

THE RISE OF FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF NEOLIBERALISM: THE CASE OF AfD (ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND)

Müslüm ACAR¹

Abstract

Far-right movements in Europe have gained significant momentum, increasingly challenging the European Union's integration process and core values. This study aims to analyze the underlying causes behind the emergence and rise of far-right movements while exploring their relationship with neoliberalism. Ruth Wodak's historical approach, one of the essential frameworks in critical discourse analysis, is adopted as the methodological foundation. Wodak's method, which incorporates historical context, ideology-power relations, and interdisciplinary analysis, offers a suitable framework for a detailed examination of both the rise of the far-right and the historical development of neoliberal policies. Furthermore, the study investigates how far-right movements instrumentalize the social and economic inequalities produced by neoliberal reforms, offering a multidimensional assessment supported by media analysis. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to achieve this, examining relevant academic articles, online publications, and books.

Keywords

Far Right
Neoliberalism
European Union
AfD
Germany

Article Info

Research Article

Received : 14.04.2025
Accepted : 30.08.2025
Online Published : 15.06.2026
DOI : 10.58702/teyd.1676030

¹ Doktora Öğrencisi, Kocaeli Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Avrupa Birliği Çalışmaları Bölümü, e-posta: muslimacar@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-5845-1777.

NEOLİBERALİZM ÇERÇEVESİNDE AVRUPA'DA AŞIRI SAĞ HAREKETLERİN YÜKSELİŞİ: AfD (ALMANYA İÇİN ALTERNATİF) ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Avrupa'daki aşırı sağ hareketler önemli bir ivme kazanarak Avrupa Birliği'nin bütünleşme sürecine ve temel değerlerine giderek daha fazla meydan okumaktadır. Bu çalışma, aşırı sağ hareketlerin ortaya çıkışının ve yükselişinin altında yatan nedenleri analiz etmeyi ve neoliberalizm ile ilişkilerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada, eleştirel söylem çözümlemesinin önemli yöntemlerinden biri olan Ruth Wodak'ın tarihsel yaklaşımı metodolojik temel olarak benimsenmiştir. Wodak'ın tarihsel bağlam, ideoloji-iktidar ilişkileri ve disiplinlerarası çözümlemeyi içeren yöntemi; hem aşırı sağın yükselişinin hem de neoliberal politikaların tarihsel gelişiminin detaylı biçimde incelenmesi için uygun bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışma, neoliberal politikaların yarattığı sosyal ve ekonomik eşitsizliklerin aşırı sağ tarafından nasıl araçsallaştırıldığını inceleyerek, medya analizleriyle desteklenen çok boyutlu bir değerlendirme yapmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için ilgili akademik makaleler, çevrimiçi yayınlar ve kitaplar taranarak kapsamlı bir literatür incelemesi yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Aşırı Sağ
Neoliberalizm
Avrupa Birliği
AfD
Almanya

Makale Hakkında

Araştırma Makalesi

Gönderim Tarihi : 14.04.2025
Kabul Tarihi : 30.08.2025
E-Yayın Tarihi : 15.06.2026
DOI : 10.58702/teyd.1676030

Citation Information: Acar, M. (2026). The rise of far-right movements in Europe within the framework of neoliberalism: The case of AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). *Journal of Society, Economics and Management*, 7 (2), 311-335.

Kaynakça Gösterimi: Acar, M. (2026). Neoliberalizm çerçevesinde Avrupa'da aşırı sağ hareketlerin yükselişi: AfD (Almanya için Alternatif) örneği. *Toplum, Ekonomi ve Yönetim Dergisi*, 7 (2), 311-335.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU), despite being built based on economic integration, peace, and democratization, has undergone a significant transformation process in recent years due to the rise of the far right and the impact of neoliberal policies. Far-right parties and movements have become influential on the political scene, gaining more and more support across Europe. This rise has been fuelled by economic inequalities caused by neoliberal policies and the weakening of the welfare state model. The social transformation caused by neoliberal policies has been perceived as a threat to national security and social values, which has paved the way for the more effective use of populist discourses by far-right movements. Far-right movements claim that the system serves the interests of elitist and elite groups and position themselves as representatives of the people.

As one of Europe's economic and political centers, Germany provides a critical example of the rise of the far-right. Although far-right movements have a historical background in the country, today's far-right parties have started to influence society with populist discourses. The strengthening of the far-right in Germany, one of the essential actors of the European Union and the neoliberal order, causes serious debates on the future of European politics. Far-right movements use Jose Ortega y Gasset's conceptualization of *me* and *others* to present social differences as a threat and gather support through this discourse.

In this study, the rise of far-right movements in Europe, especially in Germany, will be analyzed using qualitative research methodology, and the role of neoliberal policies in this process will be discussed. The historical method of Ruth Wodak, an essential approach to critical discourse analysis, was adopted as a methodological framework. Wodak's methodology, which incorporates elements of historical context, ideology-power relations, and interdisciplinary study, provides an appropriate framework for a detailed examination of the rise of the far-right and the historical development of neoliberal policies. Furthermore, it will examine how the far right instrumentalizes the inequalities generated by neoliberal policies and provide a multidimensional assessment supported by media analysis. In conclusion, the rise of the far-right movement has created a significant transformation in contemporary European politics, and different approaches have been developed to address the long-term effects of these movements. In this context, the relationship between the reasons for the emergence of the far-right and the social and economic consequences of neoliberal policies will be analyzed in depth in this study.

Ruth Wodak's *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA) has been selected as the methodological framework of this study, as the rise of the far right constitutes a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing historical, ideological, and discursive dimensions. By situating discourse within its historical context and power relations, DHA allows for a deeper understanding beyond surface-level narratives. In doing so, it exposes how the social and economic inequalities produced by neoliberal policies are strategically instrumentalized by far-right movements. Its interdisciplinary orientation, which draws on linguistics, political science, sociology, and history, provides a comprehensive analytical lens to explore this complexity. Moreover, the emphasis placed on the role of media in disseminating and legitimizing political discourses contributes significantly to understanding the processes through which the far right gains social acceptance in contemporary Europe. Overall, DHA

constitutes an appropriate methodological approach that enriches this study with both analytical flexibility and conceptual depth.

This study aims to analyze the impact of neoliberal policies on the rise of the far-right in Europe. In the first part, the basic arguments and assumptions of liberal and neoliberal theory will be discussed. In the second part, the origins and emergence of the far-right concept will be examined, and the approaches of thinkers such as Mudde, Betz, and Ignazi to the idea will be discussed. In the third part, the reasons for the rise of the far-right in Europe will be evaluated within the framework of neoliberal theory. In this context, why is the far-right gaining support in Europe? Can these movements be explained only by specific events and phenomena, or should they be considered in a broader framework? In the last section, far-right parties and movements in Germany will be scrutinized, their continuity or intellectual differences will be analyzed, and their relationship with neoliberalism will be evaluated.

1. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a political and economic idea emphasizing ideals such as free trade, reduced government spending, deregulation, and globalization. It is directly related to the *laissez-faire* economic model that minimizes interference in the financial affairs of individuals and society (Manning, 2022). Neoliberalism includes both economic and political arrangements. It favors private capital and aims to ensure that private enterprises control state-controlled capital. What is essential at this point is the active and orderly functioning of free markets, limiting state and government spending, and limiting public control.

The intellectual and theoretical roots of neoliberalism go back to classical liberalism. In this context, to better understand neoliberalism, it is necessary to understand classical liberalism, its thinkers, and fundamental propositions. With thinkers such as David Hume (1711-1776), Alex Ferguson (1723-1816) and Adam Smith (1723-1790), liberal thought emerged and spread (Erdoğan, 2009, p. 9). Especially Adam Smith's book *The Wealth of Nations* has a significant place in the spread of liberal thought and is one of the most referenced books on liberalism.

Thinkers and some important events and phenomena have influenced the person's liberation and the emergence and spread of liberal thought. These are the English Revolution (1688), the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Great French Revolution (1789). The common characteristic of these three critical historical revolutions is the emphasis on the individual and the spread of individual freedoms.

Liberal thought emphasized individual freedom and argued that obstacles to individual liberties should be removed. Adam Smith stated that freedoms should arise spontaneously within society, not through external interventions and regulations. Therefore, Smith argued that this spontaneous phenomenon would bring order with the help of the *invisible hand*. This area of freedom, which is formed within social dynamics without external intervention, will bring welfare, happiness, and economic development to society (Aslan, 2019). Smith's statements have been one of the most essential foundations for liberalism and neoliberalism. However, while social welfare and the individual's freedom are created with the help of the invisible hand, some groups in society are negatively affected. This raises the central question of this study. One of the most important reasons for the spread of far-right

movements in Europe in general and in Germany in particular, for the groups that support far-right movements, is the equal application of this freedom between foreigners and citizens in the country.

Liberal thought has been influential since the 19th century and has theoretically influenced different geographies since the 20th century. After the Second World War, it experienced its golden period, so to speak, and influenced most countries worldwide. The fact that the victors of the war supported liberal thought and other states believed that liberalism was necessary for development further increased the influence of liberalism. However, the Cold War, economic crises, the oil crisis, and rising unemployment and inflation from the 1970s onwards questioned liberalism.

The concept of neoliberalism was introduced at a meeting in Paris in 1938. Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, who later contributed to neoliberal theory, were also present at this meeting (Monbiot, 2016). It was argued that the powers of governments should be limited to prevent states from becoming absolutist and authoritarian, as in Nazism and communism. In 1944, *The Road to Serfdom* and in 1947, *The Mont Pelerin Society* Friedman's work in the 1950s was a turning point for neoliberalism. However, neoliberalism did not receive the expected attention in this period. In 1947, the inaugural speech of the Mont Pelerin Society discussed the Keynesian Economic Model, which supports and promotes state intervention for social welfare (Slobodian, 2018, p. 6). However, the participants did not reach a clear consensus on the arguments of the new theory. Therefore, it was necessary to wait longer to see the international impact of the theory and its position in the system. Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) were the periods when neoliberal policies were forcibly imposed on the international system. Indeed, events and phenomena such as tax cuts, the relegation of trade union rights to the background, privatization, the use of foreign resources, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union integration process, and the Maastricht Treaty led to the spread of neoliberal policies around the world (Monbiot, 2016).

Neoliberalism has been influential since the 1970s and is one of today's most debated social, political, and economic theories. Neoliberals have argued that the capacity of governments and states to provide economic and social welfare is insufficient, so private enterprise should be supported (Bockman, 2013, p. 14). At this point, the state's mission is to guarantee private enterprises and neoliberal policies and to regulate the rules accordingly. This way, individual freedoms will be secured, and markets will be liberalized. In free markets, individuals will prosper, and states that protect individual rights will prosper. According to Friedman, an essential thinker of neoliberal theory, the free market and political freedoms are directly related (Friedman, 2016, p. 344). Emancipated free market conditions will lead to free societies. This is formulated as limiting the state, liberating the individual, and securing free market conditions.

Neoliberalism has made significant progress and influenced the system since it started to be discussed. Anderson described neoliberalism as the most successful ideology and theory in world history (Anderson, 2000, p. 17). Saad-Filho and Johnston stated that we live in an entirely neoliberal world (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005, p. 1). Although these definitions contain strong and sharp arguments, they do not change the fact that the theory dominates the system. Indeed, today, power, wealth, and capital are entirely managed and directed by

transnational corporations. The policies used by states seeking development have mostly been neoliberal policies. In this sense, neoliberal economic models are the state's most important development tool. However, this does not mean that the theory is successful and realistic in absolute terms. The colonialist and colonialist history of the developed Western and Northern states and their economic accumulation in this historical process should not be ignored. Even in the developed European states, neoliberal policies have brought significant problems. Foremost among these is the strengthening and spread of far-right movements.

Harvey (2005) is an important thinker in neoliberal theory. In defining the theory, he described the market intervention as a new ethic that can guide all human action, replacing traditional patterns (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). The profit-making objective in the market is seen as prioritizing all other values. The most crucial goal is economic growth and welfare. Neoliberalism gives birth to a business ethics that rejects corporate social responsibility and states that organizations and companies should only focus on profit and loss (Steger and Ravi, 2010, p. 13). It is seen as an individual in which people's status as emotional and intellectual individuals is questioned. Human beings are entirely reduced to the plane of labor and surplus value.

David Harvey's definition of the theory is one of the most important ones that will help us understand it, given its contribution to and impact on neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a political economy theory that argues that to ensure human welfare, individual entrepreneurship, and freedom should be developed, and that free trade and free markets should be functional. The state's role is to develop and implement regulations within a framework that is appropriate to this. The state should make legal, political, and institutional arrangements to guarantee the functioning of free markets. However, state intervention should be minimal. When states intervene in the market a second time or repeatedly, the integrity of free markets will be disrupted, and some interest groups will benefit from this (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Harvey's definition is essential in presenting the general framework and arguments of the theory. The system should be designed to protect and guarantee the rights of free markets and private enterprise. However, this definition emphasizes business owners and firms. The judgment that people in a region will benefit from free market conditions is not always valid. Based on Harvey's definition, neoliberalism has been seen as a mainstream theory (Thorsen, 2006, pp. 11-12). Competition under free market conditions will create wealth for society to prosper.

Blomgren made another important definition of the theory. According to this, neoliberalism is considered a two-pronged process. One of these ends is political liberalism, which defends the freedom of governments and states. The other extreme is the control and monitoring of the economy (Blomgren, 1997, p. 224). Neoliberalism is the search for a balance between these two extremes. On the one hand, free markets and private enterprise should be free from interference. However, there is a need for a force to protect this system. Friedman argues that the state's role in neoliberalism cannot be ignored entirely. On the contrary, it should continue to exist in the system as an arbiter (Friedman, 2008, p. 20). As Blomgren and Friedman understand it, the state is not entirely ignored; on the contrary, it is defined as an institution that regulates and sometimes supervises the system.

Neoliberalism is a theory that focuses on free markets and the economy and minimizes state intervention. The minimization of state intervention paves the way for the strengthening and developing private capital. The increase in private capital and privatization do not create equal societal opportunities. As a result, unemployment has increased, and political values have been relegated to the background as the state is only a supervisor. This has led to an increase in conservative values in society and reactions against the system, which has led to the strengthening of movements such as the far right, which advocates protectionist values.

2. Origins of the Far-Right

In the literature, many concepts are used to describe far-right movements. It is possible to encounter terms such as extreme right, populism, radical right, or extreme right-wing. Many definitions and ideas are put forward about these movements. While the conceptual debates continued, in 1967, at a conference titled Extreme Right and Populism at the London of Economics, attended by important thinkers such as Ernest Gellner, Isaiah Berlin, Alain Touraine, Peter Worsley, Kenneth Minogue, Ghita Ionescu, and Franco Venturi, it was concluded that a single definition of these movements could not be correct. Mudde, on the other hand, stated that it is difficult to specify this concept with a single judgment. Instead, these movements are fed by resentment (Kaya, 2016, p. 23). The difficulty in defining the problem is that resentments are based on different reasons because the reasons for these geographical, political, social, and cultural resentments differ.

In the literature on populism and the far right, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe define populism as a discursive logic through which diverse social demands are linked together in an *equivalential chain*, thereby providing theoretical depth to the political construction of populist movements (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). This approach continues to serve as a key reference for analyzing the discursive strategies of the contemporary far-right. Cas Mudde, on the other hand, conceptualizes populist far-right parties through the dimensions of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, offering a theoretical typology of far-right parties in Europe. Mudde's radical right typology classifies parties along the dimensions of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, which help explain their emphasis on protecting national identity, strict adherence to authority, and anti-elite, populist rhetoric. This framework enables a comparative and systematic analysis of far-right parties in Europe (Mudde, 2007). These theoretical frameworks intersect with the social, cultural, and political consequences of neoliberalism (Geiselberger, 2017). In particular, some approaches provide significant insights by explaining the rise of the far right not only through economic factors but also via political, socio-psychological, and cultural foundations (Appadurai, 2017; Fraser, 2017). Within this framework, widespread disillusionment with democratic institutions leads to citizen disengagement and increasing political frustration, while the combination of neoliberal economic policies with cultural recognition and identity politics generates social tensions that can be exploited by reactionary populist actors (Appadurai, 2017; Fraser, 2017).

Ignazi's definition and interpretation are more inclusive in this context. According to him, instead of classifying far-right movements according to the rules of the democratic system, the principle of equality and fundamental rights and freedoms, ethnic, religious, and racial classification is preferred. While making this classification, the use of violence is not denied and even legitimized (Ignazi, 1992, p. 1). This overarching definition of far-right

movements today contains essential distinctions. The classification is based on exclusionary elements rather than democracy, justice, and equality. When this is the case, inevitably, the aspect of violence is not denied.

Far-right movements are successful in creating *enemies* and *others* and in directing and influencing society in this sense. The religious and racial dimensions of society are brought to the forefront, borders and classifications are clarified, and the self and the other are created (Wodak, 2015, p. 18). Immigrants, foreigners, religious minorities, and sometimes institutions such as the European Union are portrayed as threatening groups. Structural references to origin and religion, facts such as who threatens society, and how are used. This creates fear in society. Negative situations in society are associated with these groups and portrayed as threats. In populist and far-right discourses, the main elements of agitation include economic anxieties, perceived cultural threats, anti-immigrant representations, and dissemination through media channels. Economic concerns highlight societal insecurities and inequalities produced by neoliberal policies, legitimizing the blame directed at immigrants as *the other*. Perceived cultural threats reinforce the image of national identity and values being at risk, deepening social polarization. Media and social media platforms rapidly spread these narratives, focusing public attention on specific themes. Together, these elements form a strategic framework of agitation that enhances social support for populist actors and amplifies their political influence (Uygur and Bakan, 2025, pp. 820–832).

Betz draws attention to some differences when comparing the far-right movements that are effective today with those that were effective in the past. Today's far-right movements have the potential to create and sustain agendas, their party organization is strong, and they have concrete achievements, which distinguishes them from the movements of the past (Betz, 1998, p. 1). The power to set the agenda has led far-right movements in particular to adopt a populist identity. For this reason, the term far-right populism has been frequently used recently. Far-right movements combine the issues that societies are sensitive to with the element of threat and cause a sense of fear and anger in society. The issues that society is particularly sensitive to are reflected in society in different ways through the power of the media. Populism is defined as a political approach built on the claim of defending the rights of the *ordinary people* against privileged groups who are perceived to exploit and dominate society (Germani, 1978, pp. 87–89). In this context, politics is understood as the arena in which the demands and aspirations of the people must be directly represented (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2019, pp. 11–13). Thus, populist politics not only places the interests of the people at the center but also embodies a form of rebellion against the established political order.

According to Berlin, far-right movements first identify enemies who pose a threat to the population. These include refugees, foreigners, ethnic groups, and some elite groups. Once the threat is identified, the definition of the real people is made. This is in line with Gasset's notions of *me* and *others*. Then, the language of anger and hatred is used against groups identified as threats (Berlin, 1967, p. 16). Negative societal situations and structures are often associated with groups labeled as enemies, and a populist discourse is created in this context.

Ernesto Laclau, a leading figure in the discursive approach, sees populism not as an ideology but as a strategy that shapes political boundaries dividing society into two camps. According to Laclau (as cited in Uygur, 2024), populism organizes the dissatisfaction arising

from social inequalities and power imbalances, mobilizing the oppressed against those in power. Both conceptual and discursive approaches emphasize the division between the people and the elite, while the discursive perspective explains in detail how these groups are socially and politically constructed. Especially within the context of neoliberal hegemony, the discursive approach provides an important framework for understanding how social relations and power structures are shaped. This perspective allows for the analysis of populism's economic, political, and cultural dimensions together, showing how the people-elite division is reinforced in the context of the insecurities and inequalities created by neoliberal globalization (Moffitt, 2020; Uygur, 2024).

3. Far-Right in Europe

Far-right movements in Europe were influential in the interwar period and were eliminated mainly after the Second World War, causing great destruction. The term *far-right*, as we use it today, does not have the old meaning, but it started to be effective in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the most important difference and decisive elements between the discourses of today's extreme movements and those of the old right-wing movements is that the differences are not based on biological ethnicity but on cultural differences, failed integration, and the negative impact of neoliberal policies on the European middle class.

There are different reasons for the rise of far-right movements in Europe. Indeed, economic, political, and social conditions determine the arguments and demands of these movements. Neoliberalist policies and regulations directly affect far-right movements. As a result of the emphasis on neoliberal policies instead of the welfare model of the states and the promotion of firms and capital instead of protecting and developing individual rights, individual rights have been put on the back burner from time to time (Acar, 2017, p. 249). Regulations made to encourage capital and investments are met with a reaction by society. What matters for neoliberalist regulations is capital and cheap labor. This causes people living in cities and small regions to be unemployed or pushed to the background. Especially in Germany, where the number of refugees and foreigners is high, it is easier to obtain cheap labor or to bring in cheap labor from abroad.

Uygur (2024) emphasizes that the structure of neoliberal globalization, which generates social inequalities and precarities, plays a central role in the production of anti-immigrant discourses by far-right movements. In the book, economic grievances, cultural anxieties, security concerns, and perceptions of racial threat are defined as the main elements of agitation contributing to the growth of anti-immigrant sentiment. Media and political rhetoric, in turn, are highlighted as crucial instruments that shape and sustain these elements of agitation within the collective consciousness.

In the new world order created by globalization, it is clear that the working class is negatively affected (Koray, 2005, p. 339). With globalization, the labor market attaches importance to high technology. This paves the way for layoffs and the employment of less labor in firms. Another critical issue is that capital owners transfer their firms to regions with cheap labor due to international competition. The labor and social rights of the labor force in developed countries such as Germany are costly for firms. Instead, capital owners shift their investments to low-wage and self-dependent areas where social rights are absent. In addition,

deregulation of working conditions gives advantages to employers rather than workers. As a result, the regulations of nation-states aimed at protecting the owners of capital led to unemployment and related reactions. In the case of Germany, factors such as cheap labor and firms' preference for investment in third-world countries lead to an increase in unemployment among the local population or the restriction of social rights. *Far-right* movements reflect This situation as a serious threat, and an agenda is created accordingly.

Since the beginning of the European states' acquaintance with neoliberal policies, neoliberalism has not positively impacted the continent. Indeed, the transformation brought about by neoliberalism hurt the welfare model state policy. Neoliberal policies have caused the middle class, which constitutes the most important building block of European states, to become discontent (Attikkan, 2014, p. 13). A new process has begun for the middle class, which generally has a conservative identity. These classes could have resolved their discontent by creating a new one. The problem here was who would be the other. The immigrants who came to the country from the 1960s onwards were generally referred to as guest workers, and it was hoped that they would return. These workers were Muslims and strangers to European culture. The integration of these masses was not as easy as expected, and they continued to maintain their own identity. During the Cold War, the other was referred to as the USSR. However, with the changing collective situation and the international system, Islam became the most crucial threat to the West (Mishra, 2009). Since the 1990s, the phenomenon of the other has been used to define Islamic elements. Far-right groups in Europe have constructed their own other by depicting Muslims with historical ties and enmities.

Another factor that led to the rise of the far right in Europe was the European Union integration process and the Schengen Agreement, which transferred sovereignty to higher institutions and abolished borders (Whitaker, 1992, p. 195). The EU integration process has had two critical repercussions. The first is the transfer of decision-making mechanisms to higher institutions and the perception of a threat to national sovereignty in this context. Although the subjects in the decision-making process are states, far-right movements reflected the EU as a threat to the national sovereignty of states. Another point is that the disappearance of borders with Schengen and the consequent free movement of refugees and foreigners is perceived as another critical problem. The migration of young and qualified people living in their cities (mostly rural and medium-sized cities) to other cities and the resulting settlement of foreigners in these regions was perceived as a cultural threat. What needs to be emphasized here is why EU citizens support far-right movements. Indeed, people living in rural or small areas perceive immigrants, foreigners, or people with a different religious identity as a threat.

Although extremist parties have historically existed in Europe, the increase in their populist discourse and support is directly related to the refugee crisis. Since 2008, there has been an intense demand for migration and asylum from African and Middle Eastern countries to the EU. Mainly due to the instability after the Arab Spring and the ongoing wars in the Middle East, people started to migrate to European countries for economic, political, and sociological reasons. The European Union officially labeled this situation as a refugee crisis in 2015 (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018, pp. 1-2). Foreigners and groups with different religious backgrounds have migrated to Europe before for various reasons. In particular, labor agreements with countries such as Germany and Turkey helped these countries to recover

after the Second World War. However, previous migrations were controlled by economically strong countries. Since 2015, all EU countries have faced a sudden wave of migration. Another critical factor is that EU countries were negatively affected economically after the 2008 crisis, and the migration wave started after this economic crisis. Critical studies have shown that this situation has increased support for far-right movements (Gold, 2020, pp. 74-75). Although these parties have strong racist, populist, and anti-foreigner discourses in their policies, they also state that the problem is neoliberal policies and globalization. The fact that the economic and political rights available in a state are only the rights of the citizens of that state and that they demand positive discrimination in this sense directly contradicts the policies of neoliberalism that prioritize individual freedom and rights. Migrants, who were once seen as very important for EU development, are associated with terrorism, marginalized, and portrayed as the most critical security problem with the far-right parties.

Another important reason for the rise of far-right parties in Europe is the reactions against traditional right and left parties. Discontent with these parties has increased recently, increasing the tendency towards the far right. Far-right parties call the traditional left and right parties corrupt, outdated, and rotten and put forward themselves as an alternative or third way (Pisoiu and Ahmed, 2015, p. 171). In Europe, the distinction between right and left parties has diminished over time, and both parties have moved toward the center. Parties that have been in state administration for many years have not been able to produce a straightforward solution to the problems of the people, and the problems have increased over time. This situation increased the reactions of the people against these parties. When these parties realized the public's tendency towards far-right movements, they changed their policies. Parties that were in favor of human rights, social democracy, and equality started to abandon these arguments in the face of the rise of far-right movements and started to develop far-right populist discourses.

Figur 1. Distribution of Far-Right Populist Parties in Europe

Source: Der Spiegel, 2017.

The table above clearly illustrates the far-right movements that are the most critical potential challenge to the European Union project and capable of halting the European integration process. Far-right parties are part of the government or support the government in Italy, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Finland, and Denmark. In these countries, the far right is not a temporary phenomenon or a reaction of the moment but a growing force. In countries such as Germany, France, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Germany, France, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, they have become a force that is gaining supporters and is recognized by society. Especially in states like France and Germany, the rise of the far right is met with uneasiness. Indeed, these two states are the most important states in the EU process and influential powers in world politics.

Although it is difficult for the far-right parties in Europe to unite under a single roof and take over the system as a whole in their favor, they seem to have some common ideas on some points. Elites, liberal thinkers, and EU bureaucrats (Spiegel International, 2019). In particular, they say that the system is organized for these groups and that these groups exploit the public with neoliberal policies. In all countries where the far right is on the rise, there is a serious tendency to oppose three groups. These are immigrants, refugees, and Muslims. In particular, the discourse that these three groups are not part of Europe's social, cultural, and economic structure has been developed.

4. Far-Right in Germany and the AfD Case

The far-right movements in Germany left the German people with devastation and a tremendous historical responsibility, both for causing the Second World War and for the terrible destruction of Germany and the world. These movements, which categorized people according to biological ethnicity, were dismantled mainly by 1945. Due to the official division of Germany into Right and West, the right-wing movements developed differently. Germany took responsibility for the Second World War and declared that it regretted it. However, whether this was a forced declaration or genuine remorse has always been raised (Herf, 1997, p. 5). Historians such as Kondrashin have argued that Germany had no regrets but had no choice but to accept the heavy defeat. After the war, both in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), processes of de-Nazification and reconstruction began with the Nuremberg Trials (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). However, the Germans stated that the courts were established with a sense of revenge and were unfair, that the trials were held without categorizing crimes and criminals, and that the whole German people were actually on trial (Lokeid, 2024, p. 99). This situation prevented the far right from being wholly liquidated, and after a short period, stirrings occurred.

In East Germany, the German Democratic Republic was established in 1949 as a pro-Soviet state. Allied forces supported anticommunist groups and structures during this period, and right-wing movements took advantage of this situation. The former Nazi leaders in East Germany were reorganized, especially in opposition to the USSR, and provided vital information to the Allied forces. This situation increased their strategic importance. However, the USSR made it impossible for the Nazis and the far right to establish a new party, as it was necessary to obtain permission from the Council of the Allied Committee to establish a party in Germany in 1945-1949. Therefore, they strengthened themselves by infiltrating relatively small parties (Kruglanski, 2019). Although the world faced such a tragedy as the Second World War, the positive change in the attitude of the allied powers towards the Nazis in the post-war period is an essential topic of discussion. However, the point that should not be missed here is that the USSR was a threat with its emergence as a new power, whereas the Nazi rulers were more organized. This situation forcibly led to the disregard of past experiences. In East Germany, the right-wing parties remained weak due to the pressure of the USSR. They mainly existed through infiltration into other parties or in the form of small violent groups.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, which covers the western part of the country, the situation was more flexible, and there were grounds for the development of far-right movements. 1949, the requirement for a license to form a party was abolished, and in 1951, the Reemployment Act was passed. This paved the way for former officials to return to state service. Since 1946, many parties, large and small, have been founded, but the most influential party to date is the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands), founded in 1964. The slogan of this party is the homeland (Die Heimat). In addition, many neo-Nazi and far-right parties were established in the course of history but were either dissolved or banned. Since 1946 the following parties have been banned and dissolved: Deutsche Rechtspartei (1946-1950), Socialist Reich Party (1949-1952), Deutsche Reichspartei (1950-1964), German Social Union (1956-1962), Free German Workers Party (1979-

1995), National Front (1985-1992), German Alternative (1989-1992), National Offensive (1990-1992) (Wikiwand, 2023).

In 1959, the power and influence of the neo-Nazis was clearly felt. The event of drawing swastikas on synagogues, which started in some of the 1960s, is known as the Schmierwelle movement. This movement spread all over Germany within a few weeks (Maxwill, 2014). The fact that the Nazis, who were thought to have been completely liquidated, were still active and effective made both the German people and Europeans uneasy. Therefore, anti-Semitism was tried to be prevented with some legal regulations. In particular, some documents were published that these movements were organized and provoked by the USSR during this period, and it was said that they were provocations (Shekhovtsov, 2018, pp. 14-15). The Federal Republic of Germany, which was shown as an exemplary democracy and a place of economic development, attracted the attention of people living in the USSR-controlled East Germany. Therefore, essential contacts and relations existed between the far-right movements in the USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In the 1980s, there was a significant increase in far-right movements in Europe as a result of the unrest brought about by neoliberal policies. From 1984 to 1985, the European Parliament established the Committee of Inquiry into the Rise of Racism and Fascism in Europe, and in 1989, the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia. The Committee report emphasized economic and social reasons, and it was stated that modernization was effective in the rise of the far right (Ford, 1991, pp. 45-47). Between 1970 and 1990, right-wing movements were intertwined, and there were numerous violent incidents against minorities and foreigners in East and West Germany (Kruglanski, 2019). In the 1990s, the two Germans were united, but violence continued until the 2000s.

The NPD was the party that showed its influence in political instability. The party, which included ideas such as conservative, anticommunist, and national socialist, was founded by former Nazi administrators and officers (Schellenberg, 2013, p. 40). Since the day it was founded, the NPD has failed to achieve the power it desired and has weakened over time due to internal strife and turmoil within the party. As the NPD was unable to have the expected impact and moved away from its founding philosophy over time, the establishment of a new right-wing movement came to the fore.

Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) was founded seven months before the German general elections in 2013 (Berning, 2017, p. 17). Since it was founded shortly before the elections, it favored more liberal policies and pursued an anti-European Union policy (Häusler, 2016, p. 3). Since it was founded shortly before the elections, it gave the impression of an unknown but new party for people. In the beginning, the ideas it defended were in complete contradiction with each other. Both advocating a liberal policy and being anti-EU constituted the populist line of the party. Thus, it tried to gain the people's sympathy by analyzing their demands and desires and using everyday discourses. Although it received 4.7% of the votes in the first Bundestag elections, it could not be represented in the Parliament as it fell below the election threshold of 5% (Bundestagswahl, 2013).

The AfD has a powerful reputation in the field of economics. The most important reason for this is that the party's founders are nationally and internationally renowned

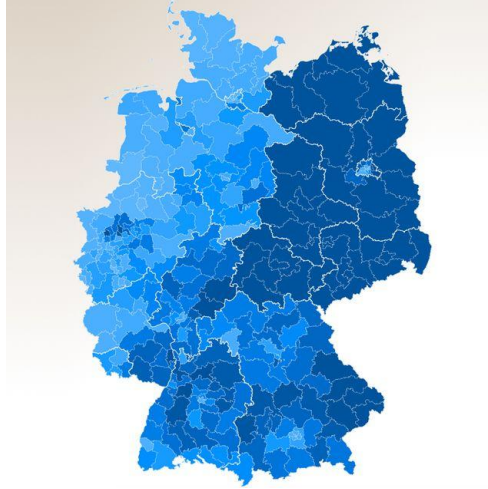
academics and researchers. Bernd Lucke is an economist at the University of Hamburg, Joachim Starbatty is a professor of economics at Tübingen, and Hans-Olaf Henkel is a professor of economics, and many other economists joined the party and criticized Germany's participation in the Euro process from the beginning. Over time, with the negative impact of the Euro on the German economy, these economists became popular (Bebnowski, 2015, pp. 72-73). The fD has gained an intellectual reputation as it includes many professors and economists.

During its establishment, the AfD constantly emphasized Euroscepticism and immigration issues (xenophobia). This situation led to two groups within the party over time. Although this situation brought the danger of the party splitting, the refugee crisis in 2015 caused the party to continue on a populist line (Goerres et al., 2018, pp. 137-138). With the refugee crisis, the AfD shifted to the far right and focused its discourse more on anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and conservative nationalist terms. The AfD, which hardened its rhetoric over time and shifted to a populist line, achieved significant success in the elections in September 2017, reaching a vote rate of 12.6% and taking 94 of the 709 seats in the Bundestag (Bundestagswahl, 2017). Although the AfD declined in the 2021 Federal General Elections with 10.3% of the vote, it still maintains its importance.

There has always been controversy about the AfD's ideological axis and its basic ideas. The AfD's ideas can basically be summarized in three points. These are national conservatism, right-wing populism, and economic liberalism (Häusler and Roeser, 2015, pp. 13-27; Decker, 2016, p. 5). The party has an anti-immigrant agenda and uses it frequently. The basic understanding of nationalism is *volk* (people) nationalism. This concept is based on the Volksgemeinschaft (community of the people) used by the National Socialists, which aims to create a pure race. In 2016, the AfD chairman reintroduced the term *volkish* and stated that it should be used more positively (Hentges, 2019, p. 82).

Thilo Sarrazin (2010, p. 236-331), an economist and former Bundesbank board member, published the book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany is destroying itself), which forms the basis of the AfD's populist arguments. In the book, he tried to explain the low performance of immigrants -especially Turks and Arabs (Muslims)- in business life and tried to explain this based on racial and cultural factors (Berghahn and Young, 2013, pp. 768-778). This book and its arguments became the starting point and mainstay of the new far-right populism in Germany. The interpretations and implications are based on a hazardous racial categorization. The adverse effects of neoliberalism and globalization are combined with some racial arguments to synthesize a new racist movement.

Cultural arguments have again come to the fore in their assessment of the EU and the Euro Crisis. In addition to German discipline and creativity, they claimed that productivity was low due to the lower cultural norms of the people in Southern European countries (Bebnowski and Förster, 2014, pp. 8-9). The competition and free markets inherent in neoliberalism combine cultural arguments to create a dangerous marginalization. While describing the economic differences between states, cultural values were tried to explain them. The lower economic performance of countries experiencing economic crises results from the managers and institutionalization in countries. Explaining this with cultural or national values is directly related to the perception of a *superior society*.

Figur 2. AfD's Vote Distribution Across Germany in the 2017 German General Elections

Source: *Der Spiegel*, 2017.

An analysis of the results of the elections in East and West Germany clearly shows that the AfD has a higher share of the vote in the former. Although the historically authoritarian tendency of East Germany and differences in governance play an important role here, it is not correct to limit the AfD to East Germany only. The AfD has a high voting potential throughout Germany. Unemployment is high because employment and development in these regions are relatively behind the western parts of Germany. Globalization has a more significant impact on these regions, which has been met with a reaction among the public, reflected in the elections.

The AfD is not only a party that has gained strength and popularity based on its anti-foreigner and anti-immigrant rhetoric. It also has a powerful economic program. The monetary policy of the party especially emphasizes ordoliberalism.

According to the party's economic policy, it refers to a free market initiative in which governments only provide a general framework and are free from state and government intervention. Although the government is given the task of being a regulator, the government's task here is to draw a general framework to ensure the continuation of economic functioning (Foucault, 2004, p. 146). Direct state intervention prevents a fair income distribution among society by providing benefits to those close to the government. In ordoliberalism, this situation is minimized to ensure income justice. The framework set by the government is, in a sense, the economic constitution of the state (Vanberg, 2013, p. 25). In a social market economy with high competition and low government spending, individuals carry out their economic activities by serving the common good. The AfD argues that government spending is unfairly distributed and that it is unfair to subsidize individuals who do not engage in economic activity at the same rate as individuals who engage in economic activity for the common good.

At this point, social conditions and dynamics are ignored; in a sense, there is a longing for authoritarian neoliberalism. Policies such as austerity and reduction of government spending imposed on Greece during the Euro Crisis are fed by ordoliberalism (Young, 2013, p. 34). These attempts to impose these measures, ignoring the economic structures and conditions of the states, have resulted in a complete disaster. Southern European countries are

much further behind economically than Western European countries. By insisting on austerity and fiscal discipline laws, the AfD and far-right movements emphasize authoritarian neoliberalism. This also leads to privileges for certain groups in society.

The AfD does not explicitly refer to the European Union but argues that the duties and responsibilities of the EU should be reduced and that Germany should continue its duties only with the economic union (Alternative für Deutschland [AfD], 2023). When the Eurozone was first established, it was established with certain conditions. However, with the addition of new members today, states are not making the necessary efforts to meet these conditions. If this situation continues, Germany should leave the Eurozone. The party attaches particular importance to immigration and asylum. AfD especially emphasizes Africa and Arab Muslims and uses the slogan *Africa cannot be saved in Europe*. Accordingly, it argues that these regions are experiencing a population explosion and that German society is endangered by immigration, so immigration should be prevented (AfD, 2023). The AfD, which argues that the increasing crime rates in the country are directly related to foreign nationals, argues that changes should be made in the immigration law and that harsher practices such as deportation and revocation of residence cards should be implemented.

The AfD, with these proposals or the policies it advocates, wants authoritarian neoliberalism to dominate the state system. Authoritarian neoliberalism is a reaction to the capitalist crisis in which states move away from democratic practices and restructure the system (Havertz, 2019, p.386). Practices such as the Euro Crisis and austerity policies show that the European Union has recently made some decisions in this direction. The strengthening of far-right movements across Europe means increased authoritarian neoliberalist practices. This will lead to questioning the values of the European Union and adopting undemocratic practices.

CONCLUSION

European values and norms have been seriously questioned for the first time since the European integration process began. Today, far-right movements in Germany, France, and Italy, the three most important members of the EU, have gained significant support, and there is no obstacle to their coming to power. One of the most important reasons for this is the implementation of neoliberal policies instead of the EU welfare state and social policies. With neoliberalism, the middle class has felt uneasy both financially and culturally, and this has led to the rise of far-right movements.

A second phenomenon that led to the rise of far-right movements was the 2008 Financial Crisis and the 2015 Refugee Crisis. People from different geographies flocked to Europe for economic prosperity and political freedoms. Far-right movements in Europe have portrayed this situation as both a national security problem and a threat to their cultural values. Religious, cultural, and racial elements have been constructed as the other, giving the image that the future of the EU and its societies are in grave danger. Far-right movements have brought these differences, which have emerged as a natural consequence of globalization and neoliberalism, to the agenda as a destruction of national values and a significant risk to future generations.

Another important reason for the strengthening of far-right movements in Europe is the center-right-left parties that have existed in state politics for many years and their inability to renew themselves according to the people's demands. Far-right movements describe these parties as corrupt, elitist, and distant from society. Interestingly, far-right movements in all countries in Europe are moving away from this point, although they are based on different arguments.

Far-right movements in Germany can be broadly divided into three groups. The first group was the National Socialist Workers' Party, which left a great responsibility to the German people for causing the Second World War. This party was primarily liquidated in 1945. However, later on, especially in the 1960s, former Nazi leaders and representatives returned as neo-Nazis. These groups sought to maintain their existence through infiltration of small-scale parties or acts of violence. Especially the crackdowns and bans on these groups have caused a reaction among the German public. German far-right movements have become popular among young people by presenting this situation to the young German generation as populist through the media. Finally, there is the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Although this party has some rhetoric reminiscent of the old far-right movements, it is different. In particular, the AfD has a powerful economic program and populist discourses such as xenophobia and anti-immigration.

Especially by presenting ordoliberalism as an economic program instead of neoliberalism, the AfD actually has two goals. First, it aims to create an unequal society where the state provides the regulatory framework. In such a society, some groups will naturally benefit more from economic activities, and the masses, who are the actual citizens of the country, will be given positive privileges. The values of culturally and sociologically differentiated societies are intended to be combined with economic activities. Another necessary consequence of ordoliberalism is the establishment of economic authoritarian regimes. With the adoption of this economic system, social differences will merge with an economic phenomenon and cause the system to take on an authoritarian structure.

In AfD's discourse, the tension between ordoliberalism and authoritarian neoliberalism makes it possible to appeal to both economic and cultural issues at the same time. On the economic side, the party uses ordoliberal ideas to talk about regulating markets and protecting the middle class. On the cultural side, it takes elements of authoritarian neoliberalism, such as security concerns and exclusionary policies, to promote anti-immigrant positions and defend social homogeneity. By combining these two approaches, AfD turns the insecurities created by neoliberal globalization into a nationalist and authoritarian message, which helps it gain support on both economic and cultural levels. This hybrid strategy addresses voters' economic insecurities while simultaneously mobilizing their concerns about identity and immigration, thereby enabling AfD to strengthen its political base.

The AfD has gained considerable popularity today due to the influence of the media. However, we need more time to understand whether this situation is permanent or temporary. There seems to be a conflict within the party between those who prioritize economic policy and those who prioritize anti-refugee policies. In the coming period, it will be essential to see whether the AfD will come out of this debate stronger or fragmented. In any case, the party is on its way to becoming one of the most important political actors in Germany. A possible

scenario of AfD's coming to power in Germany will lead to increased authoritarian practices in Germany and Europe and to a questioning of EU values.

Declaration of Research and Publication Ethics

This study was conducted in line with academic research and publication ethics. All written and visual sources were properly cited, and plagiarism was strictly avoided. The data used in the literature review and discourse analysis were obtained from publicly accessible and ethically appropriate sources. No personal data were collected, and no procedure requiring ethical committee approval was included. There is no conflict of interest in this research.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

This article is solely authored by the researcher, and no contributions from third parties have been incorporated.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The author have no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

Ethical Approval Statement

Ethical approval is not required for this article. A signed consent form indicating that ethical approval is not necessary is included in the article's submission files on the system.

REFERENCES

- Acar, E. (2017). Neoliberalizm ve sosyal refah devlet ekseninde üçüncü yol yaklaşımı. *Kastamonu Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 18(1), 248-263.
- Alternative für Deutschland. (2023). Euro-finanzen-EU. Retrieved September 2, 2023 from <https://www.afd.de/euro-finanzen-eu/>
- Anderson, P. (2000). Renewals. *New Left Review*, 1(1), 5-24.
- Appadurai, A. (2017). *Democracy fatigue*. In H. Geiselberger (Ed.), *The Great Regression*. Polity Press.
- Aslan, A. (2019, September 21). Liberalizm nedir? Retrieved September 21, 2019 from <https://perspektif.eu/2019/09/21/liberalizm-nedir/>
- Attikkan, Y. (2014). *Avrupa'da aşırı sağ ve otoriter popülizm: Kriz, neoliberalizm ve direniş*. NotaBene Yayınları.
- Bebnowski, D. (2015). *Die alternative für Deutschland, aufstieg und repräsentanz einer rechten populistischen partei*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-08286-4>
- Bebnowski, D. and Förster, L. J. (2014). *Competitive populism, the "Alternative for Germany" and the influence of economists*. Otto Brenner Stiftung.

- Berghahn, V. and Young, B. (2013). Reflections on Werner Bonefeld's "Freedom and the strong state: on German ordoliberalism" and the continuing importance of the ideas of ordoliberalism to understand Germany's (contested) role in resolving the euro crisis. *New Political Economy*, 18(5), 768–778. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2013.736959>
- Berlin, I. (1967). *The concept of liberty*. Oxford University Press.
- Berning, C. C. (2017). Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)–Germany's new radical right-wing populist party. *İfo DICE Report*, 15(4), 16-19.
- Betz, H. G. (1998). *The new politics of the right: Neo-populist parties and movements in Western Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blomgren, A. M. (1997). *Nyliberal politisk filosofi. En kritisk analys av Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick och F. A. Hayek*. Bokförlaget Nya Doxa.
- Bockman, J. (2013). Neoliberalism. *Contexts*, 12(3), 14–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504213499873>
- Bundestagswahl. (2013). Results of the German Federal Election. Retrieved January 19, 2025 from <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de>
- Bundestagswahl. (2017). Results of the German Federal Election. Retrieved January 19, 2025 from <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de>
- Decker, F. (2016). The "Alternative for Germany" factors behind its emergence and profile of a new right-wing populist party. *German Politics and Society*, 34(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2016.340201>
- Der Bundeswahlleiter. (2013). Ergebnisse der Bundestagswahl 2013. Retrieved December 9, 2024 from <https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/bundestagswahlen/2013/ergebnisse/bund-9.html>
- Der Bundeswahlleiter. (2017). Endgültiges Ergebnis der Bundestagswahl 2017. Retrieved December 9, 2024 from https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/info/presse/mitteilungen/bundestagswahl-2017/34_17_endgueltiges_ergebnis.html
- Der Spiegel. (2017). Bundestagswahl 2017: Wo die Wahl entschieden wurde. Retrieved December 9, 2024 from <https://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/bundestagswahl-2017-wo-die-wahl-entschieden-wurde-fotostrecke-152757.html>
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2023). Nürnberg trials. Retrieved August 7, 2023 from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Nurnberg-trials>
- Erdoğan, M. (2009). *Anayasal demokrasi* (2nd edition). Orion Kitabevi.
- Ford, G. (1991). Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia on the findings of the Committee of Inquiry. Retrieved January 19, 2025 from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d8734ae4-921b-487c-9086-2941571e1cf1>
- Foucault, M. (2004). *The birth of biopolitics*. Picador.

- Fraser, N. (2017). *Progressive neoliberalism versus reactionary populism: A Hobson's choice*. In H. Geiselberger (Ed.), *The Great Regression*. Polity Press.
- Friedman, M. (2008). *Kapitalizm ve özgürlük*. Plato Film Yayınları.
- Friedman, M. (2016). Capitalism and freedom. In R. Blaug and J. Schwarzmantel (Eds.), *Democracy: A reader* (pp. 344–349). Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/blau17412-074>
- Geiselberger, H. (Ed.). (2017). *The Great Regression*. Polity Press.
- Germani, G. (1978). *Authoritarianism, Fascism, and National Populism*. Transaction Books.
- Goerres, A., Spies, D. C. and Kumlin, S. (2018). The electoral support of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Reaction to incumbent performance and a vote against the mainstream parties. In K. Arzheimer and E. Carter (Eds.), *The AfD and the rise of right-wing populism in Germany* (pp. 131–148). Routledge.
- Gold, R. (2020). The economic causes of populism. *Global Solutions Journal*, (5), 72-77. Retrieved August 17, 2023 from https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GSJ5_Gold_Fetzer.pdf
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Häusler, A. (2016). *Die AfD: Eine rechtspopulistische partei im wandel*. Ein Zwischenbericht.
- Häusler, A. and Roeser, R. (2015). Die rechten Mut-Bürger: Entstehung, Entwicklung, Personal und Positionen der Alternative für Deutschland. VSA. Retrieved August 28, 2023 from <https://www.vsa-verlag.de/uploads/media/www.vsa-verlag.de-Haeusler-Roeser-AfD.pdf>
- Hentges, G. (2019). Right-wing populism and nationalism in Germany: AfD, PEGIDA and the politics of exclusion. In R. Wodak and M. Krzyżanowski (Eds.), *Right-wing populism in Europe and USA: Contesting politics and discourse beyond "Orbanisation"* (pp. 75–96). Springer.
- Herf, J. (1997). *Divided memory: The Nazi past in the two Germanys*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.658719>
- Ignazi, P. (1992). The silent counter-revolution: Hypotheses on the emergence of extreme right-wing parties in Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 22(1), 3-34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1992.tb00303.x>
- Kaya, A. (2016). Avrupa'da popülist sağın yükselişi: Karşılaştırmalı analiz için teorik araçlar. *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 13(52), 23–42.
- Koray, M. (2005). *Çalışma yaşamı ve yeni eğilimler: Esneklik, güvencesizlik ve sendikalar*. İmge Kitabevi.

- Kruglanski, A. W., Webber, D. and Koehler, D. (2019). Right-wing extremism in Germany. In *The Radical's Journey: How German Neo-Nazis voyaged to the edge and back* (online ed.). Retrieved August 21 2023 from <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190851095.003.0002>.
- Krzyżanowski, M., Triandafyllidou, A. and Wodak, R. (2018). The mediatization and the politicization of the “refugee crisis” in Europe. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 16(1-2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2017.1353189>
- Laclau, E., and Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso. <https://doi.org/10.1177/072551368701600118>
- Lokeid, J. (2024). The enduring and controversial legacy of the Nuremberg Trials. *Washington University Global Studies Law Review*, 24(1), 80-108. <https://journals.library.wustl.edu/globalstudies/article/id/8971/>
- Manning, L. (2022). Neoliberalism: What it is, with examples and pros and cons. Retrieved August 9, 2022 from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/neoliberalism.asp#toc-what-is-neoliberalism>
- Maxwill, P. (2014, December 9). Die stunde der schmierfinken. Retrieved August 22, 2023 from <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/hakenkreuz-antisemitismus-in-der-nachkriegszeit-a1006236.html>
- Mishra, P. (2009, August 15). A culture of fear. Retrieved August 18, 2023 from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/15/eurabia-islamophobia-europe-colonised-muslims>
- Moffitt, B. (2020). *Populism*. Polity Press.
- Monbiot, G. (2016, April 15). Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems. Retrieved August 7, 2023 from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>
- Mudde, C., and Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2019). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. [https://doi.org/10.19195/1899-5101.12.2\(23\).10](https://doi.org/10.19195/1899-5101.12.2(23).10)
- Pisoiu, D. and Ahmed, R. (2015). Capitalizing on fear: The rise of right-wing populist movements in Western Europe. In IFSH (Ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2015* (pp. 165-176). Baden-Baden: Nomos. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845273655>
- ROAPE: *Review of African Political Economy*, 39(134), 114–120.
- Saad-Filho, A. and Johnston, D. (Eds.). (2005). *Neoliberalism: A critical reader*. Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs4hp>

- Sarrazin, T. (2010). *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. <https://doi.org/10.3196/2194584511641107>
- Schellenberg, B. (2013). Rechtsextremismus und rechtsterrorismus in Deutschland: Entwicklungen und ermöglichungsstrukturen. In R. Melzer and S. Serafin (Hrsg.), *Rechtsextremismus in Europa. Länderanalysen, Gegenstrategien und arbeitsmarktorientierte Ausstiegsarbeit* (pp. 39–78). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845252940>
- Shekhovtsov, A. (2018). *Russia and the western far right: Tango noir*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Slobodian, Q. (2018). *Globalists: The end of empire and the birth of neoliberalism*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18800/anthropia.2020.004>
- Spiegel International. (2019). Europe's right wing takes aim at the EU. Retrieved August 16, 2013 from <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/right-wing-populists-look-to-flex-muscles-in-the-eu-a-1246433.html>
- Steger, M. B. and Roy, R. K. (2010). *Neoliberalism: A very short introduction* (1st ed.). Very Short Introductions. Oxford University Press. (Online edition published September 24, 2013). Retrieved May 15, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199560516.001.0001>
- Thorsen, D. E. (2006). *What is neoliberalism?* Department of Political Science, University of Oslo. Retrieved February 17, 2025 from <http://folk.uio.no/daget/What%20is%20Neoliberalism%20FINAL.pdf>
- Uygur, M. N. (2024). *Uluslararası göç ve siyaset: Neoliberalizm, popülizm, göçmen karşıtlığı*. Özgür Yayınları. <https://doi.org/10.58830/ozgur.pub536>
- Uygur, M. N., and Bakan, S. (2025). Agitation strategies of anti-immigrant: The populist and neoliberal lens. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 26(2), 813–840. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-025-01247-z>
- Vanberg, V. J. (2013). Ordnungspolitik, the Freiburg School and the reason of rules. *Annals of the University of Bucharest; Political Science Series*, 15(1), 23–36.
- Whitaker, R. (1992). The European integration process and the rise of the far right. In M. Anderson and E. Bort (Eds.), *The new nationalism in Europe* (pp. 190–210). St. Martin's Press.
- Wikiwand. (2023). Far-right politics in Germany (1945–present). Wikiwand. Retrieved August 24, 2023 from [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Far-right_politics_in_Germany_\(1945%E2%80%93present\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Far-right_politics_in_Germany_(1945%E2%80%93present))
- Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage.

Havertz, R. (2019). Right-wing populism and neoliberalism in Germany: The AfD's embrace of ordoliberalism. *New Political Economy*, 24(3), 385–403.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2018.1484715>

Young, B. (2013). Ordoliberalism as a discourse: The persistence of Germany's normative framework during the Euro crisis. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 47(3), 689–714.
<https://doi.org/10.2753/JEI0021-3624470304>

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The European integration process has been built on a normative framework based on peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law since its inception. In recent years, however, the sustainability of these values has been increasingly questioned within the European Union (EU) as the internal political systems of member states have undergone significant structural transformations. In particular, the rapid rise of far-right political movements in Germany, France and Italy, three of the most influential political and economic actors in the Union, has begun to challenge the EU's normative and institutional foundations. This phenomenon represents not only a political restructuring, but also a significant rupture in the European value system and collective identity.

The underlying causes of this shift are closely tied to the socio-economic consequences generated by the neoliberal economic policies that have dominated European governance frameworks for over four decades. Since the 1980s, the progressive dismantling of the welfare state model in favor of market-oriented neoliberal reforms has exacerbated income inequality, curtailed public services, and weakened mechanisms of social solidarity. These dynamics have particularly intensified feelings of economic insecurity and cultural anxiety within the middle class, fostering a socio-political environment conducive to the rise of far-right populist discourses. This study identifies the structural effects of neoliberalism as a primary factor explaining the social receptivity to far-right movements across contemporary Europe.

Moreover, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the 2015 Refugee Crisis acted as critical junctures that accelerated the mobilization of far-right movements. The financial crisis destabilized European economies, producing widespread unemployment, stagnation, and heightened public dissatisfaction with austerity-driven governance. In this context of socio-economic volatility, the subsequent influx of refugees — predominantly from the Middle East and North Africa — was strategically framed by far-right actors as an existential threat to national security and cultural cohesion. Migrants were socially constructed as the “other,” and their presence was depicted as undermining the future stability of European societies. Such framing not only legitimized nationalist, protectionist, and xenophobic narratives but also allowed these movements to instrumentalize popular grievances for political gain. In addition to economic and migratory factors, the weakening of established center-right and center-left parties, which have failed to effectively address shifting public demands and social anxieties, has further enabled the ascendancy of far-right movements. These traditional parties are increasingly perceived as detached, elitist, and complicit in the perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities. Consequently, anti-establishment populist forces have successfully mobilized discontented segments of society by articulating system-critical discourses and advocating

nationalist, exclusionary, and Eurosceptic positions. Despite contextual variations across different EU member states, far-right movements converge around a common critique of the status quo and a rejection of the liberal internationalist order upheld by the European Union.

The case of Germany offers a particularly instructive example in this regard. Historically, the country's far-right landscape has evolved through three distinct waves: the first embodied by the National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP), which was dismantled in the aftermath of the Second World War; the second manifested through neo-Nazi groups during the 1960s; and the third, contemporary wave represented by the rise of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). While AfD retains elements of traditional far-right rhetoric, it diverges notably through its rejection of neoliberal orthodoxy and promotion of an ordoliberal economic program. By combining anti-immigration, nationalist, and Eurosceptic discourses with a structured economic agenda, AfD has succeeded in broadening its support base, particularly in Eastern Germany and among working-class constituencies.

AfD's economic policy framework advocates for a regulatory role for the state in maintaining market order while rejecting the redistributive ethos of the welfare state. This model envisions a socio-economic hierarchy in which native citizens receive preferential benefits, while migrant communities are systematically marginalized. The party's ordoliberal framework, therefore, aligns with authoritarian tendencies, seeking to manage social heterogeneity through economic stratification and controlled exclusion. This dynamic not only reinforces socio-economic inequalities but also consolidates the ideological infrastructure for authoritarian governance models within liberal democracies.

The study further underscores the instrumental role played by media and digital communication platforms in amplifying populist narratives and facilitating AfD's rapid ascent within German public discourse. Internal ideological tensions within AfD — particularly between factions emphasizing economic policy and those prioritizing anti-immigration and ethnonationalist positions — are highlighted as a decisive factor in shaping the party's future trajectory. Nonetheless, existing empirical data indicates that AfD has already secured a durable position within Germany's political landscape.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the resurgence of far-right movements in Europe is intrinsically linked to the socio-economic disruptions and crises engendered by decades of neoliberal economic governance. The ascendance of far-right populism not only threatens national political equilibria but also jeopardizes the EU's foundational value system, posing significant risks to democracy, human rights protections, and the rule of law. In light of these developments, it is argued that the European Union must urgently recalibrate its social policy frameworks and institutional capacities to address popular discontent and socio-economic grievances. Failure to do so risks accelerating a broader authoritarian shift in European politics, with enduring consequences for both regional governance and the future of liberal democracy.