

Tanya Verma

RISE OF EXTREME RIGHT IN EUROPE

It has become a little too common to associate political and economic crises with the rise of the far right ever since Adolf Hitler came to power in Weimar Germany in the 1930s during the Great Depression. But neither current European problems nor the success of former US President Donald Trump are causes of the far right. In reality, since the early 1980s, far-right parties have been steadily but gradually gaining political influence and support in Europe. They have risen from the political periphery to the political mainstream since that period.

Although there were far-right parties in many Western European nations in the years following World War II, they did not begin to challenge the political establishment until the 1980s. The structural changes brought about by the economic and social upheavals of the 1960s, such as deindustrialization and secularisation, not only altered the voters but also weakened ties between voter groups and political parties. Parties that placed a higher priority on socio-cultural (or so-called "identity") rather than socio-economic problems were given opportunities as a result of this realignment as well as shifting of priorities and values. Far-right parties saw an opportunity as the major traditional parties had converged on socio-economic policies and had taken relatively moderate or weak stances on socio-cultural issues.

Their primary concerns were all linked to opposition to integration: of markets (neoliberalism), of people, and of countries (European integration) (multiculturalism). Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, far-right parties increased both in electoral support and governmental significance. The status quo has been severely weakened by the unique string of crises in the still-young century, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Great Recession, the refugee crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The far right represents the main ideological and electoral challenge to the status quo on many socio-cultural issues.

Right-wing extremists were at the forefront of anti-lockdown demonstrations in Europe, just as they were in some other parts of the globe, as a result of governments' attempts to stop the spread of COVID-19. For instance, in Germany, far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD) demonstrations have been attended by extremists who have used the pandemic to propagate racial and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Many of these theories blamed Jews for the crisis and the need for the lockdown while blaming immigrants as the virus's initial carriers. Separately, George Floyd, a Black American man, was killed on May 25, 2020, in Minnesota by a police officer, sparking worldwide anti-racist demonstrations and counter-demonstrations. Right-wing extremists are taking advantage of the unrest in Europe to organise

counter-protests against "white racism" in Paris and the destruction of historical markers honouring slavery and colonialism in London, with the end goal of inciting violence.

They primarily focus on immigration and use racist sentiment, disguising it as nationalism, to gain power. They have succeeded in gaining political office in some instances, but in others, their only contribution has been to draw the conventional right further into their narratives in an effort to retake the political landscape. These far-right political organisations have been discovered networking across the continent, which is somewhat ironic given their tendency to oppose the European Union. They have held rallies together, spoke highly of one another to highlight the substance of their movement across the Continent, and even formed political blocs in the Union, building on each other's successes.

The case of France and Italy –

The National Front (FN) is the prototype of the modern populist radical right party. The organisation-led by the charismatic Jean-Marie Le Pen, has controlled the European far right for many years. Le Pen took the initiative and became the driving force behind any regional cooperation between far-right parties. The FN had little to no parliamentary presence, but it was clear that it had an impact on politics because, as early as the 1990s, politicians from all of France's traditional parties adopted its immigration-related issues, frames, and positions. Parties began to oppose "mass immigration" and portray immigrants, especially Muslims, as a danger to France from the left to the right. A sense of national identity is another element influencing the rise of the extreme right in France. Some French people believe that the European Union and globalisation, in particular, are threatening their culture and customs. By advocating a nationalistic and patriotic view of France, the National Front has profited from these anxieties. It's critical to remember that the rise of extreme right in France is not a recent development. Right-wing nationalism has a long history in France, and the National Front has been a major political force ever since it was founded in 1972.

Giorgia Meloni - a politician and the current leader of Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), a far-right nationalist party in Italy. Meloni is often associated with the extreme right in Italy due to her party's views on issues such as immigration, nationalism, and Euroscepticism. Fratelli d'Italia has become more admired in Italy under Meloni's guidance, especially with voters who are fed up with the country's traditional political parties. The party has a reputation for taking a hard line on immigration, calling for tighter border controls and a more stringent approach to those seeking refuge. Meloni has refuted claims that her party is associated with the radical right, calling it merely a "patriotic" group that safeguards Italian interests. Whatever one's definition of her party's political stance, it is obvious that Meloni and Fratelli d'Italia pose a

serious threat to the country's long-standing centre-right, and their rise to prominence is a sign of a wider trend towards far-right politics in Europe.

