Triadic institutionalization of the contemporary far right: Interactions between party, movement, and leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the rise of the far right, which began with the 2008 global financial crisis, not simply as an ideological reaction but through a triadic institutional framework focusing on the dynamic interaction between parties, movements, and leaders. It argues that the core mechanism behind the far right's success is a symbiotic, feedback-driven process of institutionalization involving these three elements: In this model, the party provides institutional resources while the movement mobilizes grassroots energy and street legitimacy. The leader, in turn, binds these two elements with charismatic authority, becoming the architect of reality in a post-truth political environment. Adopting qualitative and theoretical methodologies, this study analyzes the modes of reproduction of the contemporary far right by synthesizing concepts from theorists such as Laclau, Mouffe, Rancière, Tilly, and Weber. It is argued that leaders elevated by social movements and political parties subsequently acquire the power to transform both the party and the movement, and even to establish reality. It is argued that with this power, the far right can reshape democratic institutions from within. This triadic analysis aims to offer a new conceptual tool to the literature by explaining how the far right can maintain an anti-institutional discourse while simultaneously institutionalizing itself in three steps.

Introduction

Following the 2007-2008 economic crisis, known as the global financial crisis, political parties and leaders on the far right of the ideological spectrum began to gain power in many parts of the world, particularly in Europe and the United States. In some countries, they have come to power or become part of the ruling coalition governments. Although the rise of far-right politics has historically occurred in the wake of economic crises, it cannot be explained solely by economic factors. Problems in politics and society often overlap with economic issues, revealing a more complex background to the study. To analyze this background, this study considers the contemporary rise of the far right not merely as an ideological movement or reactionary phenomenon but as a significant process of institutionalization. This process involves stabilizing the behavior, discussions, and organizational forms of actors in the political arena. It also occurs through a triadic

institutional framework that dynamically interacts between the party, movement, and leader. Far-right politics is rebuilding itself by filling the void left by the weakened political structures during times of crisis. It does so by employing a set of mutually reinforcing tools such as political parties, social movements, and strong leaders. From this perspective, the 2008 crisis emerged as a critical turning point that triggered far-right institutional adaptation.

The conceptualization of far-right politics in different ways stems from its complex and multifaceted nature. Betz (1994) has termed these parties "radical right-wing populism." While Ignazi (2003) defines these parties as "extreme right," Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) as "radical right," Cas Mudde (2009) defines them as "populist radical right" emphasizing that their ideological core consists of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. In turn, Benjamin Moffitt (2020) analyzed populism as a performance-based political style and argued that this political style conceals the anti-democratic or extreme ideological legacies of populist radical right-wing parties. Copsey (2004) and Mammone (2015), on the other hand, emphasize "neo-fascism." This study focuses on triadic institutionalization dynamics beyond these different conceptualizations and proposes a common analytical framework. The existing literature has examined the ideological codes of far right and party-movement contexts (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; della Porta & Diani, 2020), resource mobilization theories (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and personalist party literature. However, while these studies have explained certain aspects of the far right, such as the party-movement relationship (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Caiani & della Porta, 2011), the broader context of party decline that can facilitate personalist leadership (Mair, 2013), and personalist party literature itself (Gunther & Diamond 2003; Panebianco 1988), they have generally focused on binary relationships. This study proposes a triadic institutional ecology that considers the directed and feedback interactions between parties, movements, and their leaders. For example, leaders transform the repertoire of movements, movements influence the organizational structure of parties, and parties confer institutional legitimacy on the leadership. Thus, a continuous cycle of interaction is formed among the three actors (Figure 1). This study deepens the literature on far-right institutional adaptation by emphasizing the leader's role. It conceptualizes the leader not only as an ideological spokesperson but also as a bridge between the party and the movement, a discursive center, and a founding actor in political reality in the post-truth era.
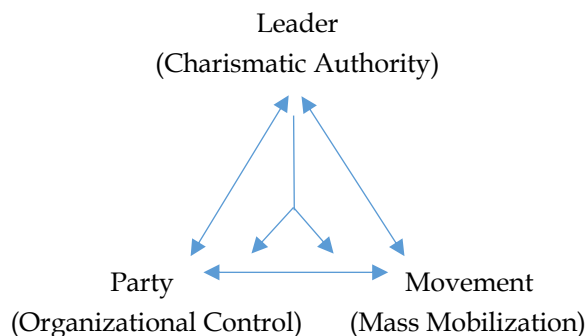
Figure 1. Conceptual model of the triadic relationship underpinning far-right institutionalization

In this study, the concept of "institutionalization" is defined as the process by which political actors make their actions, discourses, and organizational structures stable and predictable over time through specific rules, routines, values, and norms. The organizational embeddedness of parties, routinization of movements' repertoires of action, and legitimization of charismatic leadership within the political system are different

dimensions of this institutionalization. Therefore, movements and leadership are treated as institutions functioning within the political system, rather than merely personal manifestations. However, the institutionalization of charismatic authority can paradoxically trigger a process of "de-institutionalization" that erodes existing democratic institutions.

The rise of the authoritarian or radical right is often explained by theories of economic insecurity (Norris & Inglehart, 2016) or cultural backlash (Inglehart & Norris, 2019; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013). Without dismissing these explanations, this study goes beyond them by focusing on the institutional adaptation processes that reveal the explanatory power of reciprocal relationships between parties, movements and leaders. This study's original contribution is to model the far right not as an ideological phenomenon but as a political structure operating through a mechanism of triadic institutionalization, thereby overcoming conceptual fragmentation in the literature. This study used qualitative and theoretical methodologies. It combines the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe (discursive constructivism), Rancière (the political sphere), Tilly (repertoires of conflict), and Weber (charismatic authority). Laclau and Mouffe's constructivism explains how leaders and movements create the idea of "the people" and establish links between people, emphasizing the mobilizing and institutionalizing role of the leader through Weberian charisma. Different V-Dem indices are used to illustrate these concepts. The study uses V-Dem data from 2010 to 2024 for the USA, Brazil, Hungary, and Türkiye. These countries help make the study's arguments easier to understand because they provide clear examples of far-right leaders taking power or existing right-wing leaders becoming more far right. Moreover, the role of emotions has been analyzed from the perspective of political psychology as well. In this context, appraisal theories of emotion will be employed with a specific focus on the following: This will facilitate an explanation of how political events and discourses can trigger specific emotions, such as anger and fear, and how these emotions shape political attitudes and behaviors in the following ways. Therefore, the role of emotions is discussed in the context of recent literature in the field of political psychology (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019; Erisen & Vasilopoulou, 2022; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008).

Following the introduction, this study details the boundaries and differences between the three main historical periods of far-right politics. This periodization more clearly reveals the far right's evolution and its institutional adaptation. Subsequently, separate subsections theoretically explain the mechanisms of directional interactions and feedback loops between the party, movement, and leadership within the triadic framework. The section on parties analyzes their transformation by referencing the three historical periods established earlier, drawing on the relevant party literature. Subsequently, this section examines the role of social movements in the rise of the far right. The focus is on movements motivated by xenophobia and economic insecurity. The final section discusses the role of leaders as a bridge between the party and the movement. This analysis examines a leader's capacity to shape political reality and transform institutions.

The development and transformation of far-right politics

There are three historical milestones in the development of far-right politics in Western countries. The first concerns the totalitarian regimes that came to power after Mussolini became Prime Minister of Italy in the 1920s. These regimes influenced a significant part of Europe until World War II, with their impact persisting in countries such as Spain and Portugal until the last quarter of the century. While there is no consensus in the academic literature on whether all these regimes can be called fascist, there is broad agreement that

they were governments promoting a strong belief in the state and nationalism and that they had considerable support from the people. Under Mussolini's fascism, Hitler's Nazism, or Franco's Falangism (all characterized as totalitarian regimes), the societal ideal was a homogeneous bloc of people. This implies a very strong entity that tolerates no weaknesses and disregards differences. The idea of perfect social harmony goes against democracy because it rejects the acceptance of individual differences and pluralism. This conflict became particularly evident after World War II, as democracy became the main political idea worldwide.

Eco (1995) highlights that a key part of fascism is its disregard for the individual rights granted to citizens by democracy, defining "the people" as a select group. This perspective is a crucial expression of fascism's approach to society. The fascist ideology's conception of society also shapes its political outlook. Fascist movements, as historical examples of far-right movements, exhibited a triadic institutional structure characterized by the distinct roles of the party, movement, and leader. The party, such as the Fascist Party, was responsible for seizing state power and organizing society into an ideologically cohesive entity. Social movements, like paramilitary organizations, were mobilized around the leader's charisma. Finally, the leader (e.g., Mussolini, Hitler, Franco) acted as an absolute authority, exercising decisive control over both the party and the movement. This triadic structure served to build a homogenizing political order that disregarded the individual rights of democracy, defined only a select group as "the people," and aimed to eliminate other identities. Rather than valorizing other identities and organizations within the democratic frameworks of cultural diversity and pluralism, this political project seeks to disregard and, if possible, eliminate them.

The undisputed victory of liberal democracy in the Western world after World War II led to the loss of power by the totalitarian regime. Far-right parties, which maintained a weak presence during the Cold War under the banner of anti-communism, began to regain power at a specific historical moment. This moment coincided with the emergence of a new societal idea that society is not a monolithic whole but rather a pluralistic collection of differences in various aspects. New social movements, beginning in France in 1968 and spreading globally (Offe, 1985), compelled far-right actors to adapt. As a result, their worldview changed, especially how they defined "the people." The far right has grown in popularity throughout this time for two key reasons. First, there have been changes in the understanding of society. Society is no longer a whole in which differences must be eliminated. Instead, it is a phenomenon defined by pluralism and minority rights principles. This new societal understanding, often summed up by the feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970), created a landscape of identity politics. A strong counter-narrative was then created by the far right.

The second reason is the rise of neoliberalism. As the bipolar world order collapsed, leading to proclamations of "the end of history" (Fukuyama, 2016), neoliberal globalization promoted the idea that the "world has become a big village" (Dalglish, 2006). This process has normalized and accelerated global migration. Unlike their totalitarian predecessors, far-right parties did not pursue direct state control in this period. Instead, they decided to take a reactionary approach to "protect society" from what they saw as internal threats, particularly differences in society and the growing presence of "foreigners," which they linked to rising immigration rates. These parties, which build identity-based politics, have integrated cultural backlash (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013) and economic concerns (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) into their discourse. From a triadic perspective, the roles of each element shifted during this period. To gain legitimacy, the parties in question sought to integrate

themselves into the prevailing democratic system of the time. Social movements functioned as external pressure groups, exerting influence on parties' discourse and repertoires. Leaders have emerged as charismatic spokespersons for these new identity-based narratives.

The third stage of far-right politics, which this study focuses on, is when far-right parties gain power in many regions of the world, especially in Europe and the US, after 2008. These far-right parties, which began establishing their institutional identities in the 1970s, have undergone profound institutional transformations. Following the 2008 crisis, these parties came to power in many countries, including Hungary, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Philippines, Brazil, India, Poland, Russia, and Italy. They have gained enough electoral support to become significant political forces that the current system can no longer ignore in several nations, including Spain, France, Germany, and Portugal. Even if the most obvious cause of this trend is worsening economic conditions, the economic crisis cannot be the only explanation for this increase. In addition, it is necessary to focus on the sociocultural transformation created by neoliberalism, especially from the end of the Cold War to the 2020s.

During this period, new dynamics, such as social media, the post-truth political environment, and transnational networks reshaped the triadic institutionalization of the far right. To appeal to more people, political parties such as France's National Rally have sought to incorporate the energy of grassroots movements, including PEGIDA and QAnon, into their agendas. Leaders have also become increasingly significant at the same time. These actors have evolved beyond their traditional roles as mere ideological mouthpieces and have become pivotal conduits between parties and movements. The contemporary period is characterized by the prevalence of post-truth political discourse. They have established discursive hubs and assumed pivotal roles in shaping the fabric of political reality. From a triadic perspective, this event illustrates a critical feedback loop. The new leader has reshaped the party to appeal to a broader political movement, even at the cost of relegating his core ideology to the background. Marine Le Pen's leadership is a perfect example of this transformation. Her decision to expel her father from the party he founded is a clear example of removing extreme elements to become more popular (The Times, 2025). Taking the 2008 crisis as a turning point, this process signals that far-right politics has entered a new historical phase that can be termed neo-authoritarianism. This strategy is characterized not by destroying democratic structures from the outside but by transforming them from within to legitimize the authoritarian tendencies.

From mass to personalistic parties: The institutional transformation of the far right

Political parties are one of the three key institutions underpinning far-right politics. Although far-right parties found their place in political party literature after 1970, as mentioned above, they have not severed their ties with the 1920s fascist roots. Far-right parties have appeared in different forms since the 1920s. In this regard, to understand far-right politics and parties, it is important to first understand how they can be positioned within political party literature.

The historical roots of political parties and mass parties

Political parties have been the most influential institutions in global politics since the second half of the 19th century. Sometimes seen as institutions that produce oligarchies (Michels, 2021) and sometimes as indispensable to democracy (Schattschneider, 1942), modern political parties emerged in the mid-19th century as elite-based parties. Industrialization gave rise to new social movements as the working class articulated its demands. Political parties, which are expected to channel these demands into the political system, responded to this pressure. Aided by the expansion of voting rights, many transformed from elite-based clubs into socialist, mass-based organizations founded on workers' struggles (Gunther & Diamond, 2003). By the 20th century, mass parties based on nationalism or religion emerged alongside workers' parties. The fascist, Nazi, and Falangist parties can be considered predecessors of today's influential far-right parties. As such, they are prime examples of the mass party model that defined this historical period. Indeed, these parties appropriated the classic mass party model (mobilizing the masses through paramilitary youth wings, mass rallies, and a totalitarian ideology) not for democratic competition but to undermine the system and to legitimize violence. Consequently, their institutional legacy became both a model to be emulated and an obstacle to be overcome by subsequent far-right parties.

Following the two world wars, democracy and peace became dominant political forms (Sartori, 2014). Political parties, once central to rights struggles, have become the driving institutions of democratic politics despite their flaws. Their emergence has made regular elections a defining feature of such regimes. While totalitarianism had weakened, these democratic models did not achieve flawless pluralism or meaningful popular participation. In most representative democracies, democracy is often reduced to the ballot box, transforming political parties into election-focused organizations. This has obscured ideologies and prioritized electoral victory, leading to "catch-all parties" (Kirchheimer, 1966) that appeal to diverse ideologies. This ideological vacuum has empowered populist leaders who claim to represent "the real people," making program or leader parties more effective than traditional mass parties.

This focus on electoral success, prioritizing the party's institutional success over ideology, has created a distorted identity. Party bureaucrats lost influence over professional politicians (Panebianco, 1988), increasing the distance between leaders and their members. Historically, mass parties have relied on membership fees; however, new funding sources have weakened organizational loyalty and ideological legitimacy. Katz and Mair (1995) further developed Panebianco's argument. They argued that such parties, once in power, become integrated into the state and receive state funding. According to them, voters have now become "customers."

This situation has deepened voters' alienation from political institutions and increased the appeal of leaders and movements that promise a more personal and direct connection, acting as carriers of "anti-system" rhetoric. The transformation of parties from mass-based organizations into "catch-all" or "cartel" structures run by professional politicians has created a vacuum in representation and legitimacy that can be filled by charismatic leaders and extra-party movements. This has prepared the institutional ground necessary for the emergence of a triadic model.

Neoliberal transformation and identity politics

Following the 1968 social movements, major transformations occurred in the political and economic spheres worldwide. The parties that emerged during this period are conceptualized as post-industrial social movement parties. The term "post-industrial" is critical here, as technological developments have sparked a transformation in the means of production. In this new information age, the rapid global networking of information has transformed the industrialization process (Castells, 2003). In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, the establishment of factories contributed to the economic development of these countries. The primary functions of the industry are to increase national income, reduce prices, and create employment opportunities.

This established order was altered by two key factors. First, the development of information technology has shifted industrialization from the national to the global level. Second, after the 1970s oil crisis, a neoliberal order emerged, originating from the UK and the US, which led to a reduction in the nation-state's role in the production. The privatization of public enterprises and the elimination of customs duties marked the beginning of a new era in which the world was likened to a "large village" (Dalglish, 2006). This period ended the social democratic era of the welfare state, which had accepted state intervention in the market since 1929. A new era began where the market was once again the founding actor, private companies globalized, and liberal economic policies became more intertwined with conservative economic policies.

However, traditional center-right parties distanced themselves from cultural conservatism while defending economic globalization, leaving voters desiring economic protectionism and cultural nativism unrepresented. The global market (Waltz, 1993) weakened classic mass parties, which were organized nationally with ties to institutions such as trade unions, preventing them from addressing voters' economic concerns as companies relocated to cheaper labor markets. This gap was filled by leaders with flexible, ideologically sharp rhetoric and their movements. Politics shifted from ideas to strong personalities promising to protect ordinary people from global elites.

This neoliberal context has led to widespread economic migration, creating tensions between migration and citizenship. Citizenship is a legal bond and a privileged state position (Balibar, 2004). As migrant labor limited citizen employment, migrants became the primary "other" and the target of anger. This tension deepened due to the perception that migrants, being less tied to the nation-state, are less trustworthy (Koca, 2022). The emotional nature of this issue favored direct action over rational party programs, amplified by the media's focus on leaders who incited anger. This created a paradox: post-1968 politics increased minority rights sensitivity, yet rising socio-economic stakes of migration prompted harsher political reactions, because every relationship with the "other" brings mutual transformation (Kelleci, 2023, p. 266). The dual tension of economic insecurity and cultural anxiety fractured the political landscape, which is empirically visible in the sharp rise in political polarization.

As shown in Figure 2, political polarization intensified significantly in these contexts, particularly during periods when far-right leaders consolidated their power. These new, highly polarized demands exceed the representational capacities of traditional party structures. They required the raw energy of a movement to sustain their anger and a charismatic leader to embody it as "the voice of the people." Thus, in this polarized environment, the far right's institutional form inevitably evolved into a triadic structure of party, movement, and leader.

Leading parties and the institutional restructuring of the far right

After the 1970s, two opposing party types based on identity politics emerged: On the one hand, "post-industrial far-right parties" advocating exclusionary nationalism emerged in response to neoliberalism and the consequences of migration. In contrast, left-liberal parties proposing an inclusive model of society based on human rights and pluralism gained power. However, the fundamental difference between these two types of parties lies not only in their ideological goals but also in the institutional forms they adopt for their functioning. While left-liberal parties generally adopt more horizontal, deliberative, and network-type organizational models, far-right parties have established the hierarchical and mobilizing structure required by nativist and exclusionary politics through a symbiotic division of labor between the party, the movement, and the leader. Therefore, this contrast is not merely a policy difference but also a critical starting point for understanding why the contemporary far right requires a distinctive triadic institutional form. While these parties' "anti-systemic" rhetoric often targets the professional political class and bureaucracy (Jamin, 2013), the real institutional innovations lie in how they channel and politicize this anti-systemic anger within the party-movement-leader triangle.
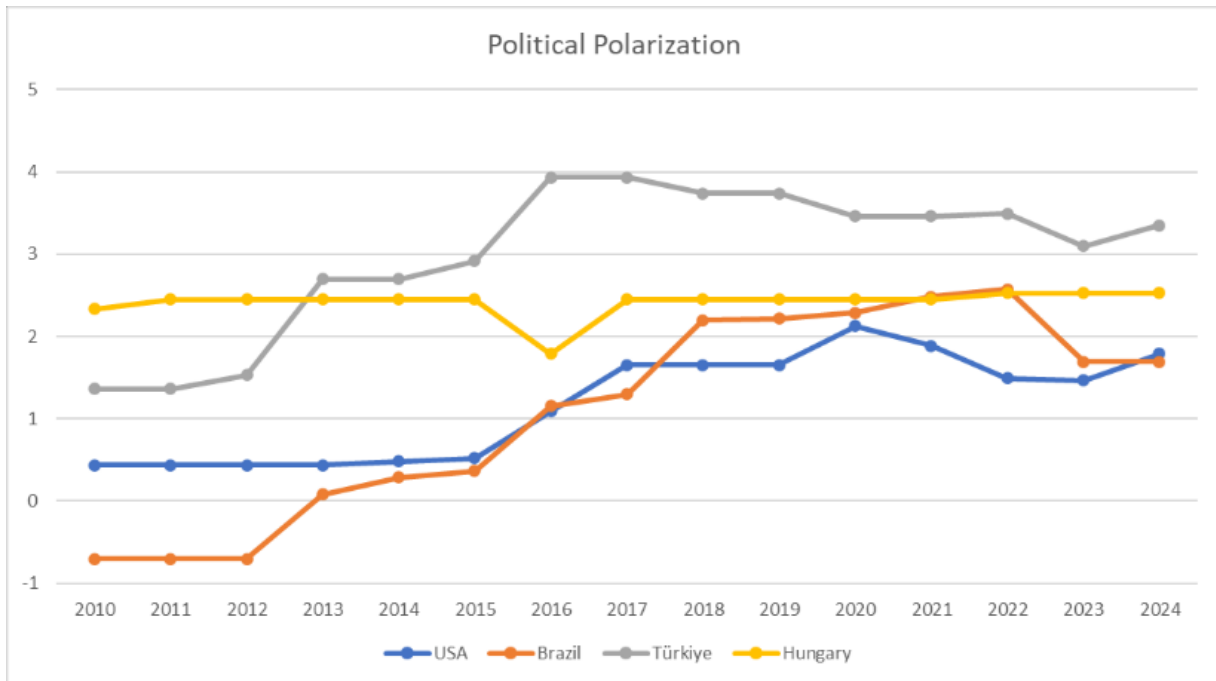
Figure 2. Political polarization index

Source: Author's compilation based on the V-Dem Dataset v14.

The organizational form of the far right is shaped by the interaction between the party, movement, and leader. A charismatic leader transforms the movement's scattered but powerful energy into a form that appeals to wider audiences through individual political performances, primarily in the media and at rallies (Moffitt, 2020). In this way, they gain the power to determine the direction of both the party and the movement. Marine Le Pen's expulsion of her father from the party or the reshaping of the party in their own image by leaders such as Donald Trump, bypassing party hierarchies, stems from this transformative power of the leader. On the other hand, grassroots movements constantly provide legitimacy and dynamism to parties and leaders. For example, PEGIDA's demands in Germany have influenced AfD's political position (Arzheimer, 2015). Social movements reinforce the perception that the leader's authority stems not only from the party elite but

also from "real people." The leader's bargaining power as a spokesperson for the people naturally increases within the party.

The third element, the party, keeps things going, is lawful, and has the equipment and people to do the job. These characteristics are qualities that a charismatic leader or a spontaneously emerging movement cannot sustain on their own. As Katz and Mair (1995) point out, certain things can change a political party into a "cartel party" structure. These include state funding, the right to participate in elections, and regular access to media. As Panebianco (1982) observed, party organizations play a key role in the routinization of charisma; this process ensures that the leader's legacy lives on and transforms the movement's energy into concrete political power. This emerging hybrid structure forms the basis of the far right's flexible yet resilient organizational form, capable of employing both disruptive and accommodative strategies. Thus, the far right can maintain an anti-system image through its leaders and movements while also benefiting from official resources.

Contemporary far-right parties have emerged not as traditional organizations but as dynamic intermediaries between the movement and the state. The party's institutional framework strengthens the leader's authority and the movement's resilience, while the leader's charisma gives the movement its radical vitality. In return, the movement gives the party and its leader legitimacy and distinctiveness not seen in mainstream politics. This symbiotic relationship is a fundamental institutional innovation that enables the far right to gain power within the system while appearing to oppose it.

The political transformation of far-right movements

The dynamics behind the emergence of new forms of right-wing parties, as mentioned above, are linked to social transformations that are reshaping the way politics and sociology analyze societies. Following the events of 1968, the understanding of society transformed, alongside political parties and social movements. This led to the strengthening of the view that society is not a unified whole (Laclau, 2012, p. 66). Post-structuralist theory, which takes Schmitt's (2012, pp. 56-58) friend-foe distinction as its starting point (Laclau & Mouffe, 2017, p. 19), has begun to develop a political analysis that identifies others within society as constitutive of the political order itself.

In Rancière's (2007) words, the polis[1] (the police order) can only establish itself by drawing a line and leaving the other outside. Indeed, he defines politics as the struggle of those left outside the challenge of the established order of the polis or to resist it. However, it is not claimed that others outside the polis also form a complete community. The ruling bloc does not treat the opposition that has formed against the social order established by the polis or the ruling power. In Rancière's words, particular demands arise independently against the institutions of the polis; similarly, in his example, Laclau points to demands against the Tsarist regime in Russia. Laclau defines populist politics as the process by which these particular demands establish a "chain of equivalence" around a central, unifying demand to achieve their goals (Laclau, 2007). Discussions about populism can be considered alongside discussions about social movements. This connects to the concept of "new social movements" that emerged after 1968. These are defined as movements that unite disparate social groups–who do not act like traditional classes–around specific themes or particular

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[1] In Rancière's thought, the polis is used as a concept related to the political process of government. It is defined as the process that organizes the gathering and consent of people in communities and determines the hierarchical distribution of tasks (Rancière, 2007, s. 71).

demands (Offe, 1985, p. 833). This populist logic explains why the "movement" aspect of our triadic model is indispensable for understanding the phenomenon. The movement functions as a dynamic source of energy that goes beyond the party's formal structure and the singular figure of its leader, bringing together particular demands and giving them a collective identity and street power.

The rise of populism: Crises and the politicization of others

Social movements and populist politics have become important issues for both right- and left-wing politics since the 1980s. For left-wing politics, it became a central concept after the pink tide, when left-wing populist leaders came to power one after another in Latin America in the early 2000s. For right-wing populism, the anger that rose against mainstream politics in Europe and the US after the 2008 crisis was an important turning point in centralizing this concept. However, it should be noted that the 2008 crisis strengthened both right-wing and left-wing populism. It is not difficult to identify demands that have turned into social movements or uprisings at both ends of the political spectrum in the past. In Latin America, social movements formed separately by Indigenous peoples, the poor, landless peasants, groups subjected to racism, and many other social groups with specific demands have come together under an "empty signifier," forming a chain of equivalence, as Laclau terms it. These groups, which political parties cannot influence, have organized themselves into non-partisan social movements. The movement has become both an identity for these groups and a means of politicizing their demands. While the parties have institutionalized the movement, their leaders have transformed the movement's dynamism into electoral victory. Where anti-system movements have come to power, transformative policies were implemented.

Similarly, in the 2010s, the economic crisis served as an empty signifier, allowing the demands of many European social groups to form a chain of equivalences around it. The anger and distrust towards existing institutions caused by the economic crisis have also led to the emergence of anti-system movements that weaken the actors of the existing structure, from politicians to bureaucrats (Arrighi et al., 2004). In contrast, this anger towards the existing order has not only been directed by charismatic leaders or parties but has also given rise to spontaneous social movements that maintain a distance from them. In fact, social movements have served as a bridge to reach groups that the party cannot reach. Thus, far-right leaders have either come to power through right-wing populism or their parties have become relevant, as Sartori (2005) conceptualized. However, both left-wing populist leaders in Latin America and right-wing populist leaders in Europe–including, to some extent, Trump in the US–have quickly However, both left-wing populist leaders in Latin America and right-wing populist leaders in Europe–including, to some extent, Trump in the US–have quickly exhibited authoritarian tendencies. Although these leaders initially gained mass support by claiming to speak for "the people" against a "guardian" system, they did not develop democratic mechanisms once they were in power. In contrast, these leaders have taken steps to eliminate the mechanisms that ensure elite circulation. For example, leaders such as Putin, Morales, and Erdoğan[2] have removed presidential term limits, paving the way for lifelong rule.

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[2] Although Erdoğan has not yet fully abolished presidential term limits, by being elected president in 2014, 2018, and 2023, he has served as president for longer than Turkish law prescribes.

However, it is noteworthy that as leaders consolidate their power, they begin to view the social movements that brought them to power as threatening. Leaders have either transformed these movements, which initially provided them with legitimacy, into civil society organizations directly under the party's control, or have marginalized them. This situation also demonstrates the delicate balance of the triadic model. The movement is an indispensable tool for bringing the leader and party to power, but it is often the first element to be sacrificed in the process of consolidating that power. While the leader claims to be the "voice of the people," they actually seek to control the people's other mechanisms for making their voices heard.

Inequality created by neoliberalism and migrant as the other

One of the most important reasons behind the rise of anti-system movements since the beginning of the new century is, as mentioned in the previous section, the creation of great social inequality by the values of neoliberal politics. Concepts such as globalization, economic growth, and the erosion of borders, once accepted as unquestionably as democracy itself, began to be debated in the face of growing social inequality (Gerbaudo, 2022, p. 11). Street protests and occupations that began in many parts of the world, particularly in the Western world, following the 2008 crisis, involving not only the poor but also the middle class, should be evaluated as examples of new social movements and examined as a response to social and economic crises. This is because the 2008 crisis made inequality among citizens visible, and the difference between the poor and the rich ceased to be merely a material one; it became a form of social stratification that is very difficult to overcome. In this new era, where ordinary citizenship has lost its value, the middle class has found itself squeezed. On the one hand, it was marginalized by a political and bureaucratic elite defending the capital. However, it felt its power diminish in the face of a growing immigrant population, whose presence was often framed by concepts such as human rights and multiculturalism. As a result, the public became alienated from political parties. This alienation created a demand for a nonpartisan social movement that could offer a shared identity and a collective experience of power. This process is crucial for understanding the emotional mechanisms underlying far-right politics. According to appraisal theories of emotion, citizens do not respond to events neutrally. They evaluate events in relation to their well-being and values (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Strong political anger arises when they perceive economic decline and immigration as unjust threats to their status and identity (Erisen & Vasilopoulou, 2022). This anger, directed at perceived threats (immigrants) and elites who appear inadequate or unwilling to stop them, is one of the sources of social movements.

The street protests that began after the 2008 crisis also had two-sided reactions: on the one hand, there was the claim to be the voice of the people against the economic, political, and bureaucratic elite; on the other, there was a discourse sometimes dominated by a nationalist ideology against immigrants. These two discourses can be found in both right- and left-wing politics. The left embraces anti-imperialist and anti-market populist politics against the elite while adopting more integrationist politics towards immigrants from a human rights perspective. Indeed, left-wing populism has generally emerged as a movement with more organized and programmatic demands, such as those of trade unions, student groups, and civil society organizations. In contrast, the right focuses on fighting institutions and immigrants rather than the neoliberal system itself (Saç, 2017, pp. 273-274).

For this reason, they appear as inorganic, leader-focused protest movements centered around a single issue (immigration, Islam, etc.). Indeed, when looking at the actors of far-

right politics in the US, Latin America, or Europe, it is clear that they marginalize the institutions and immigrants of the previous era rather than fighting against neoliberalism. As an economic elite figure, Donald Trump did not declare war on the neoliberal system that had enriched him after assuming the presidency. Instead, he built his politics and campaign primarily on anti-immigrant sentiment. Indeed, his rhetoric or promise to "make America great again" is based on maintaining the neoliberal system. However, this does not imply complete acceptance of the system; it also includes the promise to erect a national wall against it (Tierney, 2019). Trumpism, which can also be defined as a policy of directing the anger of white American workers experiencing economic problems, is based on the claim that immigrants are taking jobs from white Americans.

In this way, it also challenges neoliberal concepts such as migrants, multiculturalism, human rights, globalization, and free movement. However, during this challenge, it was not the neoliberal system that was pushed out by the polis, but immigrants and bureaucratic elites who insisted on enforcing the laws, rules, and customs of the previous era. This discourse is not borne solely by Trump or the Republican Party; it is also sustained by an amorphous social movement organized through networks like QAnon that spread institutional distrust. These movements have formed the fundamental dynamic that has given Trump autonomy and bargaining power over the party's traditional elite. The sociological and economic backgrounds of anti-immigrant sentiment are fueled by far-right politicians and political movements. According to far-right politics, migrants threaten to undermine the moral values of people (the polis). At times, immigration issues are also used as an object of fear to suppress and balance criticism of government corruption, as in the case of Orbán in Hungary (Reuters, 2024).

Similar to examples in the US and Latin America, economic and social insecurity in Europe, especially after the 2008 crisis, has paved the way for the rise of nationalism intertwined with anti-immigrant sentiment. Far-right parties such as Marine Le Pen's National Front in France, Matteo Salvini's Lega Nord in Italy, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria, and Vox in Spain are shaping Europe's political framework. Their common rhetoric combines the protection of national interests with opposition to EU bureaucracy. The first concrete result of the rhetoric of protecting national interests has manifested as anti-immigrant sentiment, as seen in the US. However, it is important to emphasize that the Islamophobic basis of anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe is more decisive than its ethnic basis. Rather than anger directed at the citizens of EU member states, it is more accurate to speak of opposition directed at non-EU citizens and, specifically, non-Christians, particularly Muslims. It is possible to say that economic concerns are the main reason behind this (Kaya, 2018, p. 16). This opposition has been transformed into a political force not only through party manifestos but also through transnational street movements such as the PEGIDA. These movements have provided parties in different countries with both a ready-made discourse and a mobilized support base. At this point, an important characteristic of far-right politics emerges, it develops a discourse against EU bureaucracy, though not against the EU itself. Similarly, it is anti-immigrant but accepts immigrants based on their identity and opposes the consequences of the neoliberal system without opposing the system itself. More clearly, far-right politics reframes the economic crises caused by neoliberalism through identities and institutions, narrows the political arena with a discourse of national interest, and directs the anger of the people towards its goals (Aytaç et al. 2024).

As an alternative to the foundations on which far-right politics has risen, populist left or far-left politics has emphasized social justice in opposition to the market, which is a

fundamental element of the neoliberal system, in response to economic and social crises. Additionally, its approach to identity politics has been from the perspective of human rights, pluralism, and international solidarity. In other words, left-wing populism has preferred human-centered politics over nation- or state-centered politics, embracing the discourse of social integration rather than anti-immigrant sentiment. The inequality created by neoliberalism and the figure of the immigrant constructed as the "other" have not only created a demand for the rise of the far right but have also determined the form of the politicization of this demand. The anger and anxiety directed against the system, unable to find representation through traditional party channels, necessitated a movement that could express and transform it into collective power. Therefore, within the triadic model, social movements should be regarded as an indispensable tool that bridges the gap between the institutional rigidity of the party and the personal performance of the leader, converting emotional energy into political action.

The dynamics of mass mobilization in far-right movements and leadership loyalty

The rise of social movements embracing far-right politics should be examined not only at the ideological and discursive levels but also in terms of their organizational forms and repertoires of action. Issues such as immigration and impoverishment first legitimized the far right and then spread it. However, it would be oversimplified to claim that it turned into a political movement because it excluded some groups. It is necessary to discuss the politicization of emotions at this point. This is because complaints stemming from neoliberalism and immigration have led to widespread political anger, making social movements indispensable. Collective anger, fueled by perceptions of injustice, is the fundamental driving force behind political action (van Zomeren, 2021). The function of the movement is to capture and channel raw emotional energy. In such times, angry crowds often seek leaders with whom they can identify, even if they are unaware of it. Tilly's (2004) analysis, presented under the acronym WUNC (Value, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment), can play an extremely functional role in understanding the processes of massification and crowd mobilization.

After 1980, far-right movements began emphasizing values. Neoliberalism triumphed over socialism following events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As a result, the neoliberal global order appeared unassailable. In this context, far-right movements are considered to be marginal or radical. However, the 2008 global economic crisis, subsequent waves of immigration, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the weaknesses of the neoliberal order and made the idea of "national self-sufficiency" meaningful again for both right-wing and left-wing politics. These crises have reshaped the value systems of far-right movements. The far right adapted ideas associated with nationalist ideology, such as "national interests," "the voice of the people," and "self-sufficiency," to suit its agenda. Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again," PEGIDA's slogan "We are the people" (Knight, 2017), and Le Pen's slogan "Let the people speak" (Malender, 2017) resonated both at the ballot box and in public opinion. Thus, far-right movements built a new politics centered on "national values" and "ordinary people." These values are particularly important because they offer groups marginalized since the 1980s and pushed to the margins or bottom of the system by neoliberal politics a chance to feel like "us" again. By creating a sense of commonality through concepts such as "white Americans," "Christian Europeans," and "indigenous peoples," they gained the power to unite individuals within the movement. However, it can be said that the triadic model was a founding mechanism in the spontaneous emergence of these "values."

The party uses these values in its election propaganda, lending them legitimacy and credibility. Meanwhile, the leader acts as a spokesperson for these values. The crowds at rallies organized by far-right movements that have been able to create common values and identities are also important. This emphasis on crowd size is so important that rally visuals are sometimes manipulated to make them appear larger than they are. This is because the size of the crowd, which is the result of mobilization skills in these movements, can provide an image of legitimacy that is independent of reality. The party's organizational skills and the leader's performance at rallies are fundamental factors in mobilizing the movement. Value, unity, and numbers are elements that can be seen in similar ways in both right-wing and leftist politics. Common values that are considered legitimate and virtuous are created, centering on those excluded or oppressed by neoliberalism. Ethnic and cultural unity is built around these values. This launches a political movement that gains national and global recognition and is often mobilized by political parties. The fourth criterion, loyalty, differs from the previous criteria. As discussed in the next section, loyalty in far-right movements manifests as loyalty to the leader.

Charisma, institution and masses: The construction of far-right leadership

The leader, whom we consider the third and final fundamental institution of the far right, also establishes the link between the party and the movement. The leader plays a founding role in directing anger at weakening political and bureaucratic institutions in times of crisis. While developing an anti-system discourse against institutions and actors on the one hand, the leader is able to construct their own political image that supplants those very institutions. The leader, who has become the representative of the new values mentioned above, constructs the discourse of the "ordinary person" or the "real people" that has been excluded until now, while also identifying themselves with the people. Therefore, the people referred to by far-right politics are those whose identity is embodied by the leader, and the leader is the voice of the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019, p. 87). Identifying the leader with the people also gives the leader the power to determine who is the people and who is the enemy. For this reason, far-right parties' political partners can change rapidly. Actors or institutions that the leader defines as the people and partners in the construction of the great nation can be labeled as centers of treason and traitors to the nation the next day.

Likewise, leaders have the power to define the values of a movement. For example, the leader of the anti-immigrant Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*) in Türkiye, while promising to deport Syrian migrants, learned that a shopkeeper he was visiting was a Turkmen. He then referred to the man as 'one of us' and granted him 'permission' to stay. This incident is a powerful example of how far-right leaders can determine both the real people and policies of their parties. Similar examples can be found with leaders such as Trump, Le Pen, and Bolsonaro. These leaders have identified their parties with movements built around new values and identified the movement with themselves. However, this identification also gives rise to certain institutional problems. The leader's rhetoric, which appeals to emotions, mobilizes the masses, and defines the opponent, weakens the institutions.

Charismatic authority and leadership in the post-truth era

The leader then fills the void left by the institutions with their personal characteristics. As illustrated in Figure 3, the Rule of Law Index declined in the United States, Brazil, Hungary, and Türkiye during the periods when leaders commonly classified as far right were in power. This decline appears to coincide with the consolidation of personalist rule, in which the leader's charisma increasingly substitutes for institutionalized legal authority. In such contexts, the rule of law is progressively undermined as legal norms and judicial autonomy are subordinated to the leader's will and image.
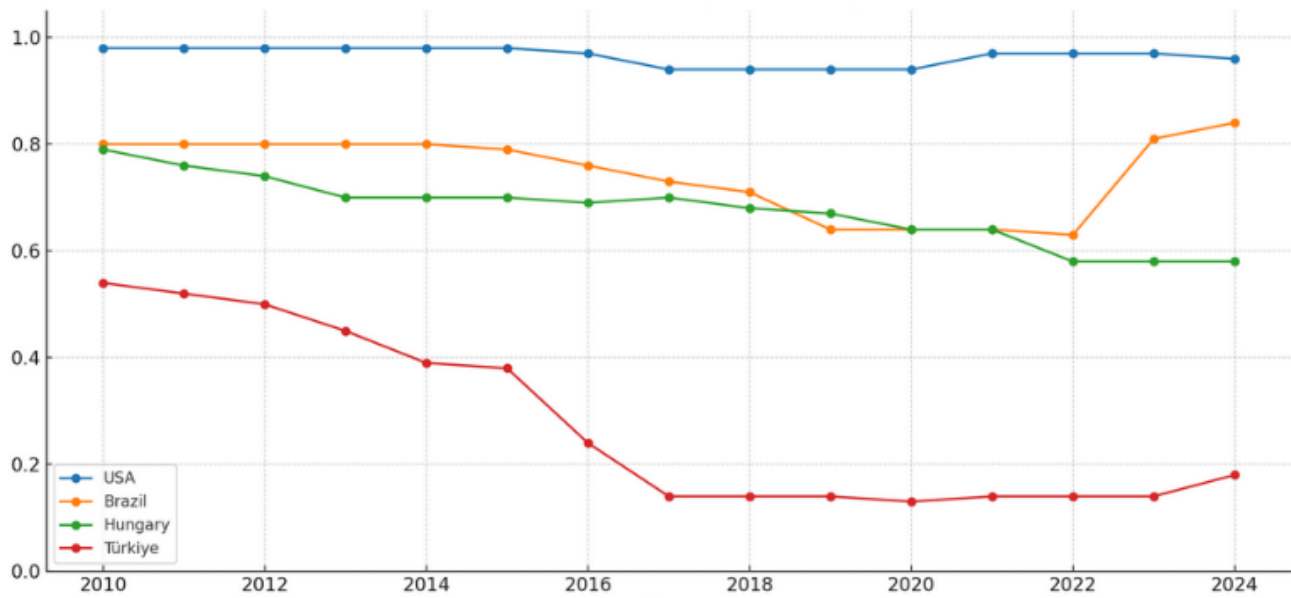
**Figure 3.** The rule of law index between 2010-2024 in four countries ruled by far right leaders

Source: Author's compilation based on the V-Dem Dataset v14.

Charismatic authority can emerge when legal-rational authority erodes and the system faces a legitimacy crisis. Leaders who establish emotional bonds with the masses through personal skills, such as oratory, can take precedence over formal institutions and rules (Weber, 1978, pp. 241-246). In fact, in addition to being the leader of the construction of the real popular will, they can also become the source of reality.

The notion of the post-truth era emerged in response to the rise of far-right leaders and is rooted in the same political logic. During this period, political reality/truth is determined not by objective data, but by emotions, beliefs, and affiliations, and more importantly, by the leader. The leader is both the source and spokesperson of this "truth." This is not merely a rhetorical strategy but a measurable governmental practice. As Figure 4 illustrates, the dissemination of false information by the government increased significantly in Türkiye, Hungary, the United States, and Brazil during the tenure of these leaders.

Consequently, the leader, empowered by the movement and the party, becomes the sole figure whose pronouncements are awaited during times of crisis. The response of the party or movement is determined not by the decisions of these institutions' boards and other decision-making mechanisms but by the leader's decision. In fact, at this point, while far-right politics can be thought of as movement-less and party-less, it is unimaginable without a leader like Donald Trump. Even if parties lose power or disintegrate, leaders' political careers can continue (Moffit, 2020, p. 91). Only the leader can simultaneously direct the dispersed energy of the movement and bring performance-based flexibility to the party's bureaucratic rigidity.

In the post-truth era, leaders position themselves as the only figures who work for the people and tell them the truth, a position sustained by their own charisma and power. Trump's accusation of "fake news" against the mainstream media (The United States Government, 2025) exemplifies this logic. Similar claims by far-right parties and leaders, such as Pegida, Zafer, and Vox, suggest that the media either fabricate information or conceal the truth from the public. The leader is presented as the embodiment of the people, their sole spokesperson, and the ultimate arbiter of what is "fake," a power claimed in defiance of the system's protective mechanisms. Leaders reinforce the image of being constantly close to the people by communicating their messages directly through social media, rallies, and live broadcasts. In this way, the leader not only informs the people about political activities and current events but also directs their emotions, anger, and fears. Therefore, through an effective and direct communication strategy, the leader gains the power to construct political discourse and popular emotions. By framing complex issues as a struggle between the "pure people" and "corrupt elites," the leader simplifies political reality and intensifies the very anger and fear that fuels the movement (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). For this reason, a leader's charisma can mobilize the masses in the short term but hinders the ability to follow a consistent line of thought. Consequently, this leads to an ideological abstraction.
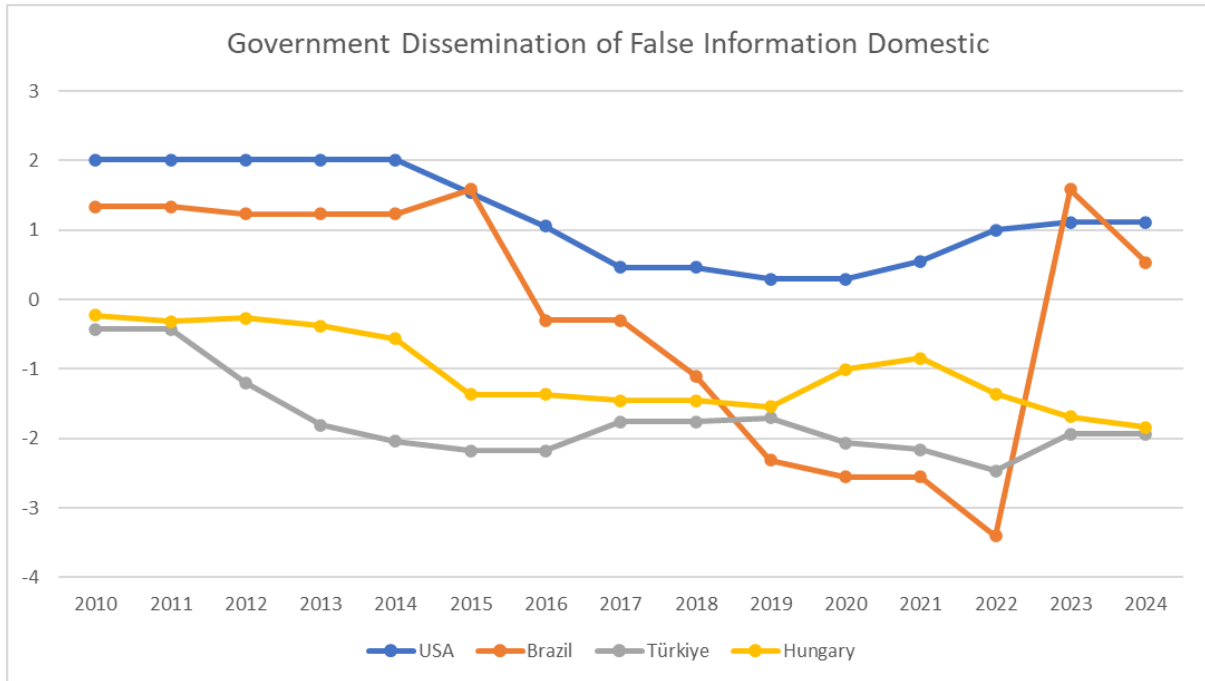

Figure 4. Government dissemination of false information domestic index
Source: Author's compilation based on the V-Dem Dataset v14.

Leader-People Identification

One of the most important realities behind a leader's ability to address the masses directly is the leader's ability to convince them of their unity with the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2019, p. 81). The leader's media performance is crucial to achieving this. A leader who opposes the media order but uses the media effectively can achieve results to the extent that they succeed in creating an image that is both powerful and ordinary. Symbols are important at this stage of the process. Leaders of far-right groups often use symbols that are easily understood. This makes people want to get involved in politics and feel more connected to movements. For example, Donald Trump's MAGA hat, Erdoğan's promotion

of the TOGG car, Bolsonaro's modest attire, and Özdağ's clothing features ancient Göktürk writing. These symbols are more than ordinary figures. Their simplicity and accessibility make them strong emotional triggers, allowing complex emotions to surface through simple actions. When someone wears a MAGA hat, they show defiance towards elites. They express this defiance through anger and pride, transforming their emotions into a political identity. These potent symbols have been shown to empower individuals to engage in political change through low-cost, low-risk actions. For many, these acts are perceived as a fundamental patriotic responsibility. Through this dynamic process, a profound emotional bond is formed between the leaders and citizens. This creates a powerful sense of unity in which private sentiments merge seamlessly with shared political purposes. They act against existing establishments. This direct emotional connection weakens the establishment discourse and undermines deliberation in liberal democracy. As shown in Figure 5, the Deliberative Democracy Index in these countries consistently declined during far-right rule.
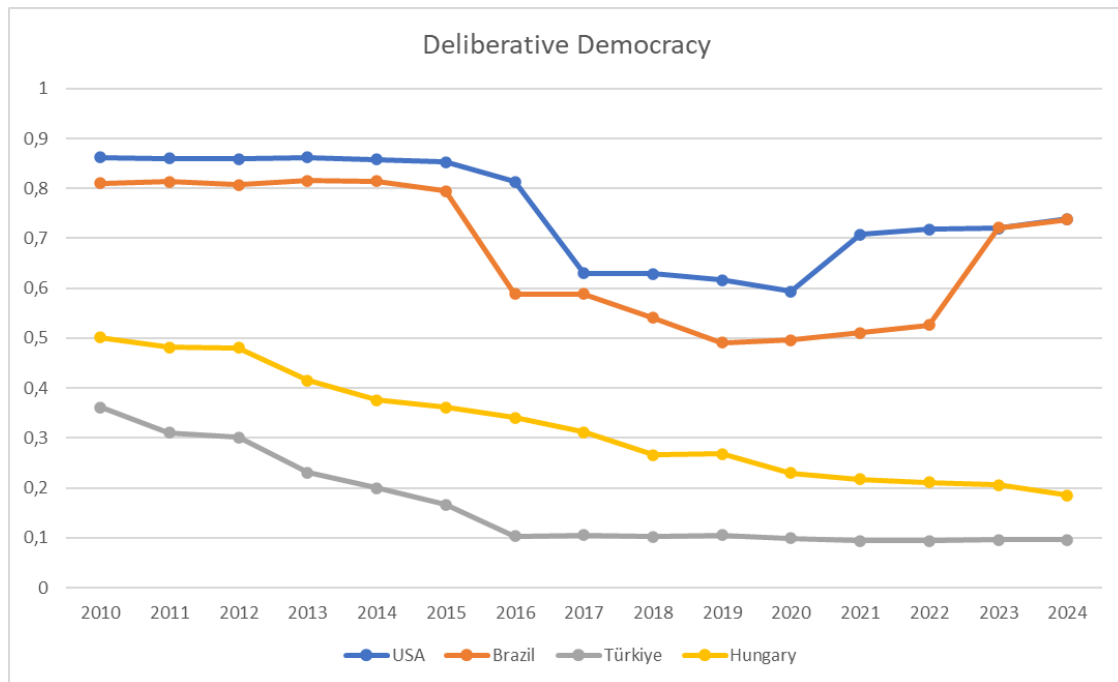
Figure 5. Deliberative Democracy Index

Source: Author's compilation based on the V-Dem Dataset v14.

This decline was not coincidental. This reflects a core trade-off in far-right politics. As unmediated, symbolic identification with the leader intensifies, the space for rational, multi-vocal, and institutionalized public deliberation systematically shrinks.

The triadic institutionalization of far-right politics culminates in a final synthesis embodied by the leader. The leader becomes an "empty signifier" in Laclau's (2007) sense, bringing together the various complaints and demands for identity in the movement within their own personality. However, it is the institutional ground provided by the party that transforms this discursive construction into concrete political power. As seen in the examples of Le Pen and the National Rally or Trump and the Republican Party, the leader initially transforms the party with the power drawn from the movement and then consolidates their control over the movement with the power drawn from the party. Thus, the leader, empowered by both the movement and the party, ultimately rises above both, becoming an indispensable center without which neither can be conceived. This is the final stage of the far right's evolution from a "mass party to a leader party," and in this structure,

the leader is not merely an administrator. They are also an institutional phenomenon that embodies the spirit of the movement, the mind of the party, and the will of the people.

Conclusion

In the last quarter of the 20th century, changing understandings of society in the fields of politics and sociology transformed the structure of political parties and social movements. From the 1970s onwards, thinkers and activists who accepted the fragmented structure of society began to construct the politics of disadvantaged groups based on their identities. In left-wing politics, this change took the form of a shift from class movements to identity movements based on gender, environmentalism, and social issues, whereas in right-wing politics, it took the form of anti-immigrant and nationalist rhetoric. Although the transformation that took place during the rise of neoliberalism did not open up neoliberalism to debate in right-wing politics, it can be seen as a reaction to its consequences. Unlike fascism or classical authoritarian regimes, the contemporary far right does not aim for a fundamental systemic transformation. However, it adopts a critical and exclusionary stance against the existing political order, cultural pluralism, and universal rights norms. Conceptually, it exhibits a great diversity. In this respect, it differs from fascism and similar authoritarian regimes in the second and third quarters of the 20th century. To emphasize this difference, many authors have referred to the new era as fascist, neo-fascist, neo-populist, new-populist, radical-right, radical-right populist, populist, right-wing populist, anti-immigrant, and new-right (Hainsworth, 2008, p. 9).

This study suggests a triadic framework that focuses on the interactions between parties, movements, and leadership. This study aims to contribute to the institutional analysis of far-right politics. Traditional approaches generally conceptualize far-right politics as anti-systemic or ideologically marginal. However, this article argues that its contemporary form operates from within the system, utilizing and reshaping democratic structures. This study examines the party's organizational resources, its attempts to gain legitimacy, the grassroots energy of the movement, and the charismatic authority of the leader who connects these two elements as the three parts of this organizational structure.

The main original contribution of this study is the modeling of the complementary yet often contradictory relationship between parties, movements, and leaders. As the literature generally focuses on party-movement contexts or personalist party analyses, it does not evaluate these three elements together. This model also provides guidance for explaining the far right's fundamental success. This explains how the far right succeeds by benefiting from the system's resources through the party while simultaneously gaining anti-system legitimacy through the movement and the leader. It also argues that the far right can simultaneously represent contradictory positions. This is because the far right is viewed as both a flexible and resilient form of politics. Moreover, even while proclaiming itself against the system, it operates within it. Explaining these tensions made it possible to conduct a holistic analysis of the party, movement, and leader triangle. This triadic model does not view the rise of the far right solely from an economic or cultural perspective but also presents theoretical and political propositions regarding institutional politics. In this situation, the threat posed to liberal democracy by the far-right rise has been discussed. The far right is not like classical fascism, which poses an external threat to democratic politics. This is a pernicious threat emanating from within the system, whereby democratic institutions are subsumed into their own political agenda through the utilization of authoritarian and exclusionary practices.

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Disclosure statement

Ethics approval statement

No ethical approval was necessary for this research, as it did not involve human subjects, animal experiments, or any procedures requiring institutional review.