise: the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, or Euroscepticism? The research question makes it clear that the independent variables believed to have played a major role in the recent rise of the far-right are the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, and Euroscepticism. Other scholars have put forth their own opposing thoughts on the rise of the far-right and those will be outlined in the literature review.

Importance of Topic

Figure 1: The Rise of the Far-Right Throughout Europe

Figure 1 shows that the phenomenon of the far-right rising in popularity is occurring throughout Europe. At first, many scholars dismissed far-right parties as being “single-issue parties” but that notion has quickly faded away. These are the biggest

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reasons for the importance of this topic; the rise of the far-right will likely continue and understanding why is essential when trying to comprehend European politics. Plus, it is not confined to one country or region in Europe, it is transcontinental. Furthermore, the ideological views held by these far-right parties can run contrary to the normal political parameters Western democracies are accustomed to. Far-right wing political parties have been known to exhibit xenophobia, racism, Euroscepticism, populism, etc.; views that challenge the norm. But, by better understanding the factors that attribute to the rise of the far-right, Europe as a whole can be better prepared to deal with drastic shifts in politics – just like the one being seen today.

*The Far-Right*

Trying to define the far-right movement with its many parties is a difficult task for any scholar. Luckily, Lubomír Kopecek has written a journal article where he evaluates different definitions of the far-right put forth by various scholars before him. After reviewing his work, the best definition was put forth by Hans Georg Betz. Betz describes the far-right as parties that:

“…radically oppose the current cultural and socio-political system in the Western democracies, but without directly attacking its foundations. They reject individual and social equality, and emphasize cultural or ethnic homogeneity in society, with a preference for “our own people” over “foreigners”… often emphasize neo-liberal economics, claim to defend the “ordinary person” against the corrupt establishment and the organs of
the state, emphasize “common sense” and law and order; they are anti-feminist, and regard themselves as defenders of traditional values.” 5

This is a very apt definition for the far-right and it encompasses the three far-right parties that will be discussed in this paper. As observed by many scholars, these far-right parties have recently started to tone down their usual authoritarian rhetoric in order to “…infiltrate the mainstream”. 8 However, these parties are still considered extremists in parts of their ideology and continue to reside on the far-right of the political spectrum.

Three examples of far-right wing political parties that will be compared in this study are the Lega Nord, National Rally, and Sweden Democrats. These three political parties were chosen because they reside in different geographic regions within Europe and have been affected by the three factors differently. For example, even though they can all be classified as ‘Western Europe’, they are geographically much different. Sweden mainly resides north, across from mainland Europe with the North and Baltic Seas separating it’s Southern border from the heart of Western Europe. Then, France is situated in the middle of Western Europe and borders major countries like Germany and Spain. Lastly, Italy is mostly bordered by the Mediterranean Sea in the South. These geographical differences are exacerbated and highlighted by the migrant crisis. Overall, these geographical,

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cultural, and economic differences will allow for the study to get a better picture of Europe by conducting a comparative case study analysis of three very different countries.

Case Study Countries and Their Far-Right Parties

To begin, Italy’s most recent far-right success comes from Lega Nord per l’Indipendenza della Padania (Lega Nord). Lega Nord was founded in 1989 by Umberto Bassi, who would go on to be their federal president.\(^9\) Even though the party’s rhetoric and platform is known to be aggressive, they can still count on a wide audience willing to listen.\(^10\) Some scholars believed that even if Lega Nord came into governance they would tone down their rhetoric and platform. However, Duncan McDonnell and Daniele Albertazzi found the opposite to be true in their journal article, *The Lega Nord Back in Government*, as they concluded that Lega Nord members are able to survive, thrive, and enjoy success when elected to the Italian government.\(^11\) Lega Nord was one of three parties chosen for this study because it resides in the Southern European country (Italy), is a port of entry for many refugees, was hit hard by the European debt crisis, and has a high number of Eurosceptic citizens.

Next, the heart of Western Europe is represented by France’s Rassemblement (National Rally; formerly National Front). France was also selected because it was affected by the European debt crisis, has a large number of asylum seekers, and faces Euroscepticism within its country. National Rally was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le


\(^10\) Ibid.

Pen who would run for President multiple times; his daughter Marine Le Pen would go on to lead the National Rally and also have a pretty successful Presidential campaign.\textsuperscript{12} Marine Le Pen would force a second round runoff vote in the 2017 French Presidential elections where she won a far-right high 33.94\% of the votes, losing out to the independent centrist Emmanuel Macron.\textsuperscript{13} The main ideology of the National Rally that Le Pen ran on is similar to most far-right political parties: nationalism, protectionism, populism, Euroscepticism, and anti-immigration.\textsuperscript{14} 

From there, the study goes to Northern Europe and looks at a country that outsiders of Europe would not particularly consider a hot bed of far-right activity – Sweden. That assumption would be wrong as Sweden’s far-right Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) has actually been one of the most successful political parties in Sweden since being founded in 1988. Alina Polyakova points out that, “The far-right Sweden Democrats Party is likewise toning down the more extremist elements in its organization in a bid for electoral respectability. And the strategy is working…”\textsuperscript{15} Even though it’s been “toned down” the party platform still contains anti-immigration, populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism.\textsuperscript{16} Aside from being in Northern Europe,

Sweden was chosen as a case study because there are sentiments of Euroscepticism and anti-immigration within Sweden society. Also, Sweden was not affected nearly as harshly by the European debt crisis as Italy and France. This will make it interesting later on when the study analyzes the data collected on the European debt crisis, in regard to the rise of the far-right in each country and how they compare.

Factors Possibly Contributing to The Rise of The Far-Right in Europe

This research study puts forth the hypothesis that there are three main factors (variables 1a-3a) that have contributed to the rise of the far-right in Europe. These are the migrant crisis which began in 2014, the European debt crisis of 2010, and Euroscepticism. The migrant crisis may also be referred to as variable 1a in this study, the European debt crisis as variable 2a, and Euroscepticism as variable 3a.

The migrant crisis is a humanitarian emergency that Europe has been trying to deal with as a whole for over six years now. Brought on by the Syrian civil war, the expansion of ISIL’s caliphate in the Middle and Near East, and ongoing conflicts in Africa, the migrant crisis has led to a substantial number of refugees fleeing towards Europe. More than 700,000 refugees have crossed the Mediterranean since 2013 and landed on Italian soil. It is fair to say the issue of immigration has been a passionately debated topic since the start of the migrant crisis in Italy. Lega Nord pushes its anti-immigration platform to garner votes, especially for single-issue voters in this regard.

Although it is not a major port of entry like Italy, France is another country affected by

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the migrant crisis. France attracts a lot of asylum seekers that wish to live in France. France’s National Rally has tried to exploit the migrant crisis for their own gain, stating they are against a multi-cultural France. Audrey Sheehy explains, “Fears of an erosion of Western culture, sparked by the Syrian refugee crisis have also led to a rise in xenophobia, which far right movements have capitalized on.” Sweden’s Sweden Democrats are no different and use refugees lack of education, crime rates, and more to promote xenophobia and garner votes.

Variable 2a, the European debt crisis of 2010, began when interest rates on government bonds skyrocketed; economies crumbled, debts grew substantially, and many welfare systems started failing. Audrey Sheehy describes how far-right parties gather support from a broken economy, “The far right is able to brand itself as stable, while continuing to tear apart the more ‘establishment’ left wing… populist and nationalist movements have tied economic hardship to the failure of the political elites.” Lega Nord and National Rally have done an excellent job in doing just that. Even in Sweden, where the debt crisis was less felt, Sweden Democrats try to use economic issues to help when it comes to election time. A sociology professor at Stockholm University, Vanessa Barker, states, “Sweden wants to preserve…its high quality of life, its social and economic well-being—its sense of national identity—for those on the inside—those deemed worthy, legitimate, productive members of society…” Refugees are seen to be “interlopers”, taking away resources from hard working citizens.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
Last up is the complicated factor of Euroscepticism, which is a pillar of almost every far-right party in Europe. Euroscepticism is similar to nationalism, but the former is used by modern day far-right parties as a pillar of their platforms. While the latter is a sentiment that helps build the independent variable of Euroscepticism, along with other sentiments and events. Aside from a rise in nationalism, the other sentiments and events include individual country’s tensions with the European Union, terrorist attacks, the migrant crisis, and the European debt crisis. Euroscepticism can be defined as, “…a skeptical, negative attitude towards the processes of European integration within the EU.” Euroscepticism ebbs and flows through the decades but it is safe to say it has been rising in recent years as can be seen in Table 1. This is due to the sentiments and events outlined above. All three countries examined in this study have a high number of Eurosceptic citizens which will become apparent in the data chapter below. Lega Nord, National Rally, and Sweden Democrats all use Euroscepticism in their rhetoric to help garner votes.

Now that all terms have been recognized, variables defined, and countries outlined – the rest of the study can be summarized. The next chapter will include a literature review which will identify past schools of thoughts on the rise of the far-right. From there, a hypothesis to the research question will be revealed. Next, the methods used in the study will be introduced before the data is laid out. Lastly, there is a discussion and a conclusion. Overall, if there is one thing to take away from this

introduction it should be that this is an important topic and the following analysis will fill an important gap in the existing scholarship.

**Literature Review**

This research study’s research question: Far-right wing political parties are on the rise throughout Europe. Which factors can be most attributed to this rise: the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, or Euroscepticism? This question illustrates that the main topic is far-right wing political parties election success in recent years. Although, before trying to answer the question, first the existing scholarship must be identified and assessed. The main sources used in this research study include: journal articles from experts in the field, the European Union, reputable news networks, election results, and various government websites. The existing scholarship that does not conform to the ideas put forth later in this research study will be reviewed first. Then, the sources found that provided background and a foundation for these later ideas will be described. From there, this literature review must recognize what gap in the literature this thesis hopes to fill, and then conclude.

*Contrasting Schools of Thought*

Before an original hypothesis can be put forth, the differentiating past schools of thought need to be named. There are four contrary schools of thought which try to answer why the far-right has been on the rise: crisis of political representation, crisis of identity, political instability, and civic participation and social trust. Let’s begin with the school of thought of crisis of political representation. *Party competition and political representation in crisis: An introductory note*, defines political representation as, “the relationship between political demand and supply aimed at transferring popular
preferences, including grievances, to the upper levels of the political system.”.\textsuperscript{25} Now, some scholars believe this relationship has gone sour in Europe between European citizens and their governments. Walter Baier is one of those scholars stating, “The crisis of political representation as witnessed throughout Europe is particularly grave, as the working class and popular strata need more from politics when faced with economic and social crisis.”.\textsuperscript{26} This is where the far-right steps in and offers citizens feeling disenfranchised a new hope. The Director for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Michael Broning, explains that a sense of disenfranchisement leads to an emotional backlash. Where, “…the European Union’s compromise machine is perceived as an institutionalized grand coalition between the center-left and the center-right that routinely ignores opposing voices.”.\textsuperscript{27} The far-right presents themselves as giving a “true voice” to the people, “They use people’s frustration and disenchantment with the performance of the political system for their own purposes.”.\textsuperscript{28} Surely, some far-right parties try to paint themselves as a new hope for political representation but it is unknown whether or not this is a major contributor to the rise of the far-right in Europe.

Next, there is a school of thought that can be labeled as Europe’s ‘crisis of identity’ which is to blame for an increase in the far-right’s popularity. Continuing with Nora Langenbacher, she points to the fact that far-right parties benefit from European citizens who look for a “scapegoat”, which is usually minorities.\textsuperscript{29}


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
mentality and promise citizens regressive utopia of a homogenous community that promises to resolve social and individual problems by excluding these minorities.\footnote{Ibid.} Even though there are some European citizens who have such convictions, this is a school of thought in need of more testing.

Political instability or perceived failures have also allowed the far-right an opening in the normal political structures throughout Europe. Michael Broning belongs to this school of thought, “The populist surge is partly a rational response to the apparent political failures of the established parties.”.\footnote{Bröning, Michael. “The Rise of Populism in Europe.” Foreign Affairs. Foreign Affairs Magazine, June 3, 2016. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2016-06-03/rise-populism-europe.} Political instability has seemed to weaken established political parties, allowing the far-right to strengthen. This is achieved through offering citizens alternative ideologies that have different solutions for the perceived political failings of established parties.\footnote{Polyakova, Alina. “THE BACKWARD EAST? EXPLAINING DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT FOR RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES IN WESTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE.” Journal of Comparative Politics 8, no. 1 (January 2015): 49–74. https://search-proquest-com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/docview/1639632676?accountid=11752.} Alina Polyakova supports this theory and asserts, “Political instability can contribute to the success of radical right parties by providing an opening in the political opportunity structure.”.\footnote{Ibid.} Not always, but usually throughout history political instability has been a part of the recipe for change in a governance. The question here is whether it applies to the current rise of the far-right in Europe.

A final, intriguing, school of thought put forth by the expert Alina Polyakova can be classified as civic participation and social trust. She tries to analyze this social factor as it affects the support of the far-right. A series of unanticipated historical studies found
that, “...high civic participation and active networks of civic associations can foster support for fascist parties in Germany, Italy, and Spain.”.\textsuperscript{34} Howbeit, classical theories of democracy come with differing conclusions. They deduce that high civic participation and the high social trust it creates actually dissuades support for radical movements.\textsuperscript{35} The above four past schools of thought will be examined further in the discussion chapter of this research study; after its own data is analyzed and evidence put forth.

Existing Scholarly Literature

These next three paragraphs will now outline the scholarly works that pertain to my original hypothesis. Each source, organized into the three independent variables (1a-3a), provided background information, statistics, and ideas, to which I am able to expand on. Beginning with variable 1a (migrant crisis), John Malone’s “Examining the Rise of Right Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe” claims that culturally motivated anti-immigration sentiment is an underlying cause of right wing populism.\textsuperscript{36} He came to this conclusion after completing three case studies and his own comparative analysis. These case studies show that cultural factors are the primary predictor of far-right success, more so than structural or economic factors. The author’s study also has him conclude that there is one condition needed for far-right success: the country the party runs in must award parliamentary seats based on proportional representation. Malone has many great ideas that were incorporated into this research study. Another great resource used in the beginning of the research process was Lubomir Kopecek’s “The Far right in Europe: A Summary of Attempts to Define the Concept, Analyze ITS identity, and Compare the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
Western European and Central European far right.”  

This work not only offered up definitions and an overview of the far-right but provided the reader with a comparison of far-right parties in Western and Central Europe. The research focuses on the far-right’s anti-immigration ideology in almost every section, which is only heightened today because of the migrant crisis. Michael Broning discusses the challenges of migration in his article, “The Rise of Populism in Europe”. His journal article makes it clear that the migrant crisis is at the forefront of a resurgent populist push. Lastly, Nora Langenbacher’s book, “Is Europe on the “Right Path”: Right Wing Extremism and Right Wing Populism in Europe”, was a fascinating read that covered a variety of topics, including a chapter on France, Italy, and Sweden. The France chapter reveals that social attitudes like racism and xenophobia, which can stem from the migrant crisis, play a role in the activity of the far-right. After giving their data they assert that a prejudice against minorities is correlated to voting for far-right wing political parties. When evaluating Italy, the authors emphasize the importance of immigration in the far-rights agenda, “The threat from illegal immigration no longer served only as a specific reference point in internal party discussion, but became one of the many arguments…to fight the center left majority.”

Last of all, the author states, “A key element of this [Sweden’s far-right] rhetoric is the belief that there is an ongoing “Islamic invasion” of Sweden and

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
Each and every one of these scholarly works highlights the importance of the migrant crisis to today’s far-right wing political parties in Europe.

Next, there are great works already written which provide great insight on the issue of the European debt crisis. For example, Ljupcho Stekvovski’s, “The Rise of Right Wing Extremism in European Union”, where he discusses Europe’s economic crisis and its relation to the far-right. Stekvovski believes that the European economic crisis has led to some unwelcome consequences: increased unemployment, falling living standards, poverty, increased corruption, and fear of the future. His assessment is that, “these consequences have an immediate impact on strengthening the right-wing extremism in the EU, and recruitment of young generations in their ranks.” He concludes by giving the prediction that if European economic woes continue, the far-right will continue to rise. Then, to get more context on the European Union and its authority over member states economic policies I looked at Shawn Tully’s article, “The European Union Is In Big Trouble”. The economic policies put into place after the European debt crisis are very relevant to the far-rights political platform. From there, one of the best articles is Alina Polyakova and Anton Shekhovtsov’s “On the Rise: Europe’s Fringe Right”, which touches on every major factor of this studies research question, including the European

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42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
debt crisis.\textsuperscript{46} They explain that the far-right has a history of favoring, “…economic protectionism, authoritarianism, and populism, while blaming minorities for economic decline and unemployment.”\textsuperscript{47} Whereas more recently, the European debt crisis has only increased the different political reality seen today of a rising far-right. Lastly, Audrey Sheehy has a discussion on the far-right’s economic platform (among many other things), which is immensely helpful, in her article, “The Rise of the Far Right”\textsuperscript{48}. In regard to the European debt crisis, the far-right is directly competing with the left. Running on a platform of statist economic policies that was centered on welfare, along with a moderate stance on democracy.\textsuperscript{49} Dr. Daphne Halikiopoulou, is quoted in Sheehy’s work as saying, “anybody who is economically insecure is considered [by scholars] to be a far-right party supporter.”\textsuperscript{50} Showing, along with the other sources, how critical the European debt crisis has been to the resurgence of the far-right in Europe.

Euroscepticism is the last main factor which is examined in this research study. Victor Turmakov provided a great definition, along with relevant background information on Euroscepticism in his journal article, “Euroscepticism: Factors, Types and Trends”.\textsuperscript{51} Turmakov explains early on how Euroscepticism finds its strongest support in the far-right. Later, he concludes that, “In times of a crisis a new division along the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
Euroscepticism-Eurooptimism line can be noticed in the EU and this division may turn into a dominant axis of political division. This statement shows the connection between Euroscepticism and the other two independent variables (migrant crisis and European debt crisis) which just happen to be crisis’s themselves. One area where Eurosceptics debate the European Union is on the issue of borders; the European Union and individual member states have very different perceptions of the border. Teresa Cierco and Jorge Tavares da Silva’s research titled, “The European Union and the Members States: two different perceptions of border”, gives background and outlines the tension this issue has caused for Eurosceptics. After careful analysis, they conclude that, “EU member states believe that Europe is not capable of a collective answer to the problem [immigration and Islamic terrorism] and is vulnerable regarding the external threats.” The journal article highlights that Euroscepticism is not just bottom up sentiment, but also can be top down. Another hotly debated topic between Eurosceptics and pro-Europe citizens is the politics of citizenship. Professor Marc Howard dives into this topic and delivers an encompassing account of how the far-right changes citizenship policy in Europe in his work, “The Impact of the Far Right on Citizenship Policy in Europe: Explaining Continuity and Change”. His main finding is that the relative strength of the far-right is able to overcome the pressures for citizenship liberalization if strong enough.

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
Conclusion

All of the above sources were immeasurably helpful in building the foundation of this research study. That being said, the existing literature is not comprehensive and there are gaps in the scholarly debate. Specifically, recent election results need to be analyzed regarding all three factors. This research study will focus on adding to the literature where there is a lack of attention on recent events (the migrant crisis and the European debt crisis) with recent election results. While also considering that Euroscepticism has a major role in the rise of the far-right recently. Moreover, there has been recent election results in just the past few years that need to be assessed. The far-right and their election results will continue to be relevant in the foreseeable future. It is our responsibility to consistently re-evaluate election results as newer elections take place and analyze the possible contributing factors. This research study hopes to achieve just that.

Hypothesis

The research in this study is guided by independent and dependent variables. The independent variables are the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, and Euroscepticism. The dependent variable is the rise of the far-right wing political parties in Europe. In the data section you will find Figures 2-4 which emphasize just how influential the independent variables are.

The main idea this study is built on is that the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, and Euroscepticism are the main factors contributing to the rise in popularity of far-right wing political parties throughout Europe. It’s not just one of these factors and they are not being tested as if one of the three is the answer. It is believed, to a varying extent, that each independent variable has continually been attributing to the rise of the
far-right in recent history. Each of the variables might be a recent event or not, either way each one is tied to a certain sentiment (anti-immigration, Euroscepticism, nationalism, etc.). The far-right have become experts at exploiting these sentiments for political gain. Plus, each independent variable is so monumental, almost every European citizen is affected by them. In theory, all the far-right has to do is get their message to reach the citizens who might be feeling such sentiments each variable elicits to try and gain their vote. It is the hope of this research study to better understand these effects.

**Methods**

The methodology used in this research study will consists of a comparative case study analysis. The three individual European countries are each treated as a case study and all three independent variables are tested in each country; then compared to the dependent variable. In order to test each case study, empirical evidence of election results of parliamentary elections will be used. This data that has been collected, organized, and tested will be found in the next chapter - Data. Following Data, the Discussion chapter allows us to analyze the results and compare the case studies.

Before testing of the dependent variable is completed, the measurements of the independent variables must be stated. The migrant crisis in Italy, Sweden, and France can be measured through the number of asylum applicants received from 2014 to 2020. Italy can also be measured by the number of sea arrivals they received each year, since they were also impacted as an entry country. The European debt crisis is able to be measured by examining each countries government debt to GDP starting around 2008 to 2020. Government debt to GDP is a simple way to quantify the extent of the European debt crisis throughout the last two decades, without over calculated a host of economic
measurements. Lastly, Euroscepticism must be measured through polling by a reputable research center that has numerous years of polling data to analyze. Next, the major portion of this research study, how it tested the far-right’s election success in relation to the three variables, is mapped out.

The first step in this portion of the methodology was to decide on what three countries to assess. After evaluating dozens of European countries, Italy, France, and Sweden were selected; mainly due to geographic differences and the different effects the three variables (1a-3a) had on each country. Once these countries were selected it was a matter of research and data collection. Parliamentary election results for each country had to be found, collected, and verified. The European political process varies from country to country and it is very different from the United States, so research was also completed to learn how each parliamentary election works. Once enough election/snap election results were collected, the information was placed in a table to be better visualized and organized.

From there, each country had to be assessed in its own way since elections were held in different years and they may have been affected by the independent variables in different years. This meant that for every country, every variable, the important elections had to be selected. For variables 1a and 2a - one election was selected before the country was affected by the event and one election after the country had time to experience the effects of the event, taking into account a time-lag effect. This is defined by at least a year, so the country fully understands and starts to feel the effects of the event. For example, for Italy and the migrant crisis, since the migrant crisis began in 2014 the Italian elections of 2013 (before) and 2018 (after) were selected. Variable 3a is a bit trickier as
there is no matching date of low/high Euroscepticism in each country. For this variable, Table 1 was used to measure Euroscepticism and generally shows an increase in Euroscepticism throughout Europe from 2004-2019. For each country an earlier year was chosen around the same time as an election and a much more recent year was chosen, also around the same time as an election. For example, France had elections in 2002 and 2017, but since the earliest year there is data on for Euroscepticism is 2004. Since that is the case, this is the first year we chose to go along with the 2002 election. Similarly, the 2017 data, which is available, was chosen to go with the 2017 election.

After the identified elections were put into the Table(s) it was time to calculate the differences in the elections. Each independent variable, in each country was then calculated for the difference in popular vote percentage, total votes, and seats for the selected elections. For this research study, the popular vote percentage is the measurement focused on and analyzed for correlation. While seats won and total votes are also interesting to view, popular vote percentage is a more accurate measure for far-right wing success or failure. Seats won and total votes can change election to election for a host of political reasons (gerrymandering, negotiations, population changes etc.). However, popular vote percentage gives an accurate representation of the proportion of the population that directly voted for the far-right. Now that all data has been identified, calculated, and placed into their respective Tables you can look for trends, outliers, and mainly a positive or negative correlation for each variable in each country. If the percentage of popular votes has a $\geq +0.01\%$ between elections, then you have a positive correlation with the dependent variable in that country. If the percentage of popular votes
has a $\leq -0.01\%$ between elections, then you have a negative correlation with the dependent variable, within that country.

This type of methodology is able to answer the research question by splitting up the independent variables and countries. This allows for nine specific tests for positive or negative correlation. If, for example, a variable gets all positive correlations in every country, then it will validate part of my hypothesis. Each part will be interesting to analyze individually, especially when you start contrasting the different parts.

**Data**

The data found in the Tables below was collected from government records, election result websites, news articles, and an individual contributor who collects European election results; Manuel Alvarez-Rivera. Figures 2-4 are shown to illustrate the severity of each of the variables, the massive effects they are having across Europe.

Figure 2 titled ‘European Migrant Crisis 2015’, was put together by Maximilian Dorrbecker, with the statistics coming from Eurostat. Figure 3, ‘Debt as a Percentage of GDP’, was reported by Alex Eichler and the graphic made by Chris Spurlock for HuffPost Business. Then, Figure 4, ‘Who Feels EU Membership Has Paid Off?’, comes from a news article by Mark Chandler in an Express news article.

Figures 5-9 and Table 1 are the measurements of the independent variables. The migrant crisis can be measured by the number of asylum applicants for France, Sweden, and Italy. This can be seen in Figure 5, which was taken from a BBC article and the statistics come from Eurostat. The total number of sea arrivals for Italy can also be used as a measurement of the migrant crisis. Figure 6 demonstrates how many refugees have arrived at Italy via the sea in the last few years. The data was collected and put together
by the United Nations High Commission For Refugees. Figures 7, 8, and 9 also get their statistics from Eurostat, but they are put together by Trading Economics. Each Figure relates to the European debt crisis by showing Italy, France, and Sweden’s government debt to GDP in recent history. Then, to get statistics on Euroscepticism within European countries, a Table created by the Pew Research Center was used. This Table (Table 1) shows the percentage of citizens who have a favorable view of the European Union.

The final three Tables (2, 3, 4) are the collected statistics this research study gathered and organized. These will be examined the most during analysis since they are testing the dependent variable of the far-right’s success. A very useful election result website for Europe, titled ‘Election Resources on the Internet’, was a great reference.56 Lega Nord’s election results were acquired from the Italian governments Ministry of the Interior.57 National Front election results were acquired from France’s Ministry of the Interior.58 Sweden Democrats election results were acquired from the Swedish Election Authority.59 The above primary and secondary sources provided this study with excellent data. The Tables created below will be at the center of analysis for the next chapter – Discussion.

Figure 2: European Migrant Crisis

Figure 3: European Debt as a Percentage of GDP

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Figure 4: Percentage of Each Nation Who Believe They Have Not Benefited From Being In the EU

Figure 5: Top 10 EU Countries For Asylum Applications\textsuperscript{53}

Figure 6: Italy’s Sea Arrivals by Year\textsuperscript{64}


Figure 7: Sweden’s Government Debt to GDP\textsuperscript{65}

Figure 8: France’s Government Debt to GDP\textsuperscript{66}


Figure 9: Italy’s Government Debt to GDP

Table 1: Views of the European Union over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Rep.</th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
<th>Russia</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>-</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>69</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistically significant changes in bold.
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8d.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Table 2: Italy’s Lega Nord Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Republic Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total votes</td>
<td>1,769,501</td>
<td>3,026,865</td>
<td>1,392,918</td>
<td>18,091,104</td>
<td>16,698,186</td>
<td>-1,633,947</td>
<td>16,321,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular vote</td>
<td>4.58%</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>4.09%</td>
<td>17.35%</td>
<td>13.26%</td>
<td>-4.21%</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Total Seats Won</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>-42</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total votes</td>
<td>1,550,785</td>
<td>2,644,361</td>
<td>1,416,461</td>
<td>16,675,971</td>
<td>15,459,510</td>
<td>-1,227,900</td>
<td>15,325,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular vote</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
<td>4.33%</td>
<td>17.61%</td>
<td>13.28%</td>
<td>-3.73%</td>
<td>13.13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Seats Won</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>44</td>
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</table>
France’s National Front

Table 3: France’s National Front National Assembly Election Results

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total votes</td>
<td>393,205</td>
<td>17,107</td>
<td>842,695</td>
<td>1,590,869</td>
<td>748,174</td>
<td>825,588</td>
<td>1,197,664</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Vote (2nd Round)</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>5.09%</td>
<td>3.58%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Seats Won</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Sweden’s Sweden Democrats Riksdag Election Results

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Votes</td>
<td>162,463</td>
<td>339,610</td>
<td>801,178</td>
<td>1,135,627</td>
<td>334,449</td>
<td>461,568</td>
<td>973,164</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Vote</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>12.86%</td>
<td>17.53%</td>
<td>4.67%</td>
<td>7.16%</td>
<td>14.60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Total Seats Won</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Figures 5-9 and Table 1

Before analyzing the results and findings of each test it is important to review what the independent variables show when looking at their measurements. First, Figure 5 reveals how France and Italy dealt with an increasing number of asylum applications every year from 2014 to 2017. Sweden had a massive increase of applications from 2014 to 2015, but then a steep drop off the following. Still, it shows Sweden felt the affects of the migrant crisis drastically in 2015. Italy was also affected by the amount of sea arrivals of refugees since it is an entry port on the Mediterranean. In Figure 6 you can assess that Italy had over 110,000 sea arrivals every year from 2014-2017, a massive strain on their immigration system.
Government debt to GDP was used to measure how much the European debt crisis affected Italy, Sweden, and France. Figures 8 and 9 reveal just how hard Italy and France were hit by the European debt crisis. Italy’s government debt to GDP went from 101.9 in 2005 to 135.3 in 2015. France also had a major increase, going from 67.4 in 2005 to 95.6 in 2015. Contrary to Italy and France, Sweden was not as affected by the European debt crisis. This is evident when looking at Figure 7; Sweden went from 37.7 in 2007 to 41.3 in 2008. This shows that there was some evidence of being affected by the European debt crisis, but not too much as their economy largely survived unscathed.

Lastly, in order to measure Euroscepticism large amounts of polling data had to be found. The Pew Research Center not only has polling numbers for citizens in Europe and their feelings toward the European Union, they also have conducted these polls for years, even decades. Table 1 shows the results of such polling and it exposes the slow trend of a growing number of euroskeptics within Europe. Overall, each independent variable is able to be measured in it’s own unique way and the numbers show how efficacious they have been on Europe.

*Independent Variable 1a: Migrant Crisis*

First, variable 1a – the migrant crisis – will be analyzed by examining the light gray column in Tables 2,3,4 labeled ‘2014 Migrant Crisis’. Looking at Lega Nord’s election results before the migrant crisis in 2013 and after in 2018 shows a +13.26% in popular votes for the Chamber of Deputies and a +13.28% in popular votes for the Senate of the Republic. This is a positive correlation between a rise in the far-right in Italy and the onset of the migrant crisis. Similary in France, the National Rally has a positive correlation of +5.09% in the second round voting for its National Assembly between the
2012 and 2017 elections. Lastly, Sweden’s far-right party, Sweden Democrats, saw their election results increase between 2014-2018. They received a +4.67% and gained 13 more parliamentary seats.

All three case studies show a rise in the far-right’s election results in regard to the migrant crisis. Looking at the Table, Lega Nord and National Rally see their biggest gain in popular vote percentage during the years that correlate with the migrant crisis. Plus, the Sweden Democrats see an almost 5% bump in their election results. It is unlikely these are all coincidences; the results of the test show a clear correlation between the migrant crisis and far-right wing political success in all three countries. Even though these countries are geographically in different regions of Europe and were affected by the migrant crisis differently, all three far-right wing parties were able to capitalize on the phenomenon. It is with high confidence that this research study can state that the migrant crisis correlates with the recent rise of the far-right in Europe.

*Independent Variable 2a: European Debt Crisis*

To test variable 2a, you want to examine the light gray column titled ‘2010 European debt crisis’ for each country in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Interestingly, in both Italy’s Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic, Lega Nord had a drop in election results (2008-2013); -4.21% for the former and -3.7% for the latter. This is the study’s first negative correlation. Contrasting that, you can see that in France from 2007 to 2012, National Rally had a +3.58% in popular votes while also garnering an additional 825,588 total votes. Then, the Sweden Democrats (2010-2014) get an even higher boost in election results than they did with the migrant crisis, gaining a +7.16% and showing another positive correlation. Which is a bit shocking as Sweden was not hit very hard by
the European debt crisis, but the Sweden Democrats were able to garner more supporters who suffered because of it.68

The second independent variable ended up being a more mixed bag of results than the first. The Northern European country of Sweden and the Western European country of France both showed a positive correlation in relation to the rise of the far-right and the European debt crisis. Yet, Italy’s Lega Nord experienced a negative correlation with their election results falling in 2013. It seems that 2013 is an outlier in Italian politics for the far-right. The far-right in Italy gained popularity in the previous election (2008) and the succeeding election (2018). So, it does not seem that the European debt crisis is a major contributing factor to the popularity of the far-right in Italy. However, it does seem to be a major factor in France and Sweden, making the hypothesis on this variable partly correct.

Independent Variable 3a: Euroscepticism

To assess the last variable (3a), the corresponding years outlined in Tables 2, 3, 4 under the light gray ‘Euroscepticism’ column should be looked at in Table 1 regarding each country. Also, looking under that same column will give you the data necessary to test the hypothesis. The earliest year of Euroscepticism data being available was used with an election around that time. Then, whatever the most recent election year was for a particular country was used for the second Euroscepticism data point. The earliest data available for Italy on Euroscepticism was 2007 where 78% of citizens had a favorable opinion of the European Union. Then, in 2018 that view dropped by 20%, all the way to

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58%, proving that Euroscepticism was on the rise. From there, you look at Lega Nord election results in 2006 and 2018 and if there is an election result that is ≥0.01%, then there is a positive correlation between Euroscepticism in Italy and far-right success. This is what happens when analyzing the numbers as Lega Nord gained +12.77% in popular voting in the Chamber of Deputies and +13.13% in the Senate of the Republic. Next up, France, where 2004 saw a 69% favorable opinion of the European Union. Just like Italy, France saw a decline in favorable opinions of the European Union in its most recent election year, 2017 (-13%) to 56%. Testing the French National Assembly elections of 2002 and 2017 will give a positive or negative correlation. In that time the National Rally garnered well over an additional 1,000,000 total votes and had a popular vote change of +6.90%. Thus, confirming another positive correlation for Euroscepticism and France’s National Rally. Then, there is Sweden’s citizens who had a 59% favorable opinion of the European Union in 2007 and a 62% favorable opinion in 2018. Sweden’s Euroscepticism actually decreased between the early year and later year, albeit ever so slightly. Since Sweden’s Euroscepticism decreased, this study will need a decrease in Sweden Democrats success to show correlation. Testing the Riksdag elections from 2006 to 2018 does not present the expected results. The Sweden Democrats had great success – +14.60 in popular voting, garnering an additional 973,164 total votes, and winning 62 more seats. This means that a positive correlation cannot be ascertained between Euroscepticism and the far-right in Sweden.

Again, another independent variable ended up with mixed results, which is not too shocking when testing three variables on three distinct countries. In Sweden there was a negative correlation. Yet, Euroscepticism ever so slightly fell instead of rising so it is still
believed that Euroscepticism could be a main factor in the far-rights success; but this study could not prove it. Fortunately, a positive correlation was found in Italy and France among Euroscepticism and their respective far-right wing political parties. After testing, it is still thought that Euroscepticism is a main factor in the rise of the far-right in Italy and France, and that Sweden is a minority on the other side of that.

Findings and Future Implications

The hypothesis submitted for this research study can be described as being partly correct after testing our comparative case study analysis. Variable 1a demonstrated that the migrant crisis is a major factor in the rise of the far-right throughout Europe. Variable 2a gave mixed results and it seems the European debt crisis, while it is a factor, is not as important of a factor as originally thought to be. Last of all, variable 3a is a complicated factor to test and the results gave us an incomplete picture of Europe as a whole. Still, two out of three countries revealed positive correlation. Overall, there were more positive correlations than negative correlations found in this research study.

Now the findings in this study play an important role in continuing to advance the literature on the topic of modern-day far-right wing political parties. More testing and scholarship are always advisable, but this research study laid a solid foundation in analyzing three key independent variables. The research and findings in this paper help further the schools of thought of immigration, Euroscepticism, and economic issues playing a major role in far-right wing success. Lastly, it is smart to acknowledge the limitations of the study so it can be built on in the future. More countries need to be tested for these variables in respect to the far-right. Also, other factors might want to be scrutinized, like populism or poverty.
Conclusion

This research study was initiated with the research question: Far-right wing political parties are on the rise throughout Europe. Which factors can be most attributed to this rise: the migrant crisis, the European debt crisis, or Euroscepticism? Trying to understand why there has been a resurgence in the far-right is so important for political, social, and economic reasons. Which is why this research study tried to incorporate recent election results to the scholarly literature, focusing on three countries and three variables. Before conducting all required research, collecting election results, and analyzing the data, a hypothesis was put forth. That all three independent variables (1a, 2a, 3a) played a major role in the recent rise of the far-right throughout Europe. To test this hypothesis a comparative case study analysis was conducted. Italy, France, and Sweden were chosen as the case study countries for geographical, social, and economic reasons. The data that was collected for testing mainly came from government websites, election result websites, newspapers, and journal articles. All the information collected allowed for our own Tables to be created to fit the required testing and analysis.

Once analysis was finished for each country in every variable a more complete picture on European politics was evident. Variable 1a (migrant crisis) had a positive correlation for every country involved. However, variable 2a (European debt crisis) and variable 3a (Euroscepticism) were mixed results of both positive and negative correlations in Italy, France, and Sweden. Overall, the hypothesis was shown to be partly correct and more research is needed to identify actual causation. Hopefully, in the future of this literature more scholarly work will be conducted on these three variables. There are many more countries in Europe that can be tested in the same way. Also, this research
having focused on the 2000’s and 2010’s elections in Italy, France and Sweden allows for future researchers to focus on future elections. Even though this research filled a vital gap in the literature, much more is needed as the far-right will continue to play a role in European politics for years to come.
Bibliography


Curriculum Vitae

Jeremy Lee is from Geneva, Illinois where he attended Geneva Community High School. He would go on to enroll at Coastal Carolina University and receive a bachelor’s degree majoring in intelligence and national security. During his time at Coastal Carolina he focused on European security issues and helped form the Chanticleer Intelligence Brief. After undergraduate, he went on to attend Johns Hopkins University. There he completed a master’s degree in global security studies and a post-baccalaureate certificate in intelligence.