



Right Response

Understanding and Countering Populist Extremism in Europe

A Chatham House Report

Matthew Goodwin



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Contents

Preface	v
Foreword	vi
About the Author	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
List of Populist Extremist Parties in Europe	ix
Executive Summary	x
1 Introduction: The Challenge	1
Overview of the report	4
2 Who Supports Populist Extremist Parties, and Why?	6
The social profile of their supporters	6
The attitudes of their supporters	8
Conclusion	11
3 The Populist Extremist Message and its Potential	12
The ideological message	12
The wider potential	14
Conclusion	22
4 Response Strategies	23
Exclusion	23
Defusing	23
Adoption	24
Principle	24
Engagement	26
Interaction	27
What strategy, and when?	27
Conclusion	28
5 Conclusion: Changing Track	29

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

1	Support for PEPs across 12 states, 1980–2010	2
2	Perceived importance of immigration in EU states, 2003–10	15
3	Two most important issues facing the country, 2010	15
4	Feelings about number of immigrants, 2010	16
5	Public perceptions of whether immigration represents a problem or an opportunity	17
6	Public attitudes towards the cultural impact of immigration	18
7	Public perceptions of Muslim integration in wider society	20
8	Public perceptions of Muslim and immigrant integration in six EU states	20
9	Public dissatisfaction with functioning of national democracy	21
10	Public perceptions of government performance on immigration and integration	22
11	Perceived preconditions for immigrants to obtain citizenship	25

Tables

1	Attitudes of BNP voters	10
2	Attitudes towards legal and illegal immigration	17
3	Attitudes towards Muslims across eight states	19

Preface

In recent years, populist extremist parties have achieved notable breakthroughs in national and local elections across the European Union. Their rise poses a growing challenge to European societies, to mainstream political parties and to the process of European integration itself. This challenge is especially acute at a time when many European governments are struggling to retain their credibility in the face of reduced rates of economic growth, unpopular immigration policies and growing scepticism towards the EU.

It was against this background that Daniel Sachs, CEO of Proventus and Chairman of the Daniel Sachs Foundation, first contacted me in the spring of 2010. Motivated by the upcoming parliamentary elections in Sweden and the rising support for the populist extremist Sweden Democrats, he proposed that Chatham House undertake a project that would examine not only the drivers behind the support for populist extremist parties but also possible political responses. As an institute committed to understanding the underlying drivers of

international affairs, we found the idea of being able to explore this phenomenon in depth and connect policy-makers with the evidence particularly attractive. I am therefore especially grateful to Daniel, not only for encouraging us to undertake this project, but also for his thoughtful input to its deliberations and his unstinting support throughout.

In Matthew Goodwin, Lecturer in Politics at Nottingham University and a specialist in this area, Chatham House found a project leader with both a strong research base into extremist parties and a long-standing interest in the policy responses undertaken by mainstream political parties. Tapping into a network of experts and policy practitioners from across the European Union, he has ably led this project from the outset and drawn its conclusions together in this report.

Chatham House has been supported in this endeavour by grants from Stiftung Mercator, Novamedia/Postkodelotteriet and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Their generous support has enabled us to take our discussions to four European capitals, engage in a genuinely pan-European conversation on populist extremism, and share the research and conclusions with a wide audience.

At Chatham House, we hope to build on the base of this research and to explore in greater detail over the coming years both the changing phenomenon of the rise of populist extremist parties and the best avenues for challenging their appeal.

Robin Niblett
Director, Chatham House

Foreword

This project was born out of frustration and fear – the same forces that constitute part of the fertile soil for populist extremism. While observing developments in Sweden, a country that has long been considered immune to this trend, I became fearful of decreasing public tolerance of difference in society, and the way in which an exclusionary form of politics was attracting increasing support and influence. This trend has since materialized with the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim Sweden Democrats (SD), who polled strongly in national elections in 2010 and gained 20 seats in parliament. This trend of rising support for populist extremist parties (PEPs) is not restricted to Sweden. In fact, it has been one of the most striking developments in modern European politics.

I was also frustrated with the inability or unwillingness of the established mainstream parties to confront this threat to liberal representative politics. In my own view, the inadequacy of this response is evident both in the substance of mainstream parties' manifestos – which show a reluctance to address the difficult, value-laden and often controversial issues around which populist extremists are rallying support – and in their lack of a coherent and effective strategy for dealing with populist extremists. Whereas PEPs devote much of their time, effort and resources to sharing best practice and developing longer-term strategies, it seems that the established parties have been in denial about their rise, and are

acting without a plan. Too often the response has been event-led and short-sighted, and for too long it has failed to address this challenge.

The intention of this project was to go some small way to reversing that trend. The aim was to *understand* the causes and consequences of rising support for populist extremism in Europe, and consider how best to *respond* to this trend. In a process that has taken us from London to Berlin, and from Sofia to Stockholm, we have examined empirical academic research and considered possible response strategies with elected politicians, public policy-makers and practitioners. These discussions were geared around a series of questions. What are the wider trends that have created favourable conditions for PEPs? What does the evidence tell us about who is voting for these parties, and why? How do small extremist political forces gain broader electoral support through populist methods? How can we protect the universalistic and egalitarian values that have become integral to European identity? And how can various actors in society address public anxiety over sensitive and highly controversial issues, such as immigration, asylum, globalization and the role of Islam in European democracies? How much of the increasing electoral support for PEPs is driven by supply factors – i.e. by these parties becoming better populists and attracting new voter groups – and how much by demand factors – i.e. unemployment, crime, fear of losing out, lack of trust in established parties and frustration in large parts of the electorate? At a time when European societies are becoming increasingly diverse, and prejudice and hostility towards that diversity are growing, building new foundations for social cohesion will be a profound challenge for European citizens and mainstream political parties alike. It is my hope that this project can contribute to that important task.

Daniel Sachs
*CEO of Proventus and Chairman of the Daniel Sachs Foundation
Stockholm, September 2011*

About the Author

Matthew Goodwin is Lecturer in Politics in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham, and an Associate Fellow of Chatham House. His substantive research interests are political extremism, voting behaviour and immigration. He is the author of *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party*, and co-editor of *The New Extremism in Twenty-First Century Britain* (both published by Routledge). His research has been published in leading academic journals, including the *European Journal of Political Research*, the *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, and *Political Studies*. Drawing on this research, Dr Goodwin has advised governmental and other agencies on these issues, including the Home Office, Cabinet Office, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), local authorities and security services. He is a frequent panellist at international conferences and regular media commentator, including in the *Economist*, *New York Times*, *Guardian* and *Financial Times*, and on *Newsnight* and *Westminster Hour*. From 2007 to 2010, he was based at the University of Manchester where he was an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Postdoctoral Research Fellow. His research in this area has also been partly funded by the British Academy.

Acknowledgments

This report is the culmination of a year-long discussion and debate. In workshops held in four European capitals, I have had the pleasure of meeting and discussing the challenges of understanding and confronting populist extremism with many of Europe's leading thinkers and practitioners in this area.

This project began at the initiative of Daniel Sachs, and he has been a continual source of support and guidance throughout. I would like to thank Daniel and the Daniel Sachs Foundation. The project was made possible through the generous support of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Novamedia/PostkodLotteriet and Stiftung Mercator, to which we are especially grateful.

I would also like to thank the partner institutions who hosted workshops for the project: Stiftung Wissenschaft

und Politik in Berlin; Ruzha Smilova and the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia; and Ambassador Andrew Mitchell, the British Embassy and Proventus in Stockholm. Each workshop benefited from expert analyses: by Ted Cattle, Jocelyn Evans and Marietje Schaake in London; Péter Balázs, Kai-Olaf Lang, Kurt Richard Luther, Stephan Mayer, Grigorij Mesežnikov, Sabine Riedel and Damir Skenderovic in Berlin; Zhidas Daskalovski, Rafal Pankowski, Daniel Smilov, Cosmina Tanasoiu and Renata Uitz in Sofia; and Lisa Bjurwald, Ann-Cathrine Jungar, Sarah de Lange, Birgitta Ohlsson, Jens Rydgren, and Pal Tamas in Stockholm. My thanks go to all who participated.

This text benefited from excellent peer reviews. I am indebted to Nick Johnson, from the Smith Institute, for many helpful ideas on how to respond to populist extremism. Within Chatham House, thanks are due to Margaret May, Nick Bouchet, Alis Martin and particularly Thomas Raines for coordinating the project and workshops.

Finally, I would like to thank the Director of Chatham House, Robin Niblett, for his insights, guidance and leadership in launching the project.

September 2011

Matthew Goodwin

List of Populist Extremist Parties in Europe

AENM	Alliance of European National Movements	LPF	List Pim Fortuyn – Netherlands (Lijst Pim Fortuyn)
AN	National Alliance – Italy (Alleanza Nazionale)	LPR	League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin)
BNP	British National Party	MIÉP	Justice and Life in Hungary (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja)
BZÖ	Alliance for the Future of Austria (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich)	MS-FT	Tricolour Flame – Italy (Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore)
DF	Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti)	MSI	Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano)
DVU	German People’s Union (Deutsche Volksunion)	ND	National Democrats – Sweden (Nationaldemokraterna)
FN	National Front – France, also Belgium (Front National)	NF	National Front – UK
FPÖ	Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs)	NPD	National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands)
FrP	Norwegian Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet)	PRM	Greater Romania Party (Partidul România Mare)
Jobbik	Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom)	PS	True Finns (Perussuomalaiset)
LN	Northern League – Italy (Lega Nord)	PVV	Party for Freedom – Netherlands (Partij voor de Vrijheid)
		SD	Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna)
		SNS	Slovak National Party, also Slovenian National Party (Slovenská Národná Strana or Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka)
		SRP	Socialist Reich Party Germany (Sozialistische Reichspartei Deutschlands)
		SVP	Swiss People’s Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei)
		VB	Flemish Interest/formerly Flemish Bloc (Vlaams Belang)

Executive Summary

Populist extremist parties (PEPs) present one of the most pressing challenges to European democracies. These parties share two core features: they fiercely oppose immigration and rising ethnic and cultural diversity; and they pursue a populist ‘anti-establishment’ strategy that attacks mainstream parties and is ambivalent if not hostile towards liberal representative democracy. These parties and their supporters remain poorly understood. What drives some citizens to abandon the mainstream in favour of populist extremists? What message are these parties offering, and how receptive are European electorates to this message? How, if at all, can mainstream parties counter the rise of PEPs? This report examines what is *causing* citizens across Europe to shift behind populist extremists, and how mainstream elites might *respond* to this challenge. It puts popular stereotypes to one side and adopts an objective and evidence-based approach to investigate the characteristics and concerns of PEP supporters, the message and the wider potential of populist extremism, and possible response strategies.

The challenge

Contrary to assumptions in the 1980s and 1990s that the emergence of PEPs in Europe would be nothing more than a flash in the pan, these parties continue to rally large and durable levels of support. They have joined national coalition governments. They have surfaced in countries

with a tradition of extremist politics, as well as those that were previously thought immune. They emerged before the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 and the recent financial crisis. They have rallied support in some of the most economically secure and highly educated regions of Europe. Some have outlasted their ‘charismatic’ leaders, who were once held up as the principal reason for their success. In the process, PEPs have challenged mainstream parties on both the centre-right and centre-left. Some argue their rise has instigated a ‘contagion from the right’, by pushing moderate right-wing parties to adopt increasingly restrictive policies on immigration and integration. Others argue their rise has presented the centre-left with a ‘triple challenge’ by (a) helping the centre-right to form coalitions, (b) increasing the salience of social and cultural issues that tend to favour the right and (c) recruiting support from manual workers who traditionally supported the left.¹ When seen as a whole, these challenges underscore the need to examine the challenge from populist extremist parties more closely.

The supporters

Supporters of PEPs are often dismissed as political protestors, single-issue voters or economically deprived ‘losers of globalization’. However, these stereotypes ignore a body of evidence on the characteristics and concerns of these citizens. PEPs are not ‘catch-all’ parties that appeal across society. Instead, their support is anchored heavily in specific social groups. The most successful parties have rallied a coalition of economically insecure lower-middle-class citizens and skilled and unskilled manual workers. Not all PEPs have assembled this coalition: some have failed and fallen dependent on a dwindling base of angry, working-class and poorly educated men. But all of their supporters share one core feature: their profound hostility towards immigration, multiculturalism and rising cultural and ethnic diversity. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that these citizens are motivated by feelings of economic competition from immigrants and

1 T. Bale, C. Green-Pedersen, A. Krouwel, K. R. Luther and N. Sitter (2010), ‘If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe’, *Political Studies*, 58, pp. 410–26.

minority groups, feelings of *cultural* threat are the most important driver of their support. For these citizens, the decisive motive is the feeling that immigration and rising diversity threaten their national culture, the unity of their national community and way of life. Much like other voters, citizens who support PEPs are not irrational. They are guided by clear and coherent goals: they want immigration reduced and rising diversity curtailed or halted altogether. They are deeply concerned about these issues, and profoundly dissatisfied with the current response offered by mainstream parties.

The wider potential

Populist extremist parties are offering a distinct set of ideas to citizens: the most important are their exclusionary policies with regard to immigrants and minority groups, and a populist ‘anti-establishment’ strategy that is targeted at mainstream parties and other institutions in society. PEPs frame minority groups (though increasingly Muslims) as posing an economic and mainly cultural threat to European societies. They also claim that mainstream parties are unable or unwilling to respond to this threat. Beyond these parties’ actual voters, large sections of European electorates are potentially receptive to this message. This potential is evident in three areas: (1) public attitudes on immigration; (2) growing public hostility towards settled Muslim communities, and (3) public dissatisfaction with mainstream parties and their performance on immigration-related issues. While traditional and cruder forms of racial prejudice are in decline, hostility towards immigration remains relatively widespread. This hostility is driven less by economic grievances than by feelings of cultural threat: large numbers of citizens feel there are too many immigrants in their countries, perceive minority groups to be a burden on social services and are deeply anxious about the impact of these changes on their

national culture and community. For example, one study examining the factors that influence public attitudes on immigration finds that concerns over cultural unity are nine times more important than concerns about crime, and five times more important than concerns about the national economy.²

PEPs are increasingly linking this sense of cultural threat to *settled* Muslim communities, and there is evidence of significant public anxiety over the perceived difficulties in integrating this group into wider society. In some countries, PEPs are now performing more strongly in areas that are not simply more ethnically diverse, but that have large Muslim communities (while their support is *lower* in areas that have large numbers of non-Muslim Asians and other minority groups).³ This suggests that anti-Muslim sentiment is becoming a key driver of support for these parties, and that simply talking about reducing the numbers of immigrants or tightening border security will no longer satisfy the modern PEP supporter. In short, there is considerable potential for parties that offer a combination of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim positions. This potential is underscored by the way in which large numbers of citizens in Europe are already dissatisfied with, and distrustful of, mainstream parties, and their performance on these issues.

The response

There is no uniform response to PEPs. But six potential response strategies do exist for mainstream parties: ‘exclusion’, ‘defusing’, ‘adoption’, ‘principle’, ‘engagement’ and ‘interaction’ offer different ways forward. Each strategy comes with risks, and their effectiveness will depend heavily on the respective national context. However, at a broad level the first four strategies go against the grain of the conclusions of this report. The last two – engagement and interaction – that are focused more heavily on the local arena offer the best prospects for progress.

2 E. Ivarsflaten (2005), ‘Threatened by Diversity: Why Restrictive Asylum and Immigration Policies Appeal to Western Europeans’, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 15(1), pp. 21–45.

3 For example R. Ford and M. J. Goodwin (2010), ‘Angry White Men: Individual and Contextual Predictors of Support for the British National Party’, *Political Studies*, 58(1), pp.1–25.

- *Exclusion* would see attempts to block PEPs from accessing public office and influencing debate. Yet there is little evidence to support the conventional wisdom that excluding populist extremists from debate and public office actually works. Rather, the opposite appears true: parties that are excluded tend to adopt more extreme ideological positions. Furthermore, the citizens who support PEPs already exhibit extremely high levels of political dissatisfaction, and are also more distrustful than other voters of mainstream politics. Enticing these voters back into the fold of mainstream politics will be difficult enough; excluding their chosen representatives is likely to make this impossible.
- Attempts to *defuse* the populist extremist message would see mainstream parties shift the focus onto issues on which they have a strategic advantage. This would see politicians play down social and cultural issues that tend to favour PEP challengers (e.g. immigration), and play up more traditional issues that tend to favour established parties (e.g. the economy). However, given the increased salience of immigration and integration in the minds of voters, this strategy is unsustainable. It might also have wider and profoundly negative consequences: the evidence suggests that when public concern over immigration goes unresolved then overall levels of public trust in political institutions – and the overall functioning of the political system – are undermined.
- *Adoption* would entail embracing more restrictive policies on immigration, integration and law and order. It is unlikely, however, that such a ‘rightward turn’ would satisfy the underlying concerns of those citizens who sympathize with the populist extremist message; and it might even compromise underlying traditions of tolerance and pluralism. Moreover, the strategy might well damage credibility, alienate core voters and inadvertently legitimize the campaigns of populist extremists. It is also distinctly unlikely that mainstream parties will be able to convince voters they can deliver a competent performance on these more divisive issues.
- The *principle* strategy would involve political debate with PEPs, but in a way that is consistent with the evidence on what is driving public concerns. Across Europe, mainstream parties have invested heavily in a narrative that emphasizes the economic case for immigration. Yet the evidence clearly demonstrates that this narrative is unlikely to satisfy the concerns and anxieties of modern PEP supporters, and those who are potentially receptive to these parties. Put simply, those who are most open to the message are unlikely to be won over by arguments that stress the economic benefits of immigration. Their concerns are driven more strongly by a belief that immigrants, culturally distinct Muslim communities and rising cultural diversity are having a profoundly negative impact on their national cultures, communities and ways of life. These citizens want a conversation about these threats, but at present only populist extremists appear to be talking to them. Mainstream elites need to go beyond making the economic case for immigration and begin making the case for cultural diversity.
- In contrast to the earlier strategies, *engagement* would require more serious investment in countering PEP campaigns at the grassroots. In recent years, the professionalization of politics has arguably left large numbers of voters feeling both disenfranchised and receptive to the populist anti-establishment message. The potential impact was best reflected in one local report, which found that some voters experienced more face-to-face contact with activists from PEPs than with activists from mainstream parties.⁴ To win the hearts and minds of voters, mainstream parties should be part of the community, have an active and visible presence and forge stronger links to local groups and forums. In practical terms, this means standing full slates of candidates at the local level, engaging with voters face-to-face and redirecting some resources to revitalizing grassroots campaigns.

4 JRCT (2004), *539 Voters' Views: A Voting Behaviour Study in Three Northern Towns* (York: Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust).

- Lastly, *interaction* would see much greater effort devoted to supporting contact and dialogue between different ethnic and cultural groups within a given community, though especially between members of the majority and minority Muslim communities. Rather than focusing on the dynamics of party competition, the key here would be to tackle head on the underlying concerns that are driving support for PEPs. This approach draws upon decades of research in social psychology that demonstrates how increasing levels of contact between members of different groups can reduce prejudice, counter perceptions of threat and raise levels of tolerance. The strategy offers a way for mainstream political

elites and other actors in society (such as voluntary and third-sector groups) to support communities to become more resistant to the populist extremist message.

PEPs have spent much of the past two decades exchanging strategies, ideas and best practice. This has enabled them to respond to new issues and events more innovatively and effectively than the established parties. Until the mainstream parties similarly begin to exchange lessons, root their responses in the evidence and address the actual anxieties of PEP voters, populist extremists will continue to rally support among a new generation of citizens. If politicians and policy-makers are to meet this challenge, they need to radically rethink their current approach to populist extremism.

1. Introduction: The Challenge

The rise of populist extremism is one of the most pressing challenges facing European democracies. Yet the challenge is not new. At least since the 1970s, and often in large numbers, citizens have shifted behind populist extremist parties. These parties share two core features: they reject the principle of human equality, and hence advocate exclusionary policies towards immigrants and minority groups; and they adhere to a populist anti-establishment strategy that is deeply critical of the mainstream parties and is ambiguous if not hostile towards liberal representative democracy.⁵

This European ‘family’ of PEPs is both large and diverse.⁶ Its members in Western Europe include the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the British National Party (BNP), the Danish People’s Party (DF), the National Front (FN) in France, the German People’s Union (DVU), the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDP), the National Front (FN) and Flemish Interest (VB) in Belgium, the Northern League (LN) and Tricolour Flame (MS-FT) in Italy, the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP), and the Swedish Democrats (SD).

While some of these parties are new arrivals, others have longer roots. One analyst has noted how PEPs emerged in three distinct waves after the Second World War.⁷ The first began after the end of the war and was comprised of openly fascist and neo-Nazi parties that remained overtly committed to political ideas that had flourished in the interwar years. While some such as the Socialist Reich Party (SRP) in Germany were banned, others found that their openly racist, anti-Semitic and anti-democratic message garnered only fringe support. The second wave that rose in the 1970s included the Progress Parties in Scandinavia that were mainly anti-tax populist movements and parties such as the National Front (NF) in Britain, which attracted only isolated and ephemeral pockets of support.

The third wave dates from the mid-1980s and has seen much higher and more durable levels of support for PEPs. The rise of parties such as the Austrian FPÖ, French FN and Flemish Bloc/Interest (VB) in Belgium followed a new phase of immigration that saw approximately 30 million people enter Europe as either workers or their dependents.⁸ These parties and others began to recruit striking levels of support. For example, between 1986 and 1999, the Austrian FPÖ saw its support increase threefold to reach 27 per cent; the French FN transformed itself from a fringe group into a professional electoral party that regularly commanded at least 10 per cent of the national vote; and the Belgian VB saw its support rocket from 1.9 per cent to 11.9 per cent.

As Europe entered the twenty-first century, PEPs were making ‘an uneven but appreciable impact’ that stretched from the margins to the mainstream.⁹ Though some were restricted to local enclaves, others ascended to national power. In 2000, the FPÖ joined the centre-right in Austria’s coalition government; in 2001, the Danish DF and Norwegian FrP began supporting minority governments and, in Italy, a

5 This definition draws on J. Rydgren (2005), ‘Is Extreme Right-Wing Populism Contagious? Explaining the Emergence of a New Party Family’, *European Journal of Political Research* 44, pp. 413–37, and E.L. Carter (2005), *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press).

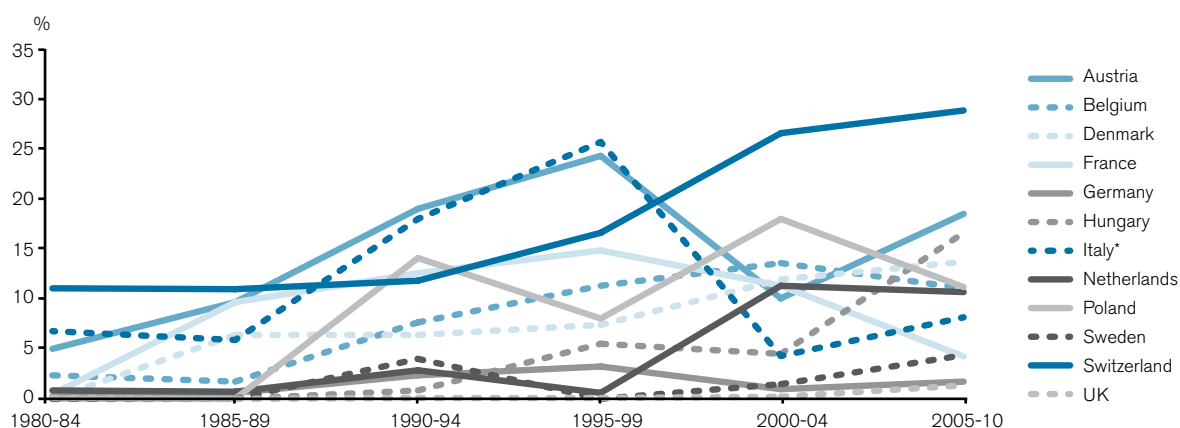
6 On viewing these parties as a ‘family’ of parties see C. Mudde (1996), ‘The War of Words: Defining the Extreme Right Party Family’, *West European Politics*, 19, pp. 225–48

7 Klaus Von Beyme (ed.) (1988), *Right-Wing Extremism in Western Europe* (London: Frank Cass).

8 A.M. Messina (2007), *The Logics and Politics of Post-WWII Migration to Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

9 P. Hainsworth (2000), ‘Introduction: The Extreme Right’, in P. Hainsworth (ed.), *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London & New York: Pinter/Continuum.), p. 14.

Figure 1: Support for PEPs across 12 states, 1980–2010



Note: Parties include Austria: FPÖ; Belgium: Vlaams Blok/Belang, Front National; Denmark: Fremskridtsparti, Dansk Folkeparti; France: Front National, Mouvement National Républicain; Germany: Republikaner, DVU, NPD; Hungary: MIÉP, MNS; Italy: MSI/AN, LN; Netherlands: Center Party, Centrum Democrats, List Pim Fortuyn; Poland: KPN, ZChN; LPR, Samoobrona; Sweden: ND, Sverigedemokraterna, Nationaldemokraterna; Switzerland: AP, SD, SVP-UDC, Lega dei Ticinesi; United Kingdom: BNP, NF.

*Without Alleanza Nazionale, includes LN, AS, MS-FT.

Sources: Individual PEP results and M. Minkenberg (2008), *The Radical Right in Europe: An Overview* (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung).

revamped National Alliance (AN) and Northern League (LN) re-joined the government; in 2002, the List Pim Fortuyn (LFP) emerged seemingly out of nowhere to poll 17 per cent of the vote, gain 26 seats in the Dutch parliament and (briefly) join a governing coalition; and in the same year in France, FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen attracted worldwide attention after beating the Socialist candidate to make it into the second round of the presidential elections (at which he polled over five million votes or 18 per cent of the vote).

By 2007, the continuing ability of PEPs to rally support led one analyst to conclude they had become a fixture in most European party systems, and presented one of 'the most disturbing and intractable challenges' to democracies.¹⁰ Contrary to initial predictions that they would be simply a flash in the pan, several parties proved able to sustain the loyalty of voters over several election cycles. The stubborn persistence of these parties is one of their most striking features. As one political scientist observed,

They have a significant number of loyal voters; they seem better able to survive institutionalisation than was previously assumed; and xenophobia and welfare chauvinism are endemic in every European electorate. There is every chance, then, that such parties will indeed succeed in securing a permanent niche in Western Europe's emerging political market.¹¹

PEPs have not remained dependent on the fortunes of charismatic leaders, who are often identified as the main ingredient for their success; while figures such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jörg Haider, Pim Fortuyn, Carl Hagen and Morgens Glistrup have left the stage, support for their parties and successors has endured. PEPs have also staged electoral comebacks. In 2008 the combined vote for two of these parties in Austria – the BZÖ and FPÖ – was 29 per cent even though both had suffered infighting. Their potential was underscored two years later when an opinion poll suggested the FPÖ had become the most popular party among young Austrians.¹²

10 Messina, *The Logic and Politics of post-WWII Migration to Western Europe*, pp. 2–3.

11 T. Bale (2003), 'Cinderella and her Ugly Sisters: The Mainstream and Extreme Right in Europe's Bipolarising Party Systems', *West European Politics*, 26(3), pp. 67–90.

12 K. Skyring, 'Far-Right Freedom Party most popular among young Austrians', *Deutsche Welle*, 20.11.2010.

At this time, PEPs were also advancing in European countries that were previously considered immune to their appeal. For example, at the 2009 European parliamentary elections the British National Party (BNP) won two seats, adding to its tally of over 50 UK local council seats and one seat in the Greater London Assembly.¹³ In fact, across Europe these elections also saw voters in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia send populist extremists to the European Parliament.¹⁴ Clearly, it is important not to exaggerate the trend. In countries such as Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain PEPs have failed to build large and stable bases of support.¹⁵ Yet in other countries the reality is that they have made remarkable progress. In 2010, attempts by Sweden Democrats (SD) to offer a more acceptable brand to voters were rewarded when the party polled over five per cent of the vote and gained 20 seats in parliament. The same year saw Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) become the third largest party in the Dutch parliament and assume a key role supporting the government. Shortly afterwards, the True Finns (PS) won over 19 per cent of the vote and became the third largest party in the Finnish parliament.

Nor is the challenge confined to Western Europe. Since the 1990s, similar parties have rallied comparable if not greater levels of support across Central and Eastern Europe, and among populations that have less experience with liberal democracy. Some have suggested that while PEPs in these regions tend to be less well organized, they are also more anti-democratic and militant.¹⁶ These parties have included Attack in Bulgaria, the Czech

Republicans, Justice and Life in Hungary (MIÉP) and the National Parties in Slovakia and Slovenia (SNS). The Greater Romania Party (PRM) follows an anti-Semitic and xenophobic ideology and is also hostile towards Hungarian and Roma communities.¹⁷ In 2000, the PRM claimed around 35,000 members and became the second largest party in parliament while its leader reached the second round of the presidential election after polling 30 per cent.

In Poland, similar parties have benefited from institutions in wider civil society, including tabloid newspapers and the *Radio Maryja* station that advocated xenophobic and anti-Semitic stances to an audience of millions while calling on them to support PEPs. By 2006, the League of Polish Families (LPR) and Self-Defence had sufficient support to join a coalition government with the centre-right Law and Justice Party. As one analyst observed, 'There was a widespread perception that extremists were entering the mainstream.'¹⁸ In Hungary, by 2010 the anti-Roma and anti-Semitic Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) had emerged and entered parliament.

European PEPs actively cooperate and transmit their ideas and strategies across borders.¹⁹ This is reflected in the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), a pan-European network that was established in 2009 and includes Jobbik, the French FN, Italian Tricolour Flame, Swedish SD, Belgian FN and British BNP. Some analysts also suggest that, in some countries, PEPs are performing 'a bridging function between an established conservatism and an explicitly anti-democratic, latently or openly violent right-wing extremism.'²⁰ Openly

13 On the rise of the BNP see M.J. Goodwin (2011), *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge).

14 These parties are the Austrian Freedom Party, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, Ataka in Bulgaria, Danish People's Party, True Finns, National Front in France, LAOS in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, Lega Nord in Italy, Greater Romania Party, Slovak National Party and British National Party.

15 On cross-national variations in levels of extreme right party support see Carter (2005), *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*; H. Kitschelt (with A. McGann)(1995), *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press); P. Norris (2005), *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

16 M. Minkenberg (2011), 'The Radical Right in Europe Today: Trends and Patterns in East and West', in N. Langenbacher and B. Schellenberg (eds), *Is Europe on the 'Right' Path? Right-Wing Extremism and Right-Wing Populism in Europe* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung).

17 M. Minkenberg (2002), 'The Radical Right in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations', *East European Politics and Society*, 16(2), pp. 335–62.

18 R. Pankowski (2011), 'Identity and Bigotry: Nationalist Populism and the Extreme Right in Contemporary Poland', in Langenbacher and Schellenberg (eds), *Is Europe on the 'Right' Path?*

19 Rydgren, 'Is Extreme Right-Wing Populism Contagious?.'

20 M. Minkenberg (2011), *The Radical Right in Europe: An Overview* (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung), p. 13.

violent right-wing extremist groups are not the focus of this report, but it is important not to lose sight of them. As highlighted by the atrocities in Norway in July 2011, there is a clear threat from more violent ‘lone wolves’ who are connected to right-wing extremist politics. The potential for violence was also underscored in 2009, when both the London Metropolitan Police and US Department of Homeland Security warned of the challenge from an increasingly confrontational right-wing milieu.²¹ The focus of this report, however, rests firmly on parties that operate within legal frameworks and contest elections, rather than violence-prone groups such as Combat 18 or the Blood and Honour network.

Overview of the report

The guiding observation behind this report is that despite attracting considerable attention, populist extremist parties and their supporters remain poorly understood. This is largely because debates about this challenge have often failed to engage with a large body of evidence on these parties, their supporters and their motivations. Taking an evidence-based approach, this report draws on a series of workshops that were organized in four countries and investigated eight cases of populist extremism.²² These brought together academic experts, members of national parliaments and the European Parliament, and civil society groups to start closing the gaps between debate, policy and evidence. Specifically, the report is concerned with three areas: (1) the profile and motivations of PEP supporters, (2) the message that PEPs offer and the extent to which citizens in Europe are receptive, and (3) potential response strategies.

Each of these areas is anchored in an observation about populist extremist parties. The first is that they have already recruited a stable of loyal followers. These supporters are not concentrated simply in the most deprived or poorly educated regions of Europe but in established democracies, affluent post-industrial societies and countries that offer cradle-to-grave welfare states.²³ Through the 1990s and early 2000s, they were found among some of the most economically secure populations in the world, and that had access to comprehensive education systems. Such conditions might have been expected to reduce rather than galvanize support for exclusionary politics, but the reality has prompted considerable debate about the exact nature of these supporters. They are often dismissed as political protestors, single-issue voters or ‘losers of globalization’. Yet while stereotypes flourish, the evidence on the characteristics and concerns of PEP voters has largely been ignored. Drawing on this research, Chapter 2 addresses the following questions: what is the profile of PEP supporters, and what are their most important motives for supporting populist extremist parties?

The second observation concerns the message that PEPs are offering and whether – beyond their *actual* voters – there is a larger pool of *potential* supporters who are also receptive. Although PEPs do not follow a uniform ideology, they do share two core ideological features. Chapter 3 examines these features and the extent to which they might rally wider support across the continent.

The third observation is that PEPs also raise important questions about the evolution of party systems in modern Europe. As others observe, in some of these systems PEPs have forced some of the most profound changes across the entire post-war era.²⁴ They have contributed to the erosion of bonds between citizens and mainstream parties, and challenge parties on the centre-right and centre-left. Some

21 R. Ford, ‘Britain under threat from neo-Nazi “lone wolves”’, *The Times*, 11 November 2009; Department of Homeland Security (2009), *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment* (Washington, DC: DHS), 7 April.

22 The workshops included presentations by academic experts on the following cases: Austria (Prof. Kurt Richard Luther), Britain (Dr Matthew Goodwin), Bulgaria (Dr Daniel Smilov), Finland (Dr Ann-Cathrine Jungar), France (Prof. Jocelyn Evans), Hungary (Prof. Renata Uitz), Poland (Dr Kai-Olaf Lang and Dr Rafal Pankowski), Romania (Prof. Cosmina Tanasoiu), Serbia and Macedonia (Dr Zhidas Daskalovski), Slovakia (Grigorij Mesežnikov), Sweden (Prof. Jens Rydgren), Switzerland (Prof. Damir Skenderovic), and additional presentations from Dr Sarah de Lange and Dr Pal Tamas (PEPs in Power).

23 Norris, *Radical Right*, p. 4.

24 W. van der Brug, M. Fennema and J. Tillie (2005), ‘Why Some Anti-immigrant Parties Fail and Others Succeed: A Two-step Model of Aggregate Electoral Support’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(5), pp. 537–73, p. 538.

suggest PEPs have instigated a ‘contagion from the right’ by pushing moderate right-wing parties to adopt increasingly restrictive stances on immigration and integration. Others argue they have presented centre-left parties with a ‘triple challenge’ by (1) facilitating the formation of centre-right coalition governments; (2) increasing the salience of social and cultural issues that favour

right-wing parties; and (3) appealing to social groups that traditionally supported the centre-left, such as manual workers.²⁵ Despite these observations, however, only limited attention has been focused on how mainstream parties and other actors in society might *respond* to this challenge. Chapter 4 addresses this gap by outlining six potential responses.

25 Bale et al., ‘If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them?’, pp. 410–26; also Kitschelt with McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*; and Bale, ‘Cinderella and her Ugly Sisters’.

2. Who Supports Populist Extremist Parties, and Why?

There are various opinions about who votes for PEPs, and why. Their supporters are often interpreted as political protestors, single-issue voters or the deprived 'losers of globalization'. Others subscribe to an ethnic competition approach, interpreting their support as an attempt to reduce competition from immigrants over economic resources. Still others view their support as a response to feelings among some citizens that their national culture and community are under threat from immigration and rising ethnic and cultural diversity. These debates, however, often ignore underlying evidence on the profile and attitudes of these citizens. Instead, stereotypes flourish. This chapter draws on the evidence to examine whether some groups in European societies are more receptive to populist extremists than others. It does so by investigating the characteristics and attitudes of PEP supporters.

The social profile of their supporters

The PEPs that have emerged across Europe are not recruiting support equally from all groups in society. Instead, their support is anchored firmly in specific

social groups, which is reflected in the fact that their supporters share a relatively distinct profile. Despite some variations (see below), the citizens who turn out for PEPs at elections tend to be men; they are either very young or very old; have no or only a few educational qualifications; come from the lower middle classes or working classes; and are deeply pessimistic about their economic prospects. Support for these parties is strongest among members of social groups that are economically insecure, mainly the petite bourgeoisie and working classes, and from citizens who are less educated than the average voter.²⁶ In contrast, comparative research demonstrates that support for populist extremism is weak among more secure and salaried sections of the middle classes, and citizens with a university-level education. Owing to their greater economic security, education and flexibility, these groups are less likely to feel threatened by immigration and rising diversity and the onset of a post-industrial globalized economy.

The most successful PEPs have appealed simultaneously to members of the lower middle classes, such as artisans, shopkeepers, farmers and the self-employed, and also skilled and unskilled manual workers. It is this coalition comprising two groups that has propelled several PEPs into national power. In Switzerland, for example, during the 1990s and 2000s the profile of Swiss People Party (SVP) voters became increasingly diverse as the party rallied support from different groups. On one side stood its traditional core base of older, middle-class men and self-employed workers from rural regions; on the other stood blue-collar workers and poorly educated citizens from urban areas.²⁷ A similar picture emerges in France, where the FN drew support from across most age groups while building an electorate comprised of both the *petite bourgeoisie* and manual workers (see Box 1). In fact, under Jean-Marie Le Pen the FN proved so effective at mobilizing workers that it surpassed the centre-left parties

26 Norris, *Radical Right*, p.139; also M. Lubbers, M. Gijsberts and P. Scheepers (2002), 'Extreme Right-Wing Voting in Western Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, 41(3), pp. 345–78; K. Arzheimer (2011), 'Electoral Sociology: Who Votes for the Extreme Right and Why – and When?', in U. Backes and P. Moreau (eds), *The Extreme Right in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives*, currently in press.

27 D. Skenderovic (2011) 'Transformations and "Direct" Success on the Right-Wing Fringe: Switzerland as a Model for Europe?', in Langenbacher and Schellenberg (eds), *Is Europe on the 'Right' Path?*, pp. 159–79.

to become the most popular party among the working classes. Opinion polls in 2011 suggest the appeal of the FN among workers persists: if presidential elections were

held tomorrow, Marine Le Pen (Jean-Marie's daughter and successor as party leader) would attract 44 per cent of blue-collar workers.²⁸

Box 1: Sociology of the Front National voters in France, 2002–11

(%)	2002 Presidentials	2007 Presidentials	2012 Presidentials (Poll, July 2011)	
	<i>JM Le Pen 1st round</i>	<i>JM Le Pen 1st round</i>	<i>M Le Pen 1st round</i>	
Total	17	10		20
Sex				
Men	21	14		20
Women	13	7		20
Age				
18-24	16	8	18-24	17
25-34	17	16	24-34	20
35-44	16	11	35-49	29
45-59	19	11	50-64	21
60-69	18	8	65+	11
70+	15	7		
Occupation				
Farmers	20	20		NA
Artisans and traders	19	15		27
Professionals and upper salariat	8	4		16
Lower salariat	14	6		16
Routine non-manual	16	14		26
Blue-collar	30	24		44
Sector				
Private-sector employee	17	12		27
Public-sector employee	17	12		26
Self-employed	17	20		16
Retired	16	9		11
Educational attainment				
Primary/intermediate	22	13		NA
Secondary	22	10		NA
Tertiary	8	7		NA

Note: 2011 poll for 2012 Presidentials assumes François Hollande to be the Socialist Party candidate.

Sources: IPSOS-Vizzavi-*Le Figaro-France* 2, 21 April, 5 May and 9 June 2002; IPSOS-Dell-*Europe 1-Le Point-20 minutes*, 22 April 2007; IPSOS-Dell-*Europe 1-Le Point-20 minutes*, 10 June 2007; IFOP-*France Soir*, 21 July 2011; Professor Jocelyn Evans (London Workshop).

28 IFOP for *France-Soir*, 'Les intentions de vote pour l'élection présidentielle de 2012', 21 July 2011, http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1577-1-study_file.pdf.

The importance of support from workers is underscored in other examples. In Denmark, the ‘typical’ supporter of the Danish People’s Party (DF) is a male manual worker with a low level of education. Much like the French FN, between 2001 and 2007 the DF recruited most of its support from workers and became the most clearly defined working-class party, a shift that came largely at the expense of the Social Democrats, the traditional working-class party.²⁹ More broadly, workers have been shown to be twice as likely as middle-class voters to support PEPs in Austria, three times as likely in Belgium and France, and four times as likely in Norway.³⁰

This evidence reveals how PEPs have proved adept at taking advantage of wider social and economic changes. In the process, the most successful have assembled a cross-class profile. They have appealed to the economically insecure lower-middle classes while also reaching out to blue-collar and non-manual workers who feel threatened by immigration and rising diversity (see below).³¹ There are, however, some exceptions. The profile of supporters above contrasts sharply with cases such as Britain, where a party that is rooted in an overtly neo-Nazi tradition – the British National Party (BNP) – has failed to extend its appeal to the lower-middle classes. Instead, the toxic BNP fell heavily dependent on a base of ‘angry white men’: older working-class men who lack educational qualifications and are deeply pessimistic about their economic prospects.³² In contrast, sections of the more insecure middle classes have appeared largely uninterested in this toxic brand.

Nonetheless, the fact that PEP voters share a relatively distinct profile challenges the conventional wisdom that they are simply protest voters, or that they represent an underclass of economically threatened workers. As one political scientist points out,

This cross-class coalition means that we should look sceptically upon the idea that the rise of the radical right is purely a phenomenon of the politics of resentment among the underclass of low-skilled and low-qualified workers in inner-city areas, or that it can be attributed in any mechanical fashion to growing levels of unemployment and job insecurity in Europe. The socio-economic profile is more complex than popular stereotypes suggest.³³

To better understand the motives driving these supporters, it is necessary to examine their attitudes.

The attitudes of their supporters

Attempts to explain *why* citizens shift behind PEPs often emphasize political protest. The argument is that these parties are rallying citizens who are dissatisfied with the political system and distrustful of mainstream elites. This ‘protest model’ raises two implications: (1) PEP voters are primarily reacting against the established mainstream parties and are not driven by ideological or instrumental preferences of their own, and (2) PEPs are a by-product of political dissatisfaction and public disenchantment, and so will disappear when the underlying source of this protest is addressed.

This protest model, however, is not backed by convincing evidence.³⁴ The fact that support for PEPs is heavily concentrated among specific social groups warns against an interpretation of these parties as by-products of political protest. If these were protest parties, then the profile of their supporters would be more diverse given that, as noted above, protest sentiment is scattered across society more widely. This is not to deny that PEP voters are politically dissatisfied, and tend to be more so than other voters. These supporters consistently express extremely

29 Danish Election Surveys, 1994–2007. See also S. Meret (2011), ‘From the Margins to the Mainstream? The Development of the Radical Right in Denmark’, in Langenbacher and Schellenberg (eds), *Is Europe on the “Right” Path?*

30 D. Oesch (2008), ‘Explaining Workers’ Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Evidence from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway and Switzerland’, *International Political Science Review*, 29(3), pp. 349–73.

31 J. A.J. Evans (2005), ‘The Dynamics of Social Change in Radical Right-Wing Populist Party Support’, *Comparative European Politics*, 3, pp. 76–101.

32 Ford and Goodwin, ‘Angry White Men’.

33 Norris, *Radical Right*, p. 257.

34 See most notably W. van der Brug, M. Fennema and J. Tillie (2000), ‘Anti-Immigrant Parties in Europe: Ideological or Protest Vote?’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 37(1), pp. 77–102; W. van der Brug and M. Fennema (2003), ‘Protest or Mainstream? How the European Anti-Immigrant Parties Developed into Two Separate Groups by 1999’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(1), pp. 55–76.

high levels of dissatisfaction with their political elites, and tend to be more distrustful than other voters of political institutions. However, these are not their most important motives for turning to PEPs.

Across Europe, there is now a large body of evidence that the most powerful predictor of who will support populist extremists is whether they are hostile to immigration. Citizens who endorse PEPs at elections are profoundly concerned about immigration and its effects: they either want it halted completely or the number of immigrants to be reduced drastically.

The critical importance of this anti-immigrant hostility to explaining support for PEPs has been demonstrated in numerous studies. One example is a comparative study that draws on the European Social Survey. It found that negative attitudes to immigrants, refugees and multiculturalism are the strongest predictors of who will support PEPs, even after controlling for social characteristics of respondents. It concluded that support

was typically stronger among people who believed that immigrants are an economic threat, by taking away jobs or depressing wages, that the nation's culture was undermined by foreigners, or that there should be restrictive policies toward refugees.³⁵

Other research that draws on the European Social Survey similarly concludes that, above all, these supporters want to see levels of immigration reduced. Compared with other citizens, PEP voters were significantly more likely to say their country should accept only a few immigrants: in Austria 93 per cent of PEP voters (versus 64 per cent overall); in Denmark 89 per cent (44 per cent); in France 82 per cent (44 per cent); in Belgium 76 per cent (41 per cent); in Norway 70 per cent (63 per cent); and in the Netherlands 63 per cent (39 per cent). In fact, fewer than 2.5 per cent of PEP voters across six countries wanted to see more immigration.³⁶ Analyses of other surveys have produced similar

findings: in Norway, large majorities of citizens who rated immigration as one of the most important issues facing the country also supported the FrP; in Britain, BNP voters similarly rated immigration as by far the most important issue facing the country; and in Denmark, since the 1990s over 70 per cent of DF voters have consistently expressed their view that immigration is threatening their national culture.³⁷

Given that PEP campaigns focus heavily on immigration, the dominance of concerns over this issue among their voters is perhaps not surprising. But what is less clear is the driver of these concerns. Are PEPs a reflection of lingering pockets of racism in European societies? Or are they a by-product of broader public scepticism about immigration? Also, to what extent do the concerns of their voters stem from actual or perceived group conflicts over economic and social resources (i.e. jobs, housing, etc.) or conflicts over national cultures and identities?

One attempt to answer these questions explored the concerns of PEP voters in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Norway.³⁸ The study sought to understand what *types* of anti-immigrant attitudes motivate support for these parties. Citizens were divided into three categories: *immigration sceptics* who are opposed to immigration and only want a few immigrants; *xenophobes* who object to having an immigrant boss or a relative marrying an immigrant; and *racists* who subscribe to the most strident forms of prejudice, such as wanting only white immigration. The study found that rather than traditional racism, it was opposition to immigration or only wanting to accept a few immigrants that were better predictors of who would support PEPs. This suggests that PEPs are mainly rallying citizens who think current immigration levels are too high, and are more dissatisfied than most with existing immigration policies. This study also found that the most effective PEP campaigns are those that associate immigrants with criminality and as posing a cultural rather than economic threat. In each of the six countries, citizens who

35 Norris, *Radical Right*, p. 260.

36 J. Rydgren (2008) 'Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists? Radical Right-Wing Voting in Six West European Countries', *European Journal of Political Research*, 47, pp. 737–65, p. 740.

37 Meret, 'From the Margins to the Mainstream?'; Ford and Goodwin, 'Angry White Men'.

38 Rydgren, 'Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists?.'

thought immigrants exacerbate crime and threaten national identity were significantly more likely to support populist extremists.³⁹ Yet not all of these parties have tapped into their wider potential. A similar study in Britain showed that rather than appealing to a larger number of immigration sceptics, the BNP has instead found its support restricted to much smaller numbers of traditional racists.⁴⁰

An additional question is why PEPs have proved so appealing among skilled and unskilled workers. Attempts to explain this put forward three competing arguments: (1) workers are responding to feelings of *economic* threat that are induced by insecure prospects and the fear of wage pressures because of immigration; (2) they are driven more strongly by feelings of *cultural* threat and the view that immigration threatens national identity; or (3) they are *socially alienated* and are turning to PEPs to express their dissatisfaction with established political channels.⁴¹ Consistent with those findings above, for workers across five countries, feelings of cultural threat and a desire to defend their national identity were a stronger motive than economic grievances: the decisive factor was not that immigrants were threatening jobs or income, but that national cultures and wider national communities were perceived to be under threat. The conclusion was that ‘cultural questions of identity are more important than economic questions of resources.’⁴²

In the world of populist extremists, these questions of culture and identity are increasingly linked to negative views of Muslims and Islam. The growing importance of anti-Muslim sentiment as a driver of support for PEPs is reflected in the attitudinal profile of their supporters. In countries such as Britain, it has been shown how levels of racial hostility tend to be higher in areas that are close to large Muslim communities.⁴³ There is also evidence that support for PEPs is higher in areas where there are large Muslim communities of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage

but tends to be *lower* than average in areas where there are large numbers of Black Britons or non-Muslim Asians.⁴⁴ Similar findings emerge in Belgium, where support for PEPs has been shown to be positively associated with the presence of large Muslim communities (a relationship that does not hold for the presence of other minority groups).⁴⁵

The increasing importance of anti-Muslim sentiment is also reflected in surveys of individual voters. In Denmark, for example, PEP voters have become increasingly hostile towards this specific minority group: in 1994, 35 per cent of Danish PEP voters endorsed the view that Muslims were threatening national security; by 2007 the figure had risen to 81 per cent (as opposed to 21 per cent of all voters).⁴⁶ Similarly, while supporters of PEPs in Britain are more likely than other voters to endorse a range of anti-immigrant statements, they are also twice as likely as the average voter to consider Islam a danger to Western civilization (see Table 1).

Table 1: Attitudes of BNP voters

	BNP	Overall
Employers should favour whites	47	12
Non-whites are not really British	45	11
Blacks are intellectually inferior	31	13
No benefits from immigration	82	35
Immigration the most important issue	88	46
No economic benefits of immigration	85	44
Immigrants should leave the country	72	24
Immigration should be halted	95	55
Islam is a danger to Western civilization	81	42

Source: D. Cutts, R. Ford and M.J. Goodwin (2011), ‘Anti-Immigrant, Politically Disaffected or Still Racist After All? Examining the Attitudinal Drivers of Extreme Right Support in Britain in the 2009 European Elections’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 50(3), pp. 418–40.

39 Ibid.

40 D. Cutts, R. Ford and M.J. Goodwin (2011), ‘Anti-Immigrant, Politically Disaffected or Still Racist After All? Examining the Attitudinal Drivers of Extreme Right Support in Britain in the 2009 European Elections’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 50(3), pp. 418–40.

41 Oesch, ‘Explaining Workers’ Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe.’

42 Ibid., p. 370.

43 B.T. Bowyer (2009), ‘The Contextual Determinants of Whites’ Racial Attitudes in England’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 39, pp. 559–86.

44 Ford and Goodwin, ‘Angry White Men’.

45 H. Coffé, B. Heyndels and J. Vermeir (2007), ‘Fertile Grounds for Extreme Right-Wing Parties: Explaining the Vlaams Blok’s Electoral Success’, *Electoral Studies*, 26, pp. 142–55.

46 Meret, ‘From the Margins to the Mainstream?’

Conclusion

European PEPs are not drawing support from across societies and are far from being 'catch-all' parties. Their supporters share a distinct profile, revealing that the strength of PEPs is heavily concentrated among particular social groups: the lower-middle classes and skilled or unskilled working-class men, citizens who lack formal qualifications and are economically insecure. These are not simply protest voters, nor should they be dismissed as merely the losers of

globalization. Rather, they are an ideologically motivated group guided by clear political goals: they are profoundly concerned about immigration and rising ethnic and cultural diversity, and they feel threatened by immigrants and Muslims. These feelings of threat do not stem simply from economic grievances, such as competition over scarce goods like jobs and social housing. More accurately, they appear to stem from a belief that immigrants, minority groups and rising cultural diversity are threatening the national culture, community and way of life.

3. The Populist Extremist Message and its Potential

Populist extremist parties offer European citizens a distinct set of ideas and policies. The similarities between them reflect their underlying core ideological features. Identifying these features is an important prerequisite to developing a stronger understanding of these parties and, over the longer term, a more effective response. Yet rather than examining the ideological message in isolation, this chapter also explores the extent to which citizens are potentially receptive to it. By investigating public attitudes to immigration, Muslim communities and levels of political dissatisfaction, it shows how PEPs are operating in a favourable climate. Rather than being restricted to a fringe minority, support for some of their core ideas appears relatively widespread across European societies. This chapter starts by considering the core aspects of the PEP message, and then draws on recent survey data to investigate whether these parties are operating in a wider pool of potential support.

The ideological message

There is considerable debate about how to define PEPs. They appear similar but in some respects they also seem the ‘same but different’: while some are rooted in explicitly

fascist and anti-democratic currents, others demand *more* democracy and the protection of individual rights; while some support the free market, others advocate economic self-sufficiency and nationalization; and while some target immigrants and Muslims, PEPs in Central and Eastern Europe devote more energy to mobilizing public hostility towards Jews, the Roma and the European Union (EU).

These variations have led analysts to distinguish between different ‘types’ of PEPs. Some draw a straightforward distinction between PEPs that remain wedded to interwar fascism and those that eschew this tradition. Others divide PEPs on the basis of their attitudes towards immigration, economic policies and liberal representative democracy. These parties are subsequently divided into five ‘sub-types’: neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, authoritarian xenophobic, neo-liberal xenophobic, and neo-liberal populist. Still others divide them according to whether they are racist, ethno-centrist, fascist, populist authoritarian or religious fundamentalist.⁴⁷

These distinctions are important, but essentially PEPs share two core features: they reject the principle of human equality and hence are hostile towards immigrants, minority groups and rising ethnic and cultural diversity; and they adhere to a populist anti-establishment strategy. In terms of the first, PEPs are commonly associated with the immigration debate. In fact, one large-scale study concluded that ‘the appeal on immigration is the only issue that unites all successful populist right parties.’⁴⁸ The heavy preoccupation with this issue has led some to define PEPs as ‘anti-immigrant parties’, on the basis that immigration is their chief concern or is considered by other parties to be so.⁴⁹ However, two points warn against adopting this restrictive approach.

The first is that, particularly since 9/11, PEPs have expanded their anti-immigrant campaigns to include a more specific form of hostility towards settled Muslim communities. Muslims are framed as a distinct cultural threat to European societies, and as subscribing to values that are incompatible with Western liberal democracy. The second point is that while PEPs are certainly ‘anti-immigrant’, this description applies less well across Central and

47 Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*. On the distinction between old and new parties see for example P. Ignazi (2003), *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

48 E. Ivarsson (2010), ‘What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-Examining Grievance Mobilisation Models in Seven Successful Cases’, *Comparative Political Studies* 41, pp. 3–23, p. 3.

49 M. Fennema (1997), ‘Some Conceptual Issues and Problems in the Comparison of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe’, *Party Politics*, 3(4), pp. 473–92.

East European countries that have had a different experience with immigration. On the whole, this issue has been less salient within these regions and though PEPs there have similarly advocated a right-wing nationalist ideology, more effort has been devoted to mobilizing anti-Semitic and anti-Roma sentiments.⁵⁰

These differences have led some to emphasize ideological features that can travel across European regions, such as nativism ‘which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state.’⁵¹ While the targets of nativist campaigns vary from one country to the next, PEPs are united in their framing of minority groups as in some way threatening to the majority. The political sociologist Jens Rydgren has similarly argued that these parties share a core of ‘ethno-nationalist xenophobia’ that is combined with anti-establishment populism. PEPs are ethno-nationalist and xenophobic because they seek to strengthen the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous, to return to traditional values and to remove ‘threatening’ groups from society.⁵² Underlying this outlook is a firm rejection of the principle of human equality, a feature that differentiates these right-wing parties from their extreme left-wing counterparts. This leads some (but not all) PEPs to emphasize the importance of a primordial belonging to an original ethnic group, and to trace differences between groups (i.e. their levels of intelligence or propensity to commit crime) to ancestry and race.

While all PEPs reject human equality, some also subscribe to a more strident form of *biological* racism that

is arguably more prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe. Seen from this perspective, minority groups are considered not only threatening but also biologically inferior to the majority group. Opposition to these groups is framed on the basis of wanting to protect the racial purity of the majority group, a crude form of racism that is often combined with anti-Semitic claims, such as that secretive Jewish-led groups control international relations or that the events of the Holocaust have been exaggerated.

Increasingly, however, this biological racism is becoming socially unacceptable among European populations.⁵³ As a consequence, the most successful PEPs have steered clear of this discourse in favour of framing minority groups as a cultural as opposed to racial threat.⁵⁴ Although PEPs may still exhibit biological racism among an inner circle of followers (the ‘back-stage’), in the quest for votes (the ‘front-stage’) these arguments are downplayed in favour of claims that minority groups are culturally threatening and incompatible with Western values and societies.

These arguments do not focus simply on economic grievance. Recent research has shown that PEPs frame minority groups as threatening in several ways, namely as (1) a threat to national identity, (2) a threat to social order, (3) as a threat to economic stability and (4) a burden on public services and the welfare state.⁵⁵ Particular emphasis, however, is placed on the threat that immigrants and minority groups present to national culture, the national community and ways of life. One example is Norway, where in the 1980s PEPs typically framed opposition to immigration along economic lines. In more recent years, however, this discourse has increasingly embraced a cultural dimension.⁵⁶

50 W. van der Brug and M. Fennema, ‘The Support Base of Radical Right Parties in the Enlarged European Union’, paper prepared for the EES Spring Meeting 2006 on ‘The European Parliament Election of 2004’, Lisbon, 11–14 May 2006.

51 C. Mudde (2011), ‘The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy’, *West European Politics* 33(6), pp. 1167–86.

52 J. Rydgren (2007), ‘The Sociology of the Radical Right’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33, pp. 241–62; see also Rydgren, ‘Is Extreme Right-Wing Populism Contagious?’

53 See R. Ford (2008), ‘Is Racial Prejudice Declining in Britain’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 59(4), pp. 609–36.

54 Carter, *The Extreme Right in Europe: Success or Failure?*; A. Cole (2005), ‘Old Right or New Right? The Ideological Positioning of Parties of the Far Right’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 44(1), pp. 203–30; M. Golder (2003), ‘Explaining Variation in the Success of Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(4), pp. 432–66; Kitschelt with McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*.

55 J. Rydgren (2003), ‘Meso Level Reasons for Racism and Xenophobia: Some Converging and Diverging Effects of Radical Right Populism in France and Sweden’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 6(1), pp. 45–68; A. Zaslove (2004), ‘The Dark Side of European Politics: Unmasking the Radical Right’, *European Integration*, 26(1), pp. 61–81. More active supporters of PEPs go further, interpreting their involvement as an attempt to defend their wider group from the threat of racial extinction. See B. Klandermans and N. Mayer (eds) (2005), *Through the Magnifying Glass: Extreme Right Activists in Western Europe* (London & New York: Routledge); also Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party*.

56 T. Bjorklund (2011), ‘The Radical Right in Norway: The Development of the Progress Party’, in Langenbacher and Schellenberg, *Is Europe on the ‘Right’ Path?*

The second core feature of these parties is their populist anti-establishment strategy. Few PEPs call for the overthrow of democracy, but most adhere to a populist strategy that undermines the pillars of liberal democratic and pluralist societies. Mainstream parties are lumped into a single ‘corrupt’ and ‘out-of-touch’ elite and are ‘all the same’. They are attacked ‘for focusing on obsolete issues, while at the same time suppressing political issues associated with the real conflict between national identity and multiculturalism’.⁵⁷ In contrast, PEPs portray themselves as outsiders in the party system, as underdog parties that represent the true voice of a ‘silent majority’, and as the only organizations willing to address sensitive issues such as immigration and the integration of Muslims. This populist strategy dichotomizes issues into good and evil, and attempts to position the majority against minority groups on sensitive issues such as asylum and integration. It also seeks to repress difference and remove dissenting voices, thereby undermining the notions of bargaining and compromise that are integral to pluralist and democratic societies.⁵⁸

In summary, by shifting away from crude biological racism and openly anti-democratic stances, the most successful PEPs have targeted citizens who are concerned about immigration, culturally distinct minority communities and rising cultural diversity, and who are also dissatisfied with the performance of the main parties and their existing political options. But to what extent are citizens across Europe potentially receptive to this message?

The wider potential

Broader trends have produced a favourable climate for PEPs and their exclusionary campaigns.⁵⁹ This section

explores this climate by drawing on a range of survey and polling data. Building on the discussion of the PEP message, three areas are investigated: (1) public attitudes to immigration, (2) public attitudes towards settled Muslim communities, and (3) levels of political dissatisfaction with the functioning of national political systems and mainstream parties.

Anti-immigrant and racist attitudes

Anti-immigration sentiment is relatively widespread across Europe.⁶⁰ In fact, citizens have long made clear their anxiety about immigration and its impact on society. One example was a Europe-wide survey in the mid-to-late 1990s suggesting that almost two-thirds of respondents felt their country had ‘reached its limits’ in terms of the number of immigrants. Around one-fifth of citizens went further, expressing support for ‘wholesale repatriation’, whereby all immigrants from outside the EU and their children (whether legal or illegal, and whether born in Europe or not) would be sent back to their country of origin.⁶¹

Evidence has continued to emerge since then about the extent to which citizens remain concerned about this issue. Since 2003, for example, significant numbers have consistently ranked immigration as one of the two most important issues facing their country (peaking at 21 per cent in 2006; see Figure 2). Nor has this public concern over immigration been fleeting in nature, or remained disconnected from decisions at the ballot box. According to one survey in 2010, almost 70 per cent of citizens follow news about immigration and integration ‘closely’ while almost half said their vote choice would be influenced by parties’ policies on immigration.⁶²

57 Rydgren, ‘The Sociology of the Radical Right’, p. 246. On populism see P. Taggart (2000), *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press); D. Canovan (1999), ‘Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy’, *Political Studies*, 42, pp. 2–16.

58 S.M. Lipset and E. Raab (1971), *The Politics of Unreason: Right-wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* (London: Heinemann), p. 5; see also R. Eatwell and M.J. Goodwin (2010), ‘Introduction’, in Eatwell and Goodwin, *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain* (London & New York: Routledge), pp. 1–20.

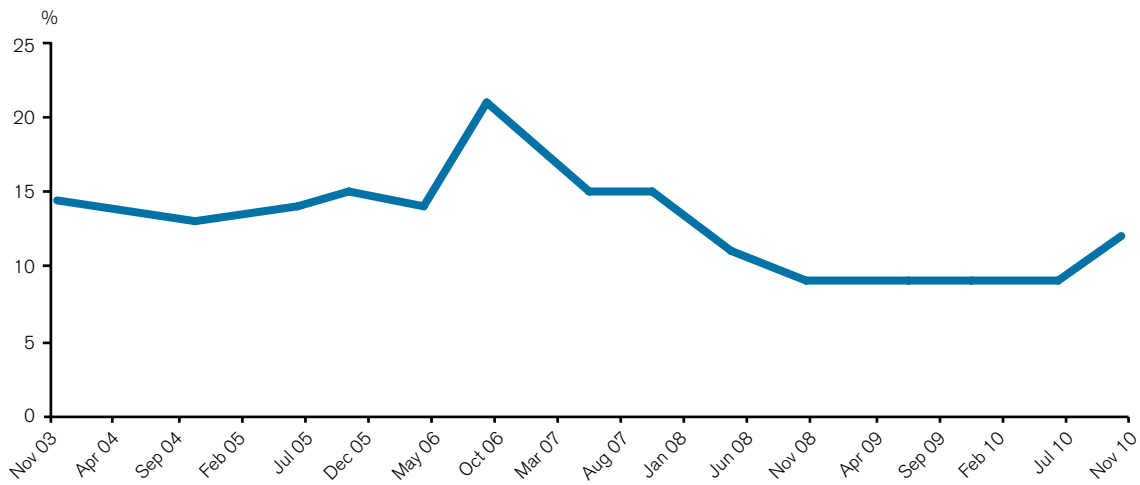
59 R. Ford (2010), ‘Who Might Vote for the BNP? Survey Evidence on the Electoral Potential of the Extreme Right in Britain’, in Eatwell and Goodwin (eds), *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain*; Mudde (2011), ‘The Populist Radical Right’.

60 For evidence on anti-immigration sentiment see L. McLaren and M. Johnson (2007), ‘Resources, Group Conflict and Symbols: Explaining Anti-Immigration Hostility in Britain’, *Political Studies*, 55(4), pp. 709–32; Ivarsflaten, ‘Threatened by Diversity’; S. L. Schneider (2008), ‘Anti-Immigrant Attitudes in Europe: Outgroup Size and Perceived Ethnic Threat’, *European Sociological Review*, 24(1), pp. 53–67.

61 Eurobarometer Survey data obtained from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm (accessed during July and August 2011).

62 This was especially the case in Britain, where 63 per cent of citizens said they would take these policies into account. *Transatlantic Trends Survey*, 2010.

Figure 2: Perceived importance of immigration in EU states, 2003–10

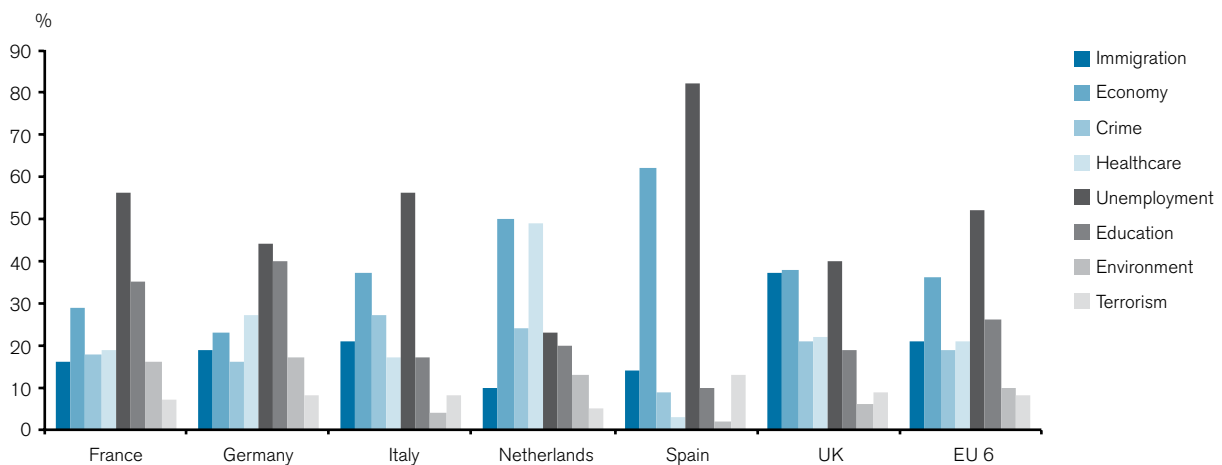


Note: Respondents were asked: 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing (our country) at the moment?'
 Source: Eurobarometer surveys, 2003–10

Figure 3 provides further insight into how levels of public concern over immigration compare across Europe. Given that this particular survey was undertaken in the aftermath of the financial crisis, it is not surprising that the economy and unemployment dominate the list of public concerns. However, even in this climate more than one-fifth of citizens considered immigration one of the two most important issues facing their country. The highest figure, 37 per cent, was recorded in Britain.

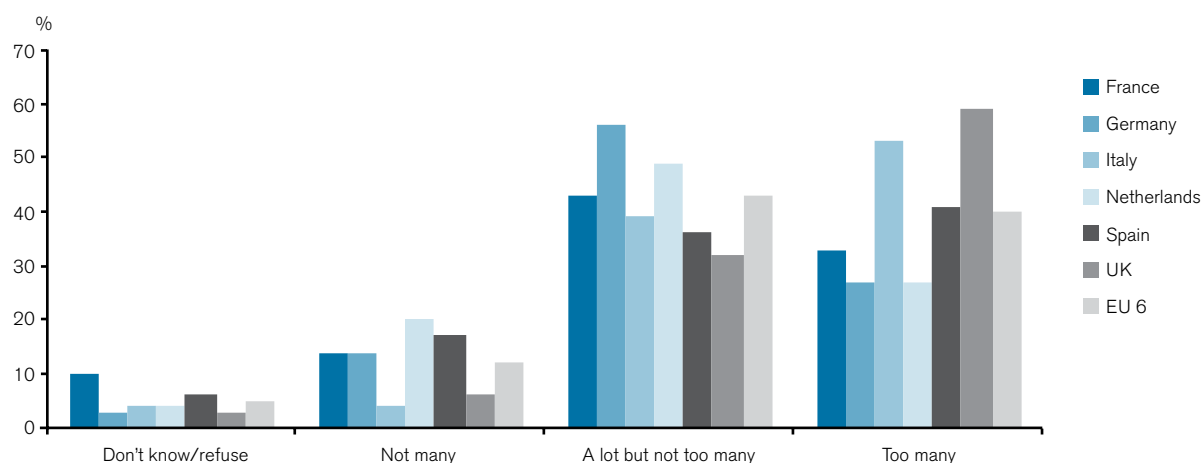
Immigration was not the main concern for these voters, but when they were specifically asked about this issue large numbers expressed negative attitudes. Between one-quarter and three-fifths of these respondents felt there were too many immigrants in their country (see Figure 4). While the British (59 per cent) and Italians (53 per cent) were most likely to hold this view, 40 per cent all respondents felt there were too many immigrants in their countries.

Figure 3: Two most important issues facing the country, 2010



Note: Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following do you see as the most important issue facing (country) today? And what is the next most important issue?'
 Source: Transatlantic Trends Topline Data 2010.

Figure 4: Feelings about number of immigrants, 2010



Note: Respondents were asked: 'Generally speaking, how do you feel about the number of people living in (country) who were not born in (country)? Are there too many, a lot but not too many, or not many?'

Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2010.

Further evidence about the scale of this concern was revealed in one survey undertaken across eight countries: Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal. It measured anti-immigrant attitudes on the basis of four statements: there are too many immigrants, one feels like a stranger in one's own country, there is competition between groups over jobs, and immigrants enrich national culture. Though large numbers of respondents saw immigrants as enriching national cultures, the survey found that approximately half thought there were too many immigrants in their country and that jobs should be given to locals when work is scarce, and about one-third felt like a stranger in their own country.⁶³

Similar findings have emerged in other countries, such as Switzerland, where one survey suggested over half of the population were sceptical that a compromise could be achieved with migrants from different cultural backgrounds. It also revealed a rise in anti-immigration sentiment among Swiss voters. Whereas in 1994, 33 per cent of citizens thought the proportion of foreigners should be reduced, by 1997 the figure had risen to 46 per cent, and in 2006, 59 per cent of respondents took the view that immigration had reached its limit. According to the same survey, 43 per cent thought foreigners were exploiting the welfare state.⁶⁴

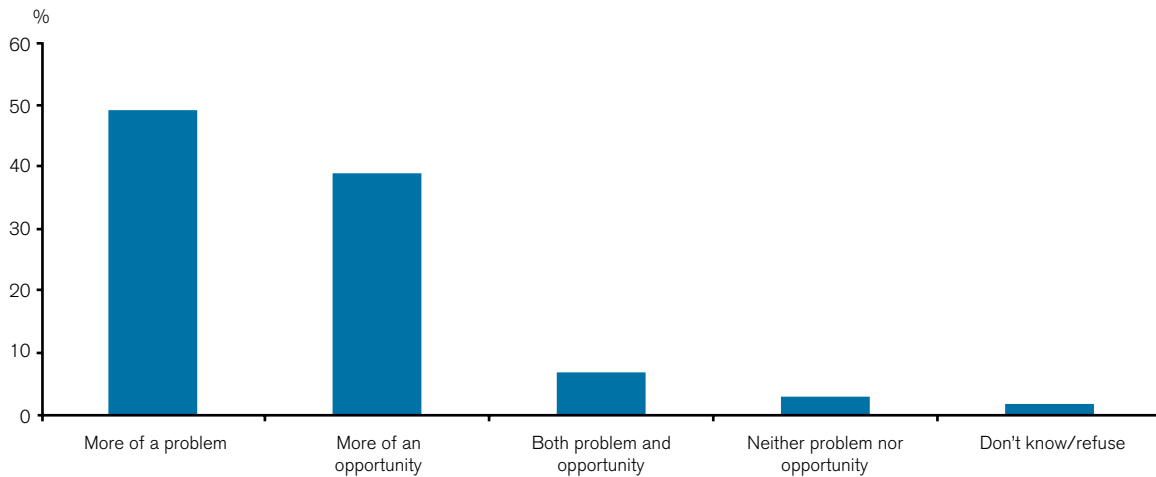
European political elites have often sought to respond to these anxieties by framing immigration as an economic benefit. The evidence, however, suggests that large numbers of citizens are deeply unconvinced. As highlighted in Figure 5, citizens are more likely to view immigration as a problem than as an opportunity for their country. In fact, the proportion labelling immigration as problematic was ten percentage points higher.

As noted in Chapter 1, PEPs frame immigrants as a threat to social order, economic resources and social services. But to what extent are these views also shared by large numbers of citizens? Table 2 sheds light on this question by revealing public attitudes towards legal and illegal immigration. Consistent with the claims of PEPs, in most countries majorities of citizens saw illegal immigrants as a burden on social services and as a cause of crime. Furthermore, large portions of these electorates – between 29 and 56 per cent – saw *legal* immigrants as a burden on services and a cause of crime. More generally, between one-quarter and three-fifths endorsed the notion that immigrants take jobs away from the native population, and between one-quarter and one-half thought immigrants bring down wages.

63 A. Zick, B. Küpper, A. Hövermann (2011), *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination: A European Report* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung).

64 D. Skenderovic, 'Transformations and "Direct" Success on the Right-Wing Fringe'.

Figure 5: Public perceptions of whether immigration represents a problem or an opportunity



Note: Respondents were asked: 'Some people say that immigration is more of a problem for (country). Others see it as more of an opportunity for (country). Which comes closer to your point of view?' Figures represent the average across six EU states.
Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2010.

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret these perceptions of economic threat as the main driver of public hostility to immigration. Similar to the evidence on actual PEP voters, across Europe there is now convincing evidence that while economic grievances are important in explaining why some citizens hold negative attitudes on immigration, they are not the most powerful driver. Instead, the evidence points clearly to the conclusion that perceptions of *cultural* threat (i.e. that immigrants and minority groups threaten national cultures, national communities and ways of life) are the most important

driver. One example is a study that investigated hostility to immigration across 18 countries. It found that, overall, concerns about cultural unity were nine times more important than concerns about crime, and five times more important than concerns about the national economy.⁶⁵

These findings have been echoed in other studies. One comparative study found that the feeling of having to protect one's national culture from other cultures predominated in each of the countries under investigation – 78 per cent of Hungarians, 70 per cent of Portuguese and 69 per cent of Poles said their own culture should be protected from the influence

Table 2: Attitudes towards legal and illegal immigration

	EU 6	Britain	France	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	Spain
Legal immigrants are a burden on social services	40	47	48	29	44	42	35
Illegal immigrants are a burden on social services	58	76	62	48	47	52	71
Legal immigrants increase crime in society	42	33	40	46	56	46	29
Illegal immigrants increase crime in society	61	63	55	63	57	65	70
Immigrants take jobs from native born	35	57	36	26	29	25	38
Immigrants bring down wages of citizens	44	52	42	39	44	24	53

Note: Figures represent the percentage of respondents who either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statement.
Source: Transatlantic Trends Topline Data 2010.

65 Ivarsflaten, 'Threatened by Diversity'.

of other cultures.⁶⁶ Findings from another study presented in Figure 6 similarly highlight how large numbers of citizens across Europe share the view that new customs and ideas introduced by immigrants are having a negative impact on national cultures. This view was most prominent in Britain, the only country where respondents were more likely to think immigrants are having a negative rather than positive cultural impact.⁶⁷

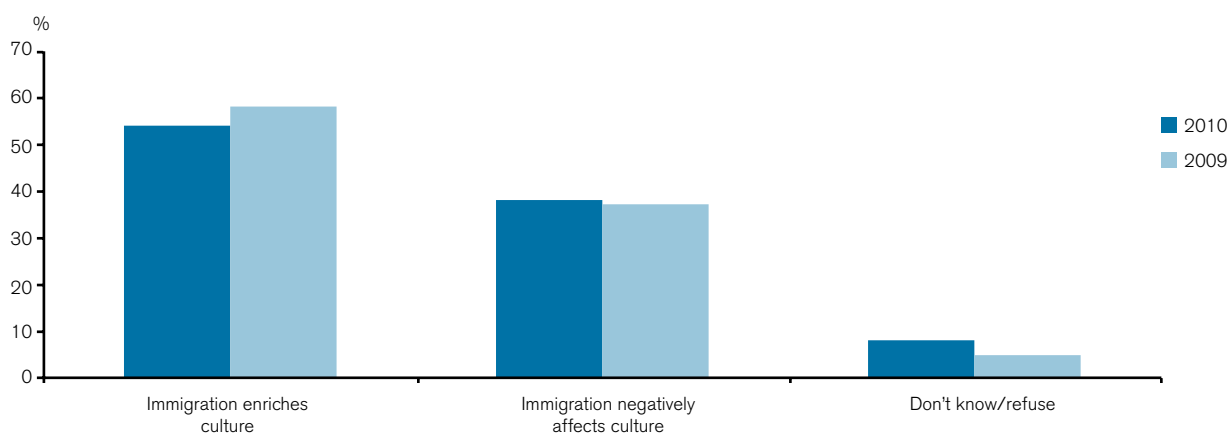
In summary, the evidence reveals how large sections of European electorates are concerned about immigration, though especially its impact on their national cultures and identities. It is important to note, however, that while anti-immigration sentiment appears relatively widespread, levels of public support for ‘traditional’ and more strident forms of racism appear to be in decline. Recent research suggests that a steep generational decline is taking place in levels of support for traditional racial prejudice.⁶⁸ Unlike older generations, young citizens today are increasingly less likely to endorse overtly racist sentiments or actions, such as employers only hiring white employees. There are, however, some important regional variations.

According to one study that compares public attitudes towards race, immigration and minority groups across eight countries, citizens in Central and East European states such as Hungary and Poland were more likely than those in

Western Europe to endorse overtly racist views.⁶⁹ Whereas around two-fifths of Poles and Hungarians agreed there is a ‘natural hierarchy between black and white people’, only one-third of Dutch respondents and one-fifth of Italians held this view. Whereas 30 per cent of Hungarians and 24 per cent of Poles felt blacks and whites should not intermarry, levels of support for this statement in Western Europe were significantly lower (10 per cent in Britain, 8 per cent in Italy and 5 per cent in the Netherlands). Similarly, whereas over 50 per cent of Polish and Hungarian respondents felt that ‘some races are more gifted than others’, only around one-quarter of the British and French felt this way.

These variations similarly apply to anti-Semitism and homophobia, which tend to feature more heavily in the manifestoes and literature of PEPs across Central and Eastern Europe. For example, almost 90 per cent of Poles and two-thirds of Hungarian respondents rejected same-sex civil partnerships whereas these figures in Germany and the Netherlands were 39 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. Similarly, while large majorities of respondents in Poland (over three-quarters) and Hungary (two-thirds) saw homosexuality as immoral, in West European countries this sentiment was shared by between 36 and 44 per cent.

Figure 6: Public attitudes towards the cultural impact of immigration



Note: Respondents were asked: ‘Some people think that immigration enriches (nationality) culture with new customs and ideas. Others think that these new customs and ideas negatively affect (nationality) culture. Which comes closer to your point of view?’ The figures represent the average across France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.

Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2010.

66 Zick et al., *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination*.

67 In Britain, 45 per cent of respondents perceived immigration as enriching their national culture, while 48 per cent perceived it to be negatively affecting their culture. The average across six EU member states was 54 per cent (enriching) versus 38 per cent (negatively affecting, Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2010).

68 Ford, ‘Is Racial Prejudice Declining in Britain?’

69 Zick et al., *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination*.

Anti-Muslim sentiment

A second area of potential for PEPs is a more specific form of hostility towards already settled Muslim communities. Since 9/11, PEPs have devoted more effort to mobilizing public anxiety over the presence and perceived integration of Muslims across European societies. These campaigns frame Muslims as a distinct threat to social order, as subscribing to values that are incompatible with Western societies and as unable or unwilling to integrate into wider society. To what extent are these views shared among European electorates?

There is no question that significant numbers of citizens are anxious about these issues. According to the most recent Pew Attitudes survey in 2011, the percentage of citizens expressing positive views towards Muslims was 64 per cent in Britain and France, 45 per cent in Germany and 37 per cent in Spain.⁷⁰ Richer insight has been provided by a study of public attitudes towards Muslims across eight countries.⁷¹ It similarly found significant levels of anti-Muslim sentiment: in most of the countries, majorities thought of Islam as a religion of intolerance and Muslims as being ‘too demanding’. There was also considerable concern about

the presence of this minority group: over 40 per cent of respondents in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland said there were too many Muslims in their country (the highest figure of 60 per cent was recorded in Hungary). The study’s conclusion was that ‘Europeans are largely united in their rejection of Muslims and Islam’.

Aside from these comparative studies, research in individual countries produces similar results. As above, these point towards the particular importance of concerns over perceived cultural conflicts. One poll in Britain in 2002 suggested that over half of the population thought their values had little or nothing in common with those of British Muslims; one-third rejected the suggestion that Muslims play a valuable role in society; and one-quarter said it was not possible for Islamic and Western values to coexist peacefully.⁷² In the following year’s British Social Attitudes survey, three-fifths of respondents answered that Muslims were more loyal to other Muslims around the world than to their fellow British citizens, over half answered that Britain would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims settled and one-quarter said they would feel unhappy if a relative

Table 3: Attitudes towards Muslims across eight states

	Germany	Britain	France	Netherlands	Italy	Poland	Portugal	Hungary
Too many Muslims in the country	46.1	44.7	36.2	41.5	49.7	47.1	27.1	60.7
Muslims are too demanding	54.1	50.0	52.8	51.8	64.7	62.3	34.4	60.0
Islam is religion of intolerance	52.5	47.2	52.3*	46.7	60.4	61.5	62.2	53.4
Muslim culture fits well into country/Europe	16.6	39.0	49.8	38.7	27.4	19.0	50.1	30.2
Muslims' attitudes towards women contradict our values	76.1	81.5	78.8	78.2	82.2	72.1	72.1	76.8
Many Muslims perceive terrorists as heroes	27.9	37.6	–	29.2	28.5	30.2	30.3	39.3
Majority of Muslims find terrorism justifiable	17.1	26.3	23.3*	19.9	21.5	26.0	22.4	29.6

Note: In France, the statements were formulated positively and subsequently reverse coded. In these cases the value for France is the percentage of respondents who ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ disagreed with the statement.

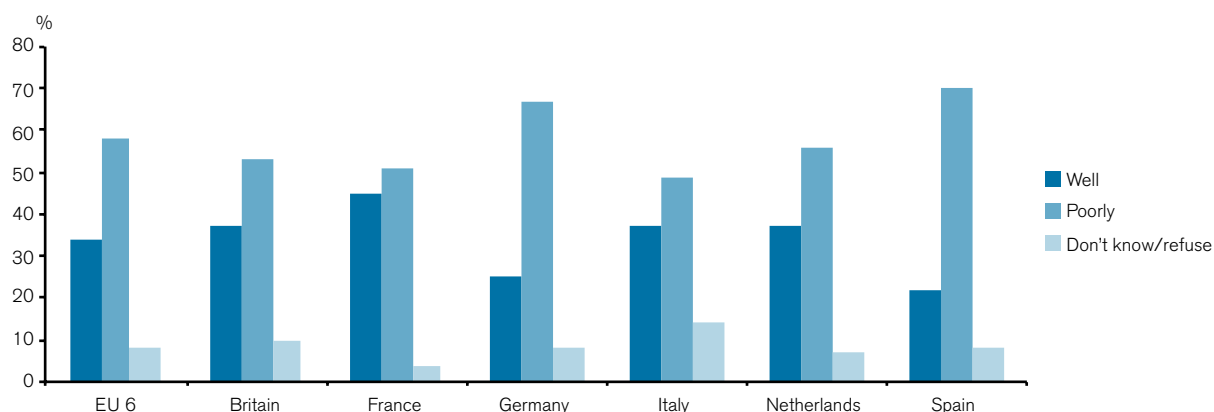
Source: A. Zick, B. Küpper, A. Hövermann (2011), *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination: A European Report* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung).

70 The specific percentages of respondents who considered relations to be bad/poor were 62 per cent in France, 61 per cent in Germany, 58 per cent in Spain and 52 per cent in Britain. Available online: <http://pewglobal.org/2011/07/21/muslim-western-tensions-persist/> (accessed 20 August 2011).

71 Zick et al., *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination*.

72 ‘Attitudes towards British Muslims: A Survey Commissioned by the Islamic Society of Britain and Conducted by YouGov’, November 2002. YouGov questioned a representative sample of 1,890 electors throughout Britain on 31 October–1 November 2001.

Figure 7: Public perceptions of Muslim integration in wider society



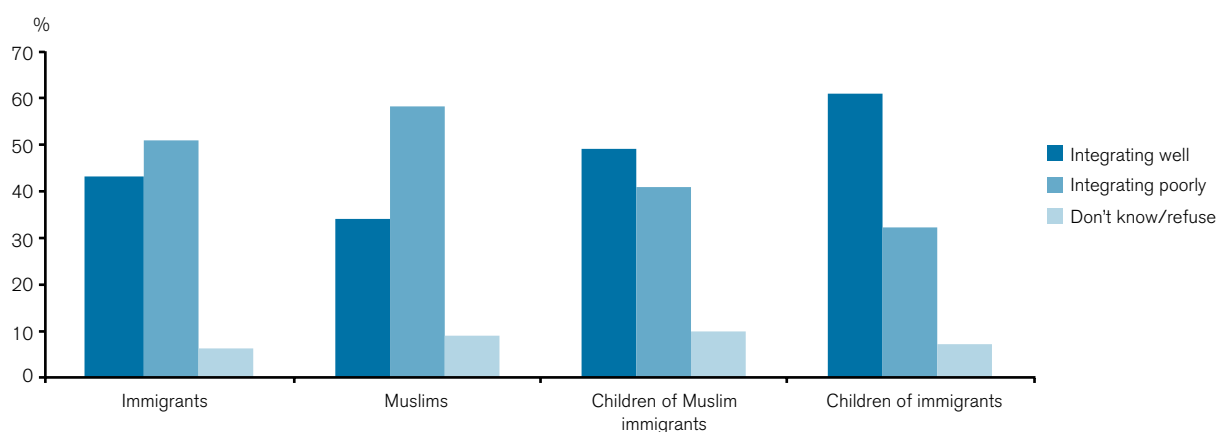
Note: Respondents were asked: 'Generally speaking, how well do you think that Muslim immigrants are integrating into (nationality) society?' Figures for 'very well' and 'well' have been rounded, as have those for 'poorly' and 'very poorly'.
Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2010.

married a Muslim.⁷³ Similar pictures emerge in countries such as Denmark, where one poll showed that over half of the population thought of Islam as a threat to national unity.⁷⁴

These concerns over the compatibility of Muslims extend to the issue of integration. To return to the Pew Attitudes survey, when asked whether Muslims want to adopt customs or remain culturally distinct, majorities of European populations

selected the latter: 72 per cent of Germans, 69 per cent of Spaniards, 54 per cent of French and 52 per cent of the British said Muslims want to remain distinct.⁷⁵ There is additional evidence of public sympathy for the claim that Muslims are unable or unwilling to integrate into society. As highlighted in Figure 7, almost three-fifths of respondents across six EU states thought Muslims were poorly integrated.

Figure 8: Public perceptions of Muslim and immigrant integration in six EU states



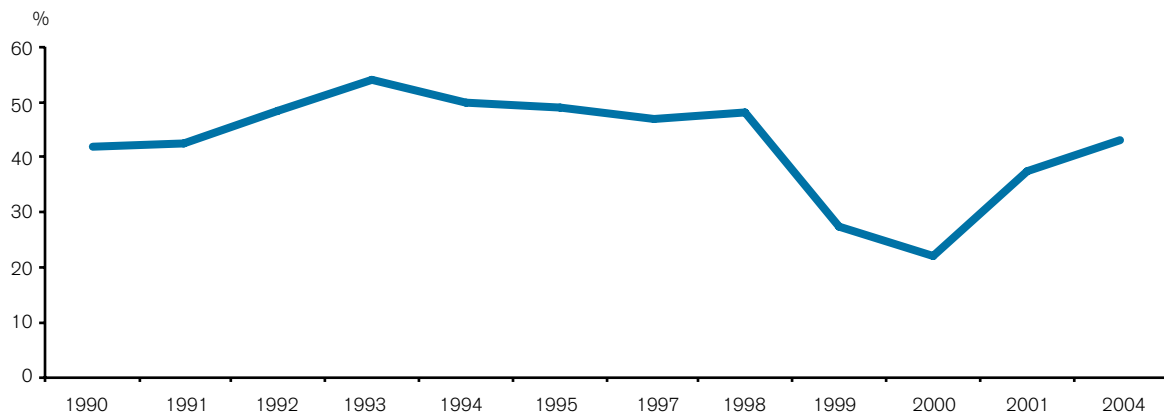
Note: Respondents were asked: 'Generally speaking, how well do you think that immigrants are integrating into (nationality) society (one answer only)?' Then: 'And what about the children of Muslim immigrants who were born in (country)? How well do you think they are integrated into (nationality) society (one answer only)?'
Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2010.

73 For further discussion of these data see McLaren and Johnson, 'Resources, Group Conflict and Symbols'. Also L. McLaren, D. Cutts and M.J. Goodwin (2011), 'What Drives Anti-Muslim Sentiment? A Test of Rival Theories', paper presented at the annual meeting of the European Consortium for Political Research, Iceland, August.

74 'Immigration and Islam divide the Danes', *Politiken*, 17.08.2010, <http://politiken.dk/indland/article1038188.ece> (accessed 20 August 2011).

75 Pew Global Attitudes survey data. Available online: <http://pewglobal.org/2011/07/21/muslim-western-tensions-persist/> (accessed August and September 2011).

Figure 9: Public dissatisfaction with functioning of national democracy



Note: Respondents were asked: 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (country)?' In this case, 'not very satisfied' and 'not at all satisfied' have been collapsed into one category. Cases: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, UK.
Source: Eurobarometer survey data, 1990–2004.

This survey also asked citizens how well they thought the *children* of immigrants and of Muslim immigrants in particular were integrating. Seen from one perspective, the results support those above in suggesting that large numbers of citizens (41 per cent) think Muslim youths are integrating poorly, and are more poorly integrated than the children of immigrants. However, seen from another perspective they point to a positive trend as, on the whole, respondents were more likely to view Muslim and immigrant youths as better integrated than older generations. That said, there remain high levels of public concern about the integration of this minority group.

Political dissatisfaction

The third area of potential for PEPs concerns levels of political dissatisfaction among European electorates. Although most citizens in Europe support democracy as a form of government, large numbers are dissatisfied with the way their national democracy is functioning and distrustful of institutions in society. As shown in Figure 9, between 1990 and 2004 large numbers of citizens expressed significant levels of dissatisfaction with the functioning of their national democracy.

Large numbers of citizens remained consistently distrustful of a range of political institutions in society: over the period 2003–11, upwards of 75 per cent were distrustful of political parties; around 60 per cent were distrustful of their national government; and between 50 and 60 per cent distrusted their national parliament.⁷⁶

Beyond political dissatisfaction *per se* is evidence of a more specific opportunity for populist extremists. At election time, citizens shift behind the party they think is most competent on the issue that they care the most about,⁷⁷ and there are good reasons to think this approach extends to immigration. While this has become an increasingly important issue to voters, large numbers also voice their dissatisfaction with the performance of mainstream parties on immigration and integration issues. In Britain, for example, between 1997 and 2010, large majorities of voters consistently rejected the suggestion that Labour was controlling immigration and asylum-seeking, making progress in this area, or being open and honest about the numbers of immigrants entering the country. At the 2010 general election, eight out of every ten voters rejected the suggestion that, after 13 years in power, Labour had developed sensible policies on these issues, while seven out of ten thought Labour managed them

⁷⁶ These data are taken from the Eurobarometer survey. Available online: <http://www.ec.europa.eu> (accessed 15 August 2011).

⁷⁷ H.D. Clarke, D. Sanders, M.C. Stewart and P.F. Whiteley, *Performance Politics and the British Voter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 306. On dissatisfaction among British voters see also R. Ford and W. Somerville (2010), 'Immigration and the 2010 General Election: More than Meets the Eye', in T. Finch and D. Goodhart (eds), *Immigration under Labour* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research), pp.10–14.

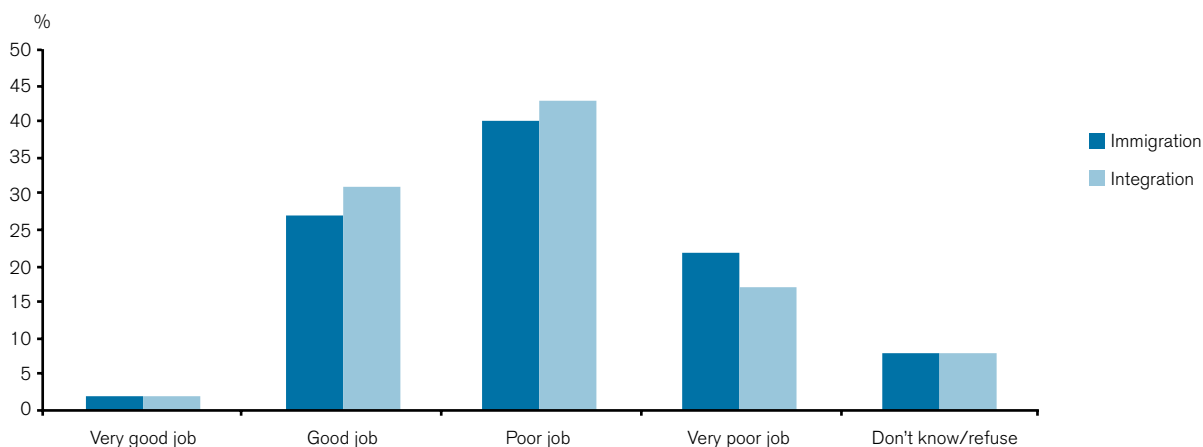
badly.⁷⁸ The results were much the same across Europe. According to a comparative survey in 2006, the percentage of voters who were confident in the ability of their government to integrate foreign populations was only 45 per cent in Spain, 37 per cent in France, 34 per cent in Germany, 32 per cent in Italy and 25 per cent in Britain.⁷⁹ A similar picture emerged in 2010, when voters in six EU states were asked their views about their government’s performance on immigration and integration. As shown in Figure 10, clear majorities thought they were performing poorly on both counts. While there is considerable public concern over immigration-related issues, there are also high levels of dissatisfaction with the way in which the mainstream parties are responding to this concern.

Conclusion

Populist extremist parties offer citizens a distinct set of ideas and policies. They are opposed to immigration, settled

Muslim communities and rising ethnic and cultural diversity, and they are hostile towards the established political mainstream. Their two core features lead PEPs to target citizens who are concerned about immigration, and dissatisfied with their existing political options. Increasingly, their opposition to the former is framed along cultural rather than economic lines, and the most successful PEPs are those that have distanced themselves from older, socially unacceptable forms of racism. In the broader European context, these ideas have met a favourable climate: on the whole, European publics are hostile to immigration; large numbers of voters are anxious about the presence, role and integration of Muslims; and large portions are dissatisfied with mainstream elites and their current response to immigration issues. These trends are neither new nor volatile, and they appear well entrenched across the continent. Not all of these citizens will turn to PEPs, but the implication is that these parties will continue to enjoy a favourable climate for some time to come.

Figure 10: Public perceptions of government performance on immigration and integration



Note: Respondents were asked: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (country)?’ In this case, ‘not very satisfied’ and ‘not at all satisfied’ have been collapsed into one category. Cases: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, UK.

78 Goodwin, *New British Fascism*.

79 Ipsos-MORI interviewed a representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 years or over in each country. Ipsos-MORI (2006), *A New British Model?* (London: Ipsos-MORI).

4. Response Strategies

The debate on how to respond to populist extremist parties has often remained focused on the extent to which they should be included or excluded from the political process and public office. However, exclusion is not the only possible response. This chapter takes as its starting point a framework that has been developed by political scientists to understand how political parties can and might respond to new challengers and issues. This framework contends that when political parties find themselves confronted with a challenger or an increasingly important issue, they have several strategic options.⁸⁰ These strategies are not set in stone, but represent ‘ideal types’ in the sense that – in the more immediate and practical world of political reality – the distinctions between them may lose focus. Nonetheless, identifying their core features is an important exercise in its own right. Drawing on this framework and the evidence presented in the previous two chapters, the chapter outlines six potential responses to the rise and appeal of PEPs in Europe.

Exclusion

In ancient Greece, ‘stigma’ was a literal mark whereby citizens were burnt or physically scarred to show they were contemptible. Albeit in different forms, in modern politics the mark of stigma is similarly applied to parties that are seen as

undermining core European values, such as equality and human rights. In several states, this has led mainstream parties to employ a *strategy of exclusion* against populist extremist parties. Whether referred to as ‘no platform’, a *cordon sanitaire* or *Ausgrenzung*, the goal is to curtail the influence and presence of PEPs. As others note, exclusion has two core aims: in the parliamentary arena it aims to prevent these parties from entering office and influencing policy, and in the electoral arena it aims to discredit them in the eyes of voters as ‘extremists’ whose supporters are ‘wasting’ their vote. Yet the strategy might also have an unintended third effect on the internal evolution of PEPs. By reinforcing their ‘outsider’ status, it might strengthen feelings of solidarity among activists and encourage their ideological radicalization.⁸¹

To what extent is the aptness of a strategy of exclusion supported by the evidence? Contrary to conventional wisdom, research on the relationship between exclusion, levels of support for PEPs and their ideological position throws doubt on its effectiveness. One study investigated the impact of exclusion on eight parties in ten party systems.⁸² Contrary to those assumptions above, it found that the parties that were not excluded but were allowed to participate in the wider party system tended, over time, to move away from more extreme positions. The implication of this finding is that exclusion actually prevents PEPs from abandoning their more extreme ideological stances. While findings such as these are positive in the sense that they suggest mainstream parties can influence the position of PEPs, they also challenge the presumed effectiveness of this strategy.

Defusing

If PEPs are not excluded, then what strategic options are left? Populist extremists work hard to turn the attention of voters away from traditional social and economic issues that tend to favour the mainstream parties. Instead, they aim

80 The chapter draws on research by T. Bale, C. Green-Pedersen, A. Krouwel, K.R. Luther and N. Sitter (2010), ‘If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe’, *Political Studies*, 58, pp. 410–26. Bale et al. identify three strategic responses that are available to political parties: attempting to win the argument; defusing the saliency of new issues; or changing their position on the issue. This chapter adds two response strategies: engagement and interaction (as well as exclusion). We are also grateful to Nick Johnson from the Smith Institute for contributing to this particular chapter.

81 J. van Spanje and Wouter van der Brug (2007), ‘The Party as Pariah: The Exclusion of Anti-Immigration Parties and Its Effect on their Ideological Positions’, *West European Politics* 30(5), pp. 1022–40.

82 Ibid.

to redirect interest towards social and cultural issues that favour their own agenda, notably immigration. To capitalize on these issues, PEPs need to increase the perceived importance of these issues in the minds of voters. If we follow this logic then a second response is for the mainstream parties to attempt to *decrease* the importance of these issues in the minds of voters. This strategy would entail avoiding or downplaying these issues and shifting public attention onto issues on which the mainstream party has an advantage. One example would be developing a consensual approach to divisive issues on which PEPs mobilize support, such as integration policy, and working across partisan lines to avoid the politicization of these issues.

However, as Bale and colleagues point out, this second strategy comes with risks. The most obvious is that mainstream parties will find it difficult to control policies that are partly shaped by their opponents. Parties may withdraw from the consensus at any moment to pursue their own electoral incentives, while the strategy also risks fuelling a view among voters that politicians are not listening to their concerns over sensitive issues. Research by Lauren McLaren demonstrates the potential longer-term consequences of this outcome: if public concern over immigration remains unaddressed then levels of public trust in political institutions more generally decline and the overall functioning of the political system can be undermined.⁸³

Adoption

A third response would see mainstream parties respond by modifying their position on issues such as immigration in an attempt to maximize their support and reduce political space for PEPs. Political scientists have long pointed to the strategy of adoption as an attempt by parties to outmanoeuvre competitors.⁸⁴ The underlying logic is as follows:

If policy is less important than the pursuit of votes, the logic is ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’: close down the issue space on the authoritarian-libertarian dimension by

arguing that migration must be limited and multiculturalism tempered by an increased emphasis on what some call ‘integration’ but others label ‘assimilation’; that done, politics can get back to ‘normal’.⁸⁵

For mainstream parties attempting to respond to the rise of PEPs, this might entail adopting more restrictive policies on immigration, tougher measures on law and order or populist rhetoric.

As with the exclusion and defusing strategies above, adoption presents multiple risks. First, it may damage a party’s credibility among voters who may view the shift as the product of political expediency rather than genuine conviction. Second, by switching position on divisive issues such as immigration a party may inadvertently alienate its base and undermine its electoral prospects. Third, the adoption strategy may also inadvertently legitimize the campaigns of populist extremists and bolster their support by increasing the salience of their core issues. One example was Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s pledge to promote ‘British Jobs for British Workers’, which many saw as a cynical attempt to entice back supporters of the BNP (which had previously used the slogan). For parties that never traditionally ‘owned’ issues such as immigration, it is distinctly unlikely that a sudden shift will convince voters either that they sincerely care about the issue or that they can deliver a strong performance on it.

Principle

An alternative is for mainstream parties to stick to their guns, remain committed to their core principles and attempt to win debates against PEPs. Through a strategy of principle, parties would underscore their existing policies on immigration issues, communicate these policies to voters more effectively and focus on mobilizing their base. Rather than pursue short-term electoral gains, mainstream parties have a duty to prevent the creeping spread of populist extremism and should be

83 L.M. McLaren, ‘Immigration and Trust in Politics in Britain’, forthcoming in the *British Journal of Political Science*.

84 A. Downs (1957), *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper).

85 Bale et al., ‘If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them?’, p. 413.

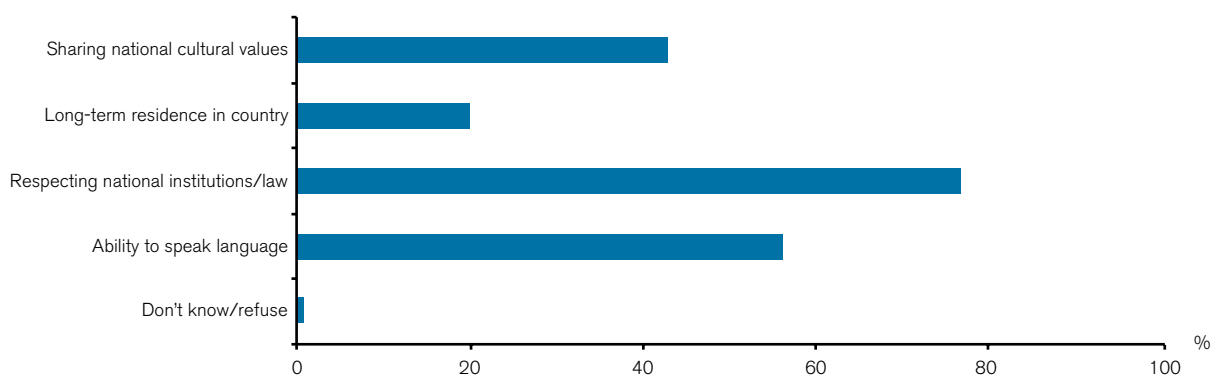
prepared to 'bear the costs incurred by a genuine battle against right-wing radicalism.'⁸⁶

For example, some argue that centre-left policies on immigration have not been mistaken but should be more strategic and 'transparent in exposing the trade-offs implicit in managing migration, and in our dialogue with the voters.'⁸⁷ The strategy of principle would entail putting stronger emphasis on 'values-led' policies that improve job prospects and employment conditions, and that make the case for migrants receiving benefits so long as they contribute to wider society. However, as noted in earlier chapters, this principled approach would need to extend beyond simply stressing the *economic* contribution of immigration. While mainstream parties across Europe have invested heavily in a narrative that underscores the economic benefits of immigration, the evidence shows that the most powerful drivers of anti-immigrant hostility are feelings of *cultural* threat.

This disconnect is particularly evident in 'myth-busting' that aims to win debates against PEPs by countering claims that immigrants and minority groups are receiving preferential treatment during the allocation of scarce resources. This involves explaining to citizens how resources such as jobs or

housing are distributed across communities. The problems with this approach are threefold. First, while PEPs manipulate statistics and events to maximize support, not every claim they advance is a myth. The prognosis and diagnosis they offer voters may be inaccurate but the cause of disconnect that they identify may be genuine. Second, the assumptions that guide myth-busting run counter to research in psychology, which suggests that when citizens are presented with facts that are inconsistent with their deeply held beliefs and fears they are unlikely to believe them. This is especially likely if large numbers of voters already distrust those who are seeking to counter 'myths', such as members of parliament, municipal government or political parties.⁸⁸ Third, this activity tends to focus almost exclusively on economic grievances, thereby ignoring the most powerful drivers of support for PEPs. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, while their supporters are financially insecure, they are not concerned solely about scarce economic resources. This point is underscored in Figure 11, which shows how for over two-fifths of respondents in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, 'sharing national cultural values' is an important precondition for immigrants to obtain citizenship.

Figure 11: Perceived preconditions for immigrants to obtain citizenship



Note: Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following attributes do you think is the most important precondition to obtaining (nationality) citizenship? And what is the next most important precondition?'

Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey 2010.

86 B. Schellenberg (2011), 'Strategies against the Radical Right and for a Pluralist, Forward-Looking Europe', in Langenbacher and Schellenberg (eds), *Is Europe on the 'Right' Path?*

87 K. Green, 'How Labour can win on immigration and welfare', Progress Online. Available at: <http://www.progressonline.org.uk/columns/column.asp?c=721> (accessed 15 July 2011).

88 There are a number of relevant studies but see G.W. Allport and L. Postman (1947), *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Henry Holt); C. Sunstein (2009), *On Rumors: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, What Can Be Done* (New York: Macmillan); and C. Heath and D. Heath (2007), *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House).

Citizens feel strongly attached to their wider national culture and community. The belief that the unity of these cultures and communities is under threat lies at the core of hostility to immigration and, by extension, support for PEPs. Considering these motives, the challenge facing mainstream parties is to make the case for cultural diversity more generally, not just to outline the economic case for immigration. This will entail exploring ways of countering the claim made by PEPs that immigrants and minority groups threaten European customs, traditions and ways of life.

Clearly, there remain risks. Especially for parties on the centre-left, a principled approach means defending immigration and rising diversity in the face of electorates that are, on the whole, hostile to these trends. Large portions of European electorates remain deeply sceptical about immigration and have made clear their desire for more restrictive policies. One potential, though also risky, response to this scepticism is for mainstream parties to be far more honest with voters about what their policies can and cannot achieve. Existing responses to anxiety over immigration typically focus on plans to reduce the number of immigrants, or curtail overall levels of immigration. Yet at the same time, international treaties have greatly reduced the capacity of governments to deliver demonstrable outcomes in this policy area. The result is a 'disconnect' between what mainstream parties promise and what they can actually deliver, which leaves space for populist extremists. The potential longer-term impact is that this approach will further fuel levels of public dissatisfaction with the performance of mainstream parties on immigration, undermine their trust in government and strengthen acceptance of the narrative offered by PEPs.

Engagement

This fifth strategy is far more basic, and is about how political parties *do* politics. PEPs have become an established political force, and so any effective response must also encompass the practice of politics. Across Europe, mainstream parties

are becoming increasingly professional and managerial, in terms of how they both campaign and select representatives. This shift has seen mass, active memberships replaced by a membership mobilized by a stronger emphasis on political marketing techniques which increasingly rely on computer-generated canvass returns and tightly scripted phone banks. Focus groups and opinion polls determine which policies appeal to which types of voters, while the language adopted by elites is calibrated to speak directly to these (often marginal) constituencies. The rise of the 'career politician' has coincided with the fall of the grassroots activist.⁸⁹ While mainstream parties may knock on doors at elections to get out the vote, compared with earlier decades these rates of activism have greatly diminished.

The style of today's mainstream campaigns often contrasts sharply with the approach employed by PEPs, which often instruct their activists to get out on the doorstep, make eye contact with voters and engage in conversations about difficult issues. Many PEPs lack the money and manpower to be consistently active, but their websites are often the most innovative available and where they do invest they often do so heavily in traditional campaigning methods. The potential impact of these campaigns was best reflected in one report in Britain, which found that in some towns voters experienced more face-to-face contact with activists from PEPs than from the mainstream parties.⁹⁰

The professionalization of politics has arguably left large numbers of voters feeling disenfranchised and susceptible to the populist anti-establishment message. It has also made it easier for challenger parties to position themselves as champions of the people, against 'out-of-touch' politicians. Politics is about winning the hearts and minds of voters, not seeking to win arguments on intellectual grounds. To do this, mainstream parties should be part of the community, have an active and visible presence, and forge stronger links to local groups and forums. In practical terms, this means standing full slates of candidates at the local level, engaging with voters face-to-face and redirecting some resources to revitalizing grassroots campaigns.

89 For evidence on declining rates of membership and activism see P. Mair and I. van Biezen (2001), 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000', *Party Politics* 7(1), pp. 5-21; S. Scarow and B. Gezgor (2010), 'Declining Memberships, Changing Members? European Political Party Members in a New Era', *Party Politics* 16(6), pp. 823-43.

90 Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, *539 Voters' Views*.

Interaction

The sixth response is found outside the arena of party politics. The strategy of interaction focuses less on competition between political parties than on relationships between different groups and the underlying concerns that are driving support for PEPs. It draws upon decades of research in social psychology that demonstrates how increasing levels of contact between members of different groups can reduce prejudice, counter perceptions of threat and improve levels of tolerance. This strategy offers one approach through which mainstream parties and other actors in society (such as voluntary and third-sector groups) can support communities to become more resilient in the face of extremism.

At the EU level, the potential role for the strategy of interaction is recognized through an increased emphasis on the concept of interculturalism, led by the Council of Europe.⁹¹ Similarly, in countries such as Britain the importance of this work has been underscored by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, which highlighted the potential the role of national and local government in encouraging ‘meaningful interaction’ between members of different ethnic and cultural groups. These ideas owe much to a wider academic literature on the effects of contact, which offers convincing and consistent evidence that this can have a positive impact on community relations.⁹²

This research, however, stands alongside evidence that large numbers of citizens are not currently interacting with those from different backgrounds. For example, in Britain more than two-fifths of respondents to one survey said they had no friends who were born in another country and more than one-third had no friends from different backgrounds. Similar pictures emerge elsewhere in Europe. According to one survey, only 21 per cent of Hungarians, 15 per cent of Poles, 15 per cent of the Dutch and 11 per cent of Italians have friends from different backgrounds.⁹³

Activities that encourage contact and interaction will clearly need a local focus. Culturally inclusive and unifying policies are best started from a community base where interaction between groups is a more manageable and realistic prospect. It is at the neighbourhood or community level that citizens come together, and develop shared experiences and a shared sense of purpose. Yet there is also a role for national government and mainstream elites. Notions of citizenship with its attendant rights and responsibilities can be a way of forming bridges between different communities – both long-standing white working-class citizens and new migrants or previously excluded minorities. A widened civic culture where it is made clear what can be expected and what can be demanded can bridge ethnic divides and reduce the potential for division.

However, an important caveat is needed. Interaction has been shown to be particularly effective when it takes place under certain conditions: groups should have equal status; work toward a common goal; experience substantive interaction; and have the support of authorities.⁹⁴ If this strategy is to be effective then it must not rely simply on ‘snapshot’ interventions, such as a one-day festival. Inviting members of different communities to self-select in a snapshot event is unlikely to have a positive and longer-term impact on community relations. On the contrary, these superficial forms of interaction may have adverse effects by confirming suspicions and fuelling tension. If it is to have positive effects, then this response strategy needs to be geared towards building sustainable and more meaningful forms of interaction between different groups.

What strategy, and when?

Looking across Europe, Bale and colleagues found that in four of the countries they studied, no centre-left party adopted the strategy of principle and fought ‘the good fight for permissive immigration and integration

91 Irena Guidikova, 'Intercultural Diversity Management – Europe Cities Showing the Way' (n.d.), <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Publication/BookCoE06-Guidikova.pdf>.

92 For a review see, for example, M.J. Goodwin (2010), 'Can We Promote Cohesion through Contact? Intergroup Contact and the Development of "Cohesive" Local Communities', in C. Durose, S. Greasley and L. Richardson (eds), *Local Governance, Changing Citizens?* (Bristol: Policy Press), pp. 91–110. For more systematic reviews see T.F. Pettigrew and L.R. Tropp (2006), 'A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), pp. 751–83.

93 Zick et al., *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination*.

94 G.W. Allport (1954), *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus).

policies.⁹⁵ While the strategy of principle was often the initial response, over the longer term it was unlikely to work when other parties in the system (notably centre-right parties) moved towards the strategy of adoption. Similarly, while attempts to defuse the appeal of PEPs were in some cases an effective pre-emptive strategy, ultimately its effectiveness depended on the actions of other mainstream parties, and whether they remained committed to pursuing this approach. This suggests that the effectiveness of any particular strategy will depend heavily on whether it is employed by one, or several, mainstream parties. Meanwhile, when parties on the centre-left decided to shift towards the strategy of adoption, the result was often internal disputes that undermined credibility. One example was Denmark, where initial attempts by the Social Democrats to defuse the issue of immigration failed. A subsequent shift to the strategy of adoption resulted in internal disputes and brought little electoral benefit.

This contrasts with the Dutch experience, where a shift towards more restrictive policies pre-empted the arrival of populist extremists. However, here too the attempt to defuse the issue and growing public concern over immigration failed, not least because mainstream parties focused heavily on the economic dimension. This left space for populist extremists, who instead geared their exclusionary campaigns to exploiting public perceptions that immigrants and Muslim communities were threatening Dutch culture and its accompanying tradition of tolerance. As outlined in earlier chapters, it is this cultural rather than economic dimension that is crucial to understanding support for PEPs.

These experiences and the wider evidence suggest that, however logical they may seem on the surface, the strategies of principle and defusing hold scant prospects for success. Instead, the best opportunities to confront the rise of populist extremism are likely to emerge at a local level, whether through the strategies of engagement or interaction where stereotypes of immigrants and of a

cultural divergence can be challenged directly by those at the community level. Whereas engagement is focused on challenging the practice of populist extremism in electoral politics, efforts to promote interaction are focused on addressing the underlying anxieties and concerns among voters that fuel support for these parties.

Conclusion

There is no uniform response to populist extremism. Nor is there a single 'model' that can be applied across markedly different cases and regions. Each of the response strategies above comes with risks, and their effectiveness will be heavily influenced by the specific national context. It is also worth stressing that, when implemented, none of those strategies above have halted support for populist extremists. In countries such as Austria, Denmark, France and the Netherlands, PEPs have encountered quite different responses, yet their support at elections remains strong. That said, the six responses outlined above provide mainstream parties and other actors in society with a useful starting point.

The evidence suggests that some strategies will be more effective than others. Responses that steer clear of exclusion are unlikely to encourage the further radicalization of PEPs and their most committed supporters. Meanwhile, responses that work towards resolving the cultural dimension of perceived ethnic threats are well positioned to tackle the roots of hostility to immigration and support for these parties. The most effective responses will be those that focus on the local level, where engagement with voters and interaction between different communities is a realistic prospect and can be forged around shared experiences and conditions. PEPs have spent much of the past two decades sharing strategies, lessons and examples of best practice. In formulating a response to the challenge they pose, mainstream parties would be well advised to do the same.

95 Bale et al., 'If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them?', p. 421.

5. Conclusion: Changing Track

‘The major task ... whether motivated by fear or fascination with the right wing, is not argument and prescription – or even proscription – but understanding and prediction.’

Robert Schoenberger (1969)⁹⁶

Few topics in modern European politics attract as much attention and interest as the rise of populist extremist parties. In a climate in which mainstream parties have described multiculturalism as a ‘failure’ and citizens are deeply concerned about immigration issues, populist extremists have moved from the margins to the mainstream. Yet important questions about these parties and their support remain largely unanswered. Instead, popular stereotypes and flawed assumptions have flourished.

The purpose of this report has been to bring the wider evidence to bear on the questions of cause and response: what factors are causing growing numbers of citizens to endorse these parties, and how might mainstream elites respond? This wider evidence base challenges conventional wisdom on several scores about these parties and their followers. Chapter 2 investigated the profile and attitudes of PEP supporters. Contrary to popular stereotypes that present these citizens as political protestors, single-issue voters or losers of globalization, the picture is more complex. PEP voters are dissatisfied with and distrustful of mainstream elites, but first and foremost they are hostile to immigration and rising ethnic and cultural diversity. While these citizens are economically insecure,

their hostility stems mainly from their belief that immigrants and minority groups are threatening their national culture, community and way of life. Nor are these citizens concerned only about ‘traditional’ immigration; they are also profoundly anxious about a minority group that is already settled. Anti-Muslim sentiment has become an important driver of support for populist extremists. This means that appealing only to concerns over immigration – for example calling for immigration numbers to be reduced or border controls to be tightened – is not enough.

Chapter 3 examined the PEP message and its wider potential in contemporary Europe. By investigating three areas of potential – public attitudes to immigration, attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, and public dissatisfaction with the response of mainstream elites to these issues – it became clear that PEPs are operating in a particularly favourable climate. The views and ideas they espouse cannot be dismissed as those of a fringe minority. Public support for more restrictive immigration policies, anxiety over Muslim communities and dissatisfaction with the existing political options are all at high levels.

Chapter 4 outlined six possible response strategies. There is no uniform response to PEPs, nor is there one single ‘model’ that can be transplanted from one national context to another. To date, the response from mainstream parties has been incoherent. While some have sought to defuse issues that are crucial for PEP success, others have adopted more restrictive policies in the hope of undercutting support for these parties. The evidence does not support the presumed effectiveness of the ‘traditional’ response of exclusion. Rather, the most effective approaches may well be those that are focused on the local level, where engaging with voters and supporting interaction between different communities is a more feasible project.

The simple realities of European politics indicate that PEPs are unlikely to disappear from the landscape. Rather, the underlying and deeper trends that have fuelled their rise look set to continue over the coming decades. Public concern over immigration and rising cultural and ethnic diversity, anxiety over the presence and compatibility of Muslims, and dissatisfaction with the performance of

96 R. A. Schoenberger (1969), *The American Right-wing: Readings in Political Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), p. 2.

mainstream elites on these issues are unlikely to subside. The enduring nature of this challenge is perhaps best reflected in more recent findings that demonstrate how PEPs are not the exclusive property of older generations. There is evidence that those who vote for populist extremist parties, like voters more generally, are also influencing the voting habits of their children.⁹⁷ This future potential is similarly underscored by the finding

that 37 per cent of the support for FN leader Marine Le Pen in France comes from those aged under 35, or by the youthful working-class demographic of English Defence League (EDL) support.⁹⁸ If politicians and policy-makers are to meet this challenge, they need to radically rethink their current understanding of, and approaches to, populist extremism. This report is intended as one step in that process.

97 H. Coffé and M. Voorpostel (2010), 'Young People, Parents and Radical Right Voting: The Case of the Swiss People's Party', *Electoral Studies*, 29(3), pp. 435–43.
98 http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1577-1-study_file.pdf (see note 28 above).



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