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UNPACKING THE FAR-RIGHT'S MIGRATION POLICY:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLICY PROPOSALS

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SUMMARY

This policy paper examines the migration policy positions of six European far-right parties, relying on the analysis of their most recent manifestos. The results show that while the AfD is often perceived as the most radical party, its manifesto positions are no more extreme than those of other far-right parties, such as the Rassemblement National (RN). Despite the RN's efforts to appear more moderate, it converges with the AfD in many regards and is sometimes even more radical. Similarly, the FPÖ and VOX hold strong sovereigntist positions and often espouse radical views, but their policies stand out as particularly simplistic and underdeveloped. The only two far-right parties in power, the Italian Lega and the Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), have recently adopted less extreme positions on migration, with the FdI moving closer to the mainstream right. Overall, far-right parties are united in their focus on externalizing migration policies, increasing deportation rates, and tightening border controls, with variation reflecting different geographical and governmental contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a truism to state that immigration is a core mobilizing theme for far-right parties, particularly in Western Europe (MIDEM 2018; Dennison/Geddes 2019). Research has shown that these parties have played a crucial role in the politicization of immigration and that they are commonly associated with the immigration issue in the minds of voters (Gessler/Hunger 2021; Walgrave et al. 2012). In spite of their diverse electoral platforms, far right parties are generally considered to be united on migration policy, typically framing migration in a negative light and advocating restrictive measures (Ivarsflaten 2008; Hutter/Kriesi 2022). Many of these parties have, for example, called for withdrawal from the Global Compact for Migration and for easier and faster deportation procedures. However, as far-right parties start to take office or to become increasingly closer to power, divides between pragmatists and extremists appear to emerge. Parties such as Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) have recently moderated their position on migration in an effort to counter perceptions of radicalism and appear as a responsible governing party. Conversely, other far-right parties continue to espouse more radical messages on migration, ostensibly as a means to continue holding issue ownership on anti-immigration positions.

This divide became particularly apparent earlier this year when a journalistic investigation exposed the participation of politicians from Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in a secret meeting where members of extremist movements discussed, among other things, plans for the mass deportation or "remigration" of millions of immigrants, including recognized asylum seekers and German citizens of immigrant descent (Bensmann et al. 2024). This revelation sparked criticism not only from mainstream parties and the general public, but also from parties within the same European parliamentary group (Identity and Democracy [ID]), who publicly denounced the AfD's stance as too radical. This was the case for Marine Le Pen of the Rassemblement National, who reportedly distanced herself from the AfD

position and demanded guarantees that "remigration" would not be included in the AfD party's platform (Wiegel 2024). These controversies eventually led to the expulsion of the AfD from the ID parliamentary group after further scandals (Wiegel u.a. 2024).

Such cases could be dismissed as strategic moves by parties seeking to appear more moderate and acceptable in the run-up to elections. However, it remains unclear whether there are real programmatic divisions within the far-right spectrum. These parties tend to be considered homogeneous in their anti-immigrant stance, but at the same time there is a lack of studies that go beyond discourse/framing and examine their specific policy proposals. Our study aims to address this shortcoming by investigating and comparing the migration policy orientations of a selected group of far-right parties. In doing so, we address several key questions: Is there an actual programmatic divide among far-right parties? Are parties keen on portraying a veneer of respectability, such as the Rassemblement National or Fratelli d'Italia, really less radical in their policy proposals? What are the concrete aspects of migration policy in which these parties differ?

To answer these questions, we examine recent party manifestos, specifically those produced for the most recent national elections and the 2024 EU elections.¹ This is not to deny the importance of other sources and the fact that representatives of the extreme and populist right sometimes take more radical positions in other forms of communication, particularly on social media and in public speeches, going far beyond what is outlined in their election manifestos. For example, following the deadly knife attack by a Syrian in Solingen on 23 August 2024, AfD parliamentary group leader Alice Weidel called via social media for a "moratorium" and a "freeze on immigration, admission and naturalization for at least five years." She emphasized that "groups with a high crime rate - especially Afghans, Syrians and Iraqis living

¹ The FPÖ has published a new manifesto for the national elections on September 29, 2024. As this manifesto became known only after the editorial deadline of this study, it could not be included in the analysis in detail. On some points, the party's positions have been clarified and, in some cases, strengthened. Where possible, these changes have been taken into account.

illegally in Germany - should be deported.” (Weidel 26 August 2024). These demands also illustrate how virulent language often becomes in such less formal settings, with the obvious purpose of further dramatizing the migration issue and mobilizing anti-immigrant sectors of the population (Maurer et al. 2023).² That said, we have chosen to focus on manifestos because they represent the most authoritative and formal articulation of a party’s policy positions. Manifestos are typically carefully crafted documents that outline the party’s official agenda, serve as a formal commitment to voters, and play a crucial role in accountability. They are also often the basis for government action. Our focus on manifestos allows us to analyze the official, public commitments of these parties. Contrary to the common perception that parties often fail to deliver on their promises, research has shown that they strive to fulfill a significant number of the commitments they make in their manifestos (Thomson et al. 2017).

Our focus is on the core of a country’s immigration regime, that is, policies that affect the entry and residence of foreigners. Policies that pertain exclusively to the integration of foreigners already residing in a country are not included in the analysis. The aim is to examine only concrete pledges that can be translated into actual policy measures. By a pledge we mean a statement committing a party to one specific action or outcome that is testable (Thomson et al. 2017). That is, a statement qualifies as a pledge if it is possible to determine its (hypothetical) fulfillment. In other words, vague statements such as “we want to control immigration” are excluded, since it is impossible to determine objectively what this actually means or what fulfillment would entail.

We first extricate individual policy pledges from the parties’ manifestos and sort them into different policy areas. In this way, we are also able to assess which areas are most important for far-right parties. Proposals are also categorized according to their degree of restrictiveness: those that merely tighten existing regulations and those that introduce significant changes to the existing legal framework, thereby significantly limiting the rights of migrants.³

The impetus for this policy paper came from the observation that some parties – most notably the German AfD – are often judged to be more radical than their European counterparts, but that this assessment is

sometimes not based on concrete empirical grounds, and never specifically tied to the comparative examination of the concrete policy agendas of different parties. With this in mind, we set out to examine the migration policy agendas of six different far-right parties in Western

Europe. We opted to exclude parties from Central and Eastern Europe, given that parties from these countries rarely discuss migration at length in their manifestos, let alone formulate concrete policy proposals (a likely result of the West-East differential in migration rates and migration policy development).

As we would like to maximize variation – and assuming that policy agendas are likely influenced by how close to power parties are –, we selected parties affiliated to different groups in the European Parliament and with different positions/prospects in terms of access to the national government: parties leading the government (Fratelli d’Italia), parties participating in the government (Lega), parties which are or were on the verge of entering the government (Rassemblement National and Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs), and parties currently far from power at the national level (Alternative für Deutschland and VOX). While we cannot guarantee that this case selection covers the whole spectrum of far-right migration policy positions, it does include the majority of the most renowned far-right parties in Western Europe and the ones that, in the German context, are most often put against the AfD, thus providing relevant grounds for comparison.

This paper is organized as follows: in a first section, we analyze the stances of each individual party separately, providing some background information and paying particular attention to the evolution of party positions over time. In a second and more extensive section, we compare the policy stances of the different parties across a wide range of migration policy sub-areas (asylum law, deportation policy, border control, labor migration, family reunification, irregular migration, cooperation with third countries, and position vis-à-vis international/EU regulation of migration). We conclude with some more general comparative thoughts, suggesting that the final picture is one of unity and that the RN’s criticism of the AfD is more of a ‘performative act’ rather than a result of fundamental disagreements.

2. POLITICAL PARTIES

Alternative für Deutschland – AfD

Year of foundation: 2013

Party leaders: Alice Weidel / Tino Chrupalla

Last election results

- National (2021): 10.4 % (83 out of 733 seats)

- EU (2024): 15.9 % (15 out of 96 seats)

² AfD’s social media strategy involves using multiple accounts. Some of these accounts are associated with the party, while others are run by activists. Content is shared on these accounts with a high frequency in order to make the most of the algorithm-based features of platforms such as TikTok (Beck 2024; Bingener/Haupt 2024).

³ The coding process was conducted by the three authors, each of whom is familiar with the language and policies of the parties being analyzed. Initially, each author independently coded each proposed policy change. They then consulted with each other to provide second and third opinions on their judgments, ensuring a balanced and comprehensive assessment of policy restrictiveness.

The evolution of the AfD's stance on migration reflects both continuity and significant change. Over time, the party's policy proposals have increasingly reflected its radicalization, while the securitarian and nativist framing of migration – focusing on security and cultural threats – has remained a constant element of its discourse from around 2015 to the present.

Initially, the AfD's approach to migration, as articulated in its early manifestos, was characterized by a focus on managing and qualifying immigration rather than outright rejection. This should come as no surprise, given the party's origins as a conservative Eurosceptic party focused on economic issues. Accordingly, in 2013 the party advocated a reorganization of immigration laws to prioritize skilled migrants and defended the humane treatment of political asylum seekers, while emphasizing the need to prevent abuses of welfare systems. The Canadian model of labor migration, which consists of a points-based system to select immigrants based on their skills and potential economic contribution, was cited as a model (AfD 2013: 4). This moderate stance began to shift as the number of asylum seekers increased, and the party itself faced internal and external pressure to address concerns about the impact of migration on Germany's social welfare systems.

Beginning in 2015, under a new leadership, the AfD began to shift its focus to issues typically owned by radical right parties, most notably migration. Proposed policies reflected a deeper embrace of nativist and securitarian rhetoric, portraying immigration as a fundamental threat to Germany's identity and stability. The party's program advocated for strict border controls, prioritized offshore solutions for asylum seekers, and pushed for a significant reduction in uncontrolled mass migration. As a result, strict asylum regimes such as the "Australia model" were cited in the party program (AfD 2015: 27, 59-61). The 2017 manifesto further reinforced this trend, emphasizing the need for strict asylum controls and the deportation of rejected asylum seekers (AfD 2017: 29-30).

The 2019 manifesto marked a further sovereigntist shift, with the AfD advocating the return of sovereignty over asylum and migration policy and expressing firm opposition to international agreements such as the UN Global Compact for Migration (AfD 2019: 38). The emphasis on "remigration," a term borrowed from extremist discourse,

became more pronounced, prioritizing the forced return of migrants to their countries of origin as the primary solution to immigration concerns. The party proposed that rejected asylum seekers who cannot be deported to their home countries should be deported to third countries. This shift was accompanied by an increased focus on demographic anxieties, portraying migration as a threat to Germany's social cohesion and identity (AfD 2019: 40-41).

As evidence of the party's professionalization, recent manifestos have become longer and more complex,

something that can also be interpreted as a means to overcome internal factional disputes through compromise. The 2021 manifesto reflects an attempt to balance a strict legalist approach with a policy of deterrence and control, advocating measures such as a "deportation offensive", the abolition of family reunification, and strict controls on immigration and asylum. While the party still refers positively to the Australian model of asylum policy, which focuses on processing asylum seekers in third countries in order to deter illegal immigration, it now also mentions the Japanese model of labor immigration. This model, known for its restrictive approach, is in line with the AfD's view that Germany is not a traditional immigration country like Australia or Canada (AfD 2021: 91-93, 96). In its 2024 election manifesto, the AfD maintains its generally restrictive migration policy stance: instead of adopting the Australian model, it advocates the slightly less stringent "Rwanda Plan," which involves processing asylum applications in third countries, based on a proposal by the former British government (AfD 2024: 14). Alongside the adoption of a vision of Europe as a heavily guarded and protected region, pointedly referred to as "Fortress Europe", the call for fixed border installations at the EU's external borders reflects a more militarized and fortified stance on border security (AfD 2024: 10-11). The 2024 manifesto continues to emphasize remigration, advocating the return of asylum seekers rather than their resettlement within Europe. This is coupled with a more pronounced focus on restoring German sovereignty over its borders and amending the Schengen Agreement to tighten national control (AfD 2024: 13-14).

Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi)

Year of foundation: 2012

Party leader: Giorgia Meloni

Last election results

- National (2022): 26 % (119 out of 400 seats)

- EU (2024): 28.8 % (24 out of 76 seats)

Founded in 2012, the Italian far-right party Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) has undergone a remarkable political transformation under Giorgia Meloni's leadership, evolving from a party that garnered only 2 percent of the vote in the 2013 Italian general election to Italy's largest party by 2022 (Vampa 2023). This evolution reflects significant shifts in its programmatic stances, particularly in its approach to migration policy (Angeli 2023). Initially, in 2013, the party's migration proposals resembled those of a mainstream conservative party, focusing more on integration than the exclusion of migrants. However, it quickly moved towards far-right positions: For example, the "The Trieste Thesis", a programmatic document of 2017, espoused a conspiracy theory akin to the 'great replacement' theory when suggesting that the EU had a plan for "ethnic replacement" (meaning the replacement of one national community by another as a result of massive migration in a country with

a low birth rate) (Giorgiameloni.it 2023). This was followed by radical proposals such as the repatriation of all illegal immigrants ('clandestini') (Fdl 2018) and military control of the external borders, along with a naval blockade to prevent boats from leaving North Africa (Fdl 2019).

In recent years, Fratelli d'Italia has moderated its stance on immigration. While the above-mentioned programmatic document advocated for national preference on employment, social benefits, public housing, and access to childcare, giving priority to those who have lived in Italy for long and contributed to its economy (Giorgiameloni.it 2023), more recent manifestos make no mention of the sovereigntist "Italians first" principle. Fratelli d'Italia has also changed its tone on Europe. In 2019, the party emphasized the primacy of the Italian constitution and legal system over European norms, criticizing Europe as a "playground for France and Germany" (Fdl 2019: 2). By 2024, however, any mention of the primacy of national law was dropped, with the party instead advocating for a politically cohesive EU in which no nation is treated as a second-class member (Fdl 2024: 2).

Stylistically, the 2022 manifesto is concise and maintains a securitarian framing, with a section on immigration aptly titled "Stop Illegal Immigration and Restore Security to Citizens" (Fdl 2022: 31). It addresses the prevention of irregular immigration using both legalistic and humanitarian frames, particularly with regard to human trafficking and the prevention of deaths at sea. Even the rhetoric against non-governmental sea rescues is somewhat softened. One of the key proposals in the 2022 manifesto is the externalization of asylum policy, advocating the creation of EU-managed hotspots outside Europe. This proposal is less extreme than those of other far-right parties, as it does not call for forcibly preventing all asylum seekers from applying within European territory. The manifesto also emphasizes the use of immigration decrees ("decreti flussi") as a tool of international cooperation to manage legal migration and facilitate the return of illegal immigrants (Fdl 2022: 32). This approach suggests a blurred line between incentives and sanctions, as cooperation with countries of origin is conditioned on their willingness to accept the return of their own citizens. The naval blockade ("blocco navale") is still mentioned (ibid), but in a fleeting and more ambiguous way compared to previous campaigns and other far-right parties such as VOX.⁴

Looking ahead, Fratelli d'Italia's manifesto for the 2024 European elections continues to reflect a pragmatic approach to migration policy. It links migration to security, emphasizing the need for Europe to control its borders and decide who enters its territory, rather than leaving these decisions to criminal organizations or external actors (Fdl 2024: 12). Criticism of the "left model" of "indiscriminate

reception" is couched in humanitarian terms, emphasizing the prevention of deaths in the Mediterranean (ibid).

Among the main proposals of the 2024 manifesto is the strengthening of cooperation agreements with third countries, as demonstrated by the strategy pursued by Meloni during her first two years in government. This includes combating illegal immigration, stopping departures, and managing asylum applications and repatriations locally. The manifesto also calls for the improvement of EU border controls by strengthening the role of Frontex, Europol and Eurodac, and emphasizes the fight against criminal networks involved in human trafficking. Interestingly, it emphasizes the need to address the root causes of irregular migration through a development plan, the "Mattei Plan for Africa," which is framed in terms of supporting the right of people not to emigrate (ibid). The manifesto also addresses labor migration, proposing the establishment of legal immigration quotas to match labor market demand. Overall, Fratelli d'Italia's evolution is a prime example of the thesis that far-right parties strategically shift towards more pragmatic and cooperative migration policies as they get closer to power - a thesis that does not apply to all parties, however.

Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)

Year of foundation: 1955

Party leader: Herbert Kickl

Last election results

- National (2019): 16.2 % (31 out of 183 seats)

- EU (2024): 25.4 % (6 of 20 seats)

The Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) is one of Europe's oldest radical right parties, founded in 1955. Over the decades, the party has experienced various shifts in orientation, oscillating between liberal and moderate right-wing populist positions and a more explicit alignment with far-right and racist ideologies that downplay the atrocities of National Socialism. Under the leadership of Herbert Kickl, who has been the party chairman since 2021, the FPÖ has increasingly aligned itself with far-right factions, including extremist fraternities and the Identitarian movement.

The FPÖ positions itself as an Eurosceptic party, advocating the strengthening of nation-states. Consistent with other far-right parties, it is critical of migration, does not view Austria as a country of immigration, and frequently expresses concerns about Islam. The party has increasingly adopted extremist rhetoric, with terms like "Fortress Europe" and "remigration" becoming prominent in its discourse. While these terms were absent from the FPÖ's manifesto for the 2019 National Council elections, they have emerged as key buzzwords in the manifesto

⁴ Giorgia Meloni's speeches downplay the blockade as an extension or reinforcement of existing agreements, such as those between the EU and Libya, to prevent asylum seekers from leaving North Africa (Angeli 2023).

for the 2024 European Parliament elections, reflecting a noticeable shift towards more radical language.

The tone of the FPÖ's manifesto for the 2019 national elections shows little departure from that of the 2013 manifesto. Both documents use a securitarian and legalistic framing to address migration issues, with explicit references to asylum fraud, asylum abuse, and the deportation of foreign criminals as straightforward solutions to national security threats (FPÖ 2013: 1). The FPÖ's 2019 manifesto advocates a complete overhaul of asylum and immigration laws. It emphasizes that asylum should only be granted temporarily and that return to the home country is mandatory once the grounds for asylum no longer exist. The FPÖ continues to blame the migration crisis on the EU and calls for its transformation into a "Europe of fatherlands", a sovereigntist concept popular among European far-right populists and extremists (FPÖ 2019: 4-6).

Under the heading "Fortress Europe and Remigration!", the FPÖ's manifesto for the 2024 European elections presents a succinct set of demands based on the Australian model of asylum policy (FPÖ 2024a: 7). These demands reflect a sovereigntist stance aimed at positioning Austria as an autonomous nation within the EU, particularly in the area of migration. The FPÖ rejects a common European refugee policy that would force the redistribution of illegal immigrants across the EU. Instead, it advocates for strict border protection and the deportation of rejected asylum seekers and criminal migrants (FPÖ 2024a: 7). In the election manifesto for the 2024 National Council elections, these positions are supplemented by a further demand: the FPÖ would like to suspend the right of asylum as long as Austria is "chronically overburdened" (FPÖ 2024c: 47).

Lega

Year of foundation: 2017

Party leader: Matteo Salvini

Last election results

- National (2022): 8.8 % (66 out of 400 seats)

- EU (2024): 28.9 % (22 of 76 seats)

Unlike most far-right parties, the political profile of the Lega has changed quite radically over the last few decades. Originally a regionalist party focused on the autonomy of northern Italy, the Lega has transformed itself into a nationally focused, ultimately nationalist party. Yet criticism of migration has always been a relevant theme in the party's communication (Ignazi 2005). From its earliest days, the Lega Nord portrayed immigration as a threat to jobs, social services, and public safety.

The Lega's evolution in dealing with migration has been marked by a long-term increase in salience, albeit with some fluctuations. Particularly after the 2015

refugee crisis, immigration has become central to the party's political rhetoric and program. This reflects the party's electorate, which has long been more hostile to immigrants than the general Italian population. Surveys since the late 1990s have consistently shown that Lega voters are significantly more xenophobic than the broader electorate (Passarelli/Tuorto 2012, 2018).

While under the leadership of Umberto Bossi in the 1990s, the Lega's anti-immigrant stance was part of a broader regionalist agenda. This stance became more central over time, with the party portraying immigration not only as a security threat but also as a cultural and economic danger. However, despite being part of the center-right coalition, the Lega faced challenges in translating its hardline rhetoric into policy due to pressure from the Catholic Church and business groups. As a result, proposals such as the use of naval forces to combat undocumented immigration and biometric identification of immigrants were used to portray a tough stance, but were either scaled back or never fully implemented. The most notable legislative action in the early 2000s remains the 2002 Bossi-Fini law, which introduced stricter immigration controls but also resulted in a massive amnesty that regularized 650,000 immigrants. During this period, the Lega began to replace Alleanza Nazionale (AN) as the most anti-immigrant party within the coalition, with AN moving towards more centrist positions.

After a transitional period under Roberto Maroni, in which migration was party marginalized in favor of other issues (especially economic ones), Matteo Salvini's leadership led to a rebranding of the party, dropping "Nord" and adopting a more Italian nationalist stance. In this sense, the slogan "Prima gli Italiani" (Italians first) represents the antithesis of the previous regionalist and autonomist positioning, summarizing the new nationalist and sovereigntist approach. While in 2013, references to immigration in the Lega's platform were minimal (Lega Nord 2013), at 1.5% (Diamanti / Pregliasco 2019), reflecting the overall low salience of the issue, with only 4% of the Italian population considering immigration a priority (Goodwin/Dennison/Geddes 2018), by 2018 they had risen to 10% (Lega Nord 2018), highlighting the growing importance of the issue in the wake of the post-2015 refugee crisis (Dennison/Geddes 2021).

Salvini's tenure as Minister of the Interior marked a peak in the Lega's influence. Policies such as the "Security Decree" were aimed at reducing the number of asylum seekers and increasing deportations. Immigration was often linked to criticism of European inaction, and the issue was framed primarily as one of security and public order, influenced by Salvini's ministerial role. Salvini managed to keep migration high on the agenda through media-effective actions such as closing ports to NGO rescue ships. In general, political and legal disputes with NGOs have been a constant theme of the Lega's migration policy under Salvini.

Overall, the Lega has maintained a consistent anti-immigrant rhetoric throughout its history, competing on the issue with other parties such as AN and later FdI, ultimately positioning itself as the most anti-immigrant party in Italy. Its framing emphasized concerns about crime, public order, and national security. While the party has maintained its cultural framing on integration, with a particular focus on Islam, the role of the sovereigntist framing has diminished in recent years, marking a difference from European allies like the RN or the AfD. Compared to these parties, the Lega can be seen as having a softer stance on asylum law and cooperation with countries of origin.

Rassemblement National (RN)

Year of foundation: 1972

Party Chairman: Jordan Bardella

Last election results

- National (2024): 32.1 % (126 out of 577 seats)

- EU (2024): 31.4 % (30 of 81 seats)

Anti-immigration has been the leitmotif of the rhetoric and ideology of the Front National/ Rassemblement National since the party's foundation in the 1970s (Stockemer/ Barisone 2017). In line with its ethnonationalist ideological core, immigration is interpreted as an existential threat to France as nation and to the survival of French identity. Similar to other far-right forces, it is also common for the Rassemblement National (henceforth RN) to associate immigration to crime and insecurity and to point to its alleged negative impact on the labour market and the social welfare system.

If it is true that Marine Le Pen has done much to detoxify the party's reputation – the so-called de-demonization strategy (*dédiabolisation*) –, it could also be argued that she has altered the 'packaging' more than the core of the party's policy platform (Ivaldi 2016). As far as immigration is concerned, the rebranding of the party has involved a partial shift from an ethno-cultural to a politico-religious frame (Shields 2014). In other words, opposition to immigration is no longer justified solely on ethno-differentialist grounds, but also repackaged as part of the defence of liberal and republican values – secularism (*laïcité*) in particular – against 'communitarianism', 'separatism', and the 'islamization' of France. In practice, this rhetoric serves to oppose multiculturalism and all public manifestations of belonging to a community other than the nation (Almeida 2013); and, therefore, the core of view of the nation as a homogenous community (in need of preservation due to external and internal threats) remains essentially unaltered. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the party seems to remain as

radical as ever when depicting France as a country "sinking into migratory chaos" or repeatedly using hyperbolic terms such as "migrant flooding" (*'submersion migratoire'*).⁵

As far as specific policy proposals are concerned, evidence of moderation is relatively limited, as the party has maintained many of its signature pledges. This is the case, for example, of its long-held policy plank to install a regime of "national preference" or "national priority", whereby French citizens are to be given priority over non-nationals on access to employment, public housing, and welfare assistance. The same is true for its long-standing demands to abolish the principle of *jus soli* (or birthright citizenship) and to tighten the conditions of access to French nationality – to be granted on the basis on merit and assimilation.⁶

Another radical proposal that has survived the test of time is the pledge to "put an end to settlement migration and to family reunification" (RN 2022b) or "limit it according to strict criteria" (RN 2022a). This is an old demand of far-right forces in France, who have long regarded family reunification procedures as one of the main culprits of undesirable migration flows to France. Knowing that this demand is unrealistic – and keen on listing immediate steps that it would take when holding office (a strong possibility in 2024) –, the party substantially toned down this proposal in its short program for the 2024 snap legislative election, speaking instead of "tightening conditions on family reunification" (RN 2024b).

The RN has also not moderated its stances regarding asylum procedures, rather the opposite. The party has long decried the expansion of the grounds for granting asylum and its diversion from its original purposes. In recent years it seems to have toughened its stance when defending, throughout various programmatic documents, that asylum applications should be filed and processed abroad only, in French embassies and consulates. If the goal to offshore asylum applications is far from unique to the RN, what appears particularly radical is the subtext of this proposal: the suggestion that asylum seekers reaching France's territory would not have the opportunity to lodge their application there. The RN's desire to prevent migrants from reaching French territory in the first place is also clear in its proposal to authorize Frontex to systematically send back irregular migrants, in violation of the non-refoulement principle.

That said, a modicum of moderation can be observed in the apparent abandonment of numerical targets. While the predecessor of Marine Le Pen (her father Jean-Marie Le Pen) would speak of "immigration zéro", Marine Le Pen proposed to substantially reduce legal entries to 10,000 per year in the 2012 and 2017 presidential

⁵ See, for example: <https://www.la-croix.com/France/Politique/Le-gouvernement-complice-submersion-migratoire-Nicolas-Bay-RN-2020-01-22-1301073377>.

⁶ In these respects, some draconian measures from the 1990s/ early 2000s were nonetheless abandoned, such as the retrospective review of naturalisations after a probatory period in which the naturalized person was to abstain from political activity; or, in line with 'national priority' on employment', an employer special tax based on wages paid to foreigners (both present in the 2002 program).

manifestos, whereas more recent programmatic documents do not mention any specific target. The same can be said about mass deportation targets, as the party has long abandoned its early pledges to deport millions of non-European immigrants (three million in the 1995 manifesto, the last to have a numerical target). Nevertheless, the party continues to advocate for the “systematic expulsion of illegal migrants, delinquents and foreign criminals” (RN 2022b). No evidence of moderation can be observed when the party explicitly pledges to “abolish all exemptions that prevent the deportation of foreigners” (RN 2024b).⁷ Similarly, the party continues to take a tough stance against irregular migrants (e.g., opposing possibilities for regularization) and those who provide them with direct or indirect assistance.

One area where some degree of moderation could be expected is in its longstanding calls to denounce and withdraw from European treaties that transfer competences to the EU in the field of migration – given the party’s broader shift from a defense of *Frexit* (exit from the EU) to a more ambiguous position of ‘reform from within’ in the last years. Indeed, rather than a simple withdrawal from the Schengen agreement, the party now proposes to reform it by restricting free circulation to EU nationals only (RN 2024a) or, in a slightly different formulation, “replace the absence of border controls with simplified border crossing procedures for EU citizens” (RN 2022a). Nevertheless, the party maintains that France’s international commitments on free movement shall be “subordinated to the safeguarding of national interests in terms of internal and external security, the protection of public order and the protection of French identity” (RN 2022a).

If it is true that the party no longer denounces European and international treaties *tout court*, it maintains a fundamental sovereigntist position when defending that national law should prevail over other sources of law. In fact, in an extensive document (RN 2022a) laying out its plans in the field of immigration, the RN proposes to enshrine the prevalence of national law over European and international law into the Constitution, so that authorities are longer constrained by France’s international commitments in the field of migration. Importantly, the same document also spells out in detail a renewed legal framework on migration, to be incorporated into the Constitution and approved via a popular referendum.⁸ Such proposals are primarily framed as a matter of regaining both popular and national sovereignty (in a field criticized for its excessive judicialization and internationalization), but also as a way of safeguarding

France’s identity” and preserving “the right of French people to remain themselves” (RN 2022a).

In short, while the alleged moderation of the RN is clear in some regards (e.g., the repression of the anti-Semitic discourse that Jean-Marie Le Pen was known for), it is less obvious in the field of migration policy. If it is true that some draconian measures have disappeared over time, new ones have been added and core policy proposals have been maintained.

VOX

Year of foundation: 2013

Party Leader: Santiago Abascal Conde

Last election results

- National (2023): 12.4 % (33 out of 350 seats)

- EU (2024): 9.6 % (6 of 61 seats)

VOX is a relatively new far right party. Created in December 2013, it made to parliament for the first time in 2019, taking great advantage of the Catalan independence challenge of 2017 to promote its (ultra) nationalist agenda. The party gained notoriety as a public prosecutor against Catalan independence leaders, appearing in the eyes of many as the only party capable of standing up against the Catalan independence movement (Rama et al. 2021). Its defense of a unitary Spanish state, together with its heavy-handed approach vis-à-vis separatism, constitute therefore the keystone of its agenda. Nevertheless, the party has taken advantage of its rise to politicize various other issues, including immigration, a topic that was previously of little political salience in Spain (Mendes/Dennison 2020). In fact, these two topics are more closely connected than it might appear at first: both regional nationalism and multiculturalism are depicted as two forces actively seeking to destroy or dilute the nation-state.

VOX’s stance on immigration is prototypical of far right parties, as it invariably depicts immigration as a securitarian, identitarian, and economic threat. Its anti-establishment agenda also intersects with the immigration theme, as the Spanish government and supranational institutions (including the European Union) are accused of “betting on the disorderly arrival of millions of illegal migrants” and “seeking to do away with external borders by imposing their ideological and multicultural model” (VOX 2023, 2021). As these statements demonstrate, the party does not shy away from coating its rhetoric with

⁷ In its thematic booklet on immigration, it specifies that the legal criteria of “necessity” and “proportionality” should no longer apply when it comes to foreigners “convicted of serious crimes or offenses, or those who are a threat to public order”. It further specifies that the Parliament shall be free to determine their expulsion (RN 2022a).

⁸ Besides being a source of popular legitimacy, the RN defends the use of a referendum as a means of circumventing eventual legal obstacles. However, the fact remains that a referendum initiative can be blocked in the first place on the basis of the unconstitutionality of its proposals. This is what happened earlier this year, when the Constitutional council blocked a referendum initiative on immigration led by les Republicans, a party that has unabashedly adopted many of the RN’s banners.

conspiratory undertones. This is particularly evident in VOX's most recent programmatic documents, where the party blames "globalist elites", "the globalist agenda" or "Agenda 2030" for all sorts of ills (VOX 2023).

In line with this, and with the party's strong *law and order* orientation, VOX's policy proposals on the field of migration are overwhelmingly focused on irregular migration and the protection of borders. VOX calls for zero tolerance with illegal immigration and therefore has consistently advocated for the "immediate expulsion of all illegal immigrants", the suppression of regularization possibilities for anyone entering the territory illegally, the end of all regularization mechanisms more generally, tougher penalties against "migration mafias" and those who assist irregular migrants, and the conditionality of development aid on third countries' acceptance of repatriated migrants (VOX 2019, 2023). The 2023 manifesto (more extensive than the 2019 one) adds some novelties in this regard, the most relevant one being "a referendum on migration policy and the expulsion of illegal migrants" (a pledge that was almost certainly copied from other European far-right parties).

Other policy proposals that were consistently present across different programmatic documents include (1) the deportation of migrants who commit crimes – not only serious crimes, but also repeated minor offenses –, with the 2023 manifesto adding that sentences should be served in the country of origin; and (2) an orderly migration policy that prioritizes citizens from the so-called 'Iberosfera', that is, countries with linguistic and cultural ties to Spain. VOX is quite unique in this regard, in that it is keen on promoting a post-imperial geopolitical and cultural space with "brother nations", whose cultural resemblance makes its subjects more easily assimilable and therefore better immigrants.

As far as border protection measures are concerned, these have suffered some relevant changes across different documents. Proposals that were present in the 2019 manifesto but that were later abandoned include "building an impassible wall in Ceuta and Melilla" and suspending the Schengen space⁹ (VOX 2019). Instead, the 2023 program speaks of a "naval blockade", framed as a way to avoid shipwrecks, but also as a means to ensure the migrants' immediate return to the safest nearby ports in countries of origin and transit (VOX 2023). Similarly, its European election program proposes combined naval missions in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean to prevent sea crossings by all means (VOX 2024). In this regard, the party advocates the creation of EU-managed disembarkation platforms in non-European territories, responsible for processing asylum applications and managing returns. There are, however, some apparent inconsistencies across

different texts. Whereas the 2023 manifesto mentions that such platforms would serve to equitably distribute those eligible for asylum across the 27 member-states, the 2024 European election program defends the elimination of quotas and relocation mechanisms and the "sovereignty of member states over immigration" (VOX 2024).

VOX's programs are, in fact, surprisingly silent on asylum-related matters. It is only in its program for the European elections that it briefly mentions that it will "work to ensure that all applications for international protection are assessed outside the EU", defending also that the asylum system should be reformed in a way that combats abuses and respects the non-refoulement principle (VOX 2024). In this respect, the party adds that agreements with third countries should privilege the "regional integration of asylum seekers, as the right to asylum does not necessarily imply living in Europe" (VOX 2024). References to asylum are, instead, conspicuously absent from its national manifestos, strictly focused on irregular migration. The same is true for its public discourse. However, declarations from party representatives suggest a particularly radical stance: in a recent interview, VOX's leading candidate to the EU election advocated that, from the moment asylum seekers enter the territory irregularly, they should not be granted the right to asylum.¹⁰

Interestingly, the 2024 European election program is also the only one to reference family reunification. In this respect, the party adopts a particularly stringent stance, defending that it should be restricted to children alone and only in exceptional situations of abandonment of the minor in the country of origin; adding that the principle of reciprocity to third countries should apply, conditional on the acceptance of the repatriation of minors to their families of origin (VOX 2024). In this regard, it should be mentioned that the party has taken issue with unaccompanied minors in particular, systematically targeting and stigmatizing them in its public discourse. Often accused of falsifying their age, unaccompanied minors (referred to as "menas"¹¹) are invariably depicted as a security and public spending liability. In its 2023 manifesto, VOX pledged to close down all housing centers for "menas" and deport them to their countries of origin, also defending that, until this goal is achieved, they should be relocated away from urban centers. Attesting to the importance of this topic, VOX has recently broken off its coalition agreements in various regional governments in opposition to the relocation of unaccompanied minors across regions.

All in all, VOX's agenda on migration policy still appears to be under construction and to lack sophistication. There are various possible reasons for this: the party's young

⁹ This proposal was, first of all, justified as a means to avoid criminals fleeing from justice – as the Catalan separatist leaders had done –, but also as a way to fight the smuggling of people by illegal immigration mafias.

¹⁰ Declarations by Jorge Buxadé in an interview to El Toro TV, 5 April 2024. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYcMEtNNiO8> (last accessed 05.08.2024)

¹¹ While 'mena' is simply the acronym for unaccompanied foreign minor ('menor extranjero no acompañado'), the repeated use of the word by VOX has conferred it a pejorative connotation that, according to critics, serves to dehumanize them and obfuscate the fact that they are minors.

age, the lack of government experience at the national level, the absence of sufficient (media) scrutiny on its proposals on migration, or simply the fact that – unlike the Rassemblement National or the AfD –, immigration has not consistently been VOX's number one issue. The changes across different programmatic documents, the fact that some of its proposals are entirely unrealistic (e.g., a naval blockade), its apparent lack of concern for legality, or the absence of nuance and detail are all evidence of that.

3. COMPARING FAR-RIGHT MIGRATION POLICY PROPOSALS

This section looks at the different migration policy proposals put forward by the six far-right parties under study. It examines their positions on relevant migration-related policy areas such as asylum law, deportation, and border control, providing a comparative overview of their positions and an indication of their level of restrictiveness.

Far-right parties often alternate between advocating measures that challenge established national and international legal norms governing migration policy or calling for stricter enforcement of existing laws. Their proposals intersect with broader political debates about national sovereignty, security concerns, and the integration of migrants, reflecting an effort to redefine migration policy in accordance with their ideological outlook.

In terms of issue attention, this analysis highlights that, as expected, far-right parties are strictly focused on 'controlling immigration', that is, finding the means to decrease the influx of foreigners into their countries. In accordance, they pay great attention to deportation and border policy, asylum procedures, and irregular migration. In contrast, labor migration receives comparatively less attention, while other areas of legal migration, such as educational or student migration, are hardly mentioned at all.

Asylum Law

A common feature of far-right parties in Europe regarding asylum law is the call for the externalization of asylum procedures, meaning that asylum applications should be processed outside Europe. This is justified as a means to discourage irregular migration. In media and public discourse, this is often associated with far-reaching proposals such as the 'Rwanda Plan' and the 'Australia Model' (also known as the 'Pacific Solution'). Among the parties analyzed, only the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)

explicitly mention these models in their manifestos: The AfD initially supported the "Australia Model" in 2021 (AfD 2021: 91), but switched to the slightly less strict Rwanda Plan in 2024 (AfD 2024: 14). The FPÖ, on the other hand, endorses the Australia Model in its 2024 European Parliament election manifesto (FPÖ 2024a: 7).¹²

Among far-right parties, proposals to externalize asylum law vary along some dimensions, which can be broadly categorized into three groups, in order of restrictiveness:

1. *Processing some applications abroad while still allowing territorial asylum*: this approach involves screening some – but not all – asylum seekers outside the country, in order to alleviate domestic backlogs. Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) endorses this approach.

2. *Processing all applications abroad but allowing recognized asylum seekers to enter the country*: this approach involves processing all asylum applications outside the country, but allowing entry to those who are recognized as refugees. Rassemblement National (RN) supports this model.

3. *Processing applications abroad and not allowing refugees into the country*: this is the most restrictive approach, as it involves placing asylum seekers elsewhere, even when they are granted asylum. The FPÖ explicitly or implicitly endorses this model (when supporting the "Australia model"¹³). Other parties are more difficult to place on this list, with the Lega probably closer to category 1 and the AfD closer to category 3.

Looking at the parties individually, the position of the FPÖ stands out as the most radical. In its manifesto the party stresses that Austria and Europe need a solution to the problem of illegal migration and pleads for a "no way" policy

modeled on the Australian approach of zero tolerance for illegal asylum seekers. The FPÖ speaks in drastic terms of an "asylum stop" and argues that asylum applications should only be made from outside European territory, going as far as to state, in its EU election manifesto, that asylum should not be granted on European soil to individuals from outside Europe (FPÖ 2024a: 7). Accordingly, it calls for the establishment of refugee processing centers exclusively outside Europe (FPÖ 2024a: 7, 2024c: 46).

While not explicitly referencing the Australian model, VOX seems to favor a similar model by proposing a 'naval blockade' and the creation of EU-managed "disembarkation

¹² Roughly speaking, under the Rwanda Plan, people seeking asylum in the EU could be transferred to a safe third country to go through the asylum process and possibly be granted asylum there. In contrast, the Australia Model involves transporting asylum seekers to detention centers on nearby island nations in the Pacific Ocean, preventing them from landing on the Australian mainland. A key difference between Australia's offshore policy and the Rwanda Plan is that the former avoids initial screening on Australian soil, thus preventing asylum seekers from acquiring any rights or legal claims associated with being in Australia. In contrast, the Rwanda Plan involves initial case-by-case screening in the UK, followed by transfer and further assessment in Rwanda. Both approaches are controversial and have faced legal challenges. However, the Australia Model is particularly controversial because it involves moving the processing of asylum seekers entirely offshore, thereby circumventing territorial legal obligations. This approach would likely be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, to which Australia is not a signatory (SVR 2024; Thym 2024).

¹³ The Australia Model is placed here because, in its last iteration, it denies recognized asylum seekers any chance of settling in Australia.

Fig. 1 Latest Far-Right Party Positions on Asylum Models and Processing

Policy Aspect	AfD	FPÖ	RN	VOX	Lega	Fdi
Model Supported	Rwanda Plan	Australia Model	Asylum processing at embassies	Naval blockade, EU-managed asylum centers in non-EU countries	EU-managed asylum centers in non-EU countries	EU-managed asylum centers in non-EU countries
External Processing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Asylum in destination country	Partial	No	Yes	Unclear	Yes	Yes

Source: Party election programs / own elaboration

platforms” in third countries to assess asylum claims (VOX 2023: 102). However, its rhetoric is less precise, speaking more broadly of “working” to ensure that all applications for international protection are assessed outside the EU and “favoring the regional integration of asylum seekers” in safe countries within the same region (VOX 2024: 16). The AfD, on the other hand, seems to have moved away from the Australian model (mentioned in 2021), endorsing the Rwanda Plan in its most recent manifesto and proposing that asylum procedures should take place in third countries willing to accept asylum seekers.

As mentioned, the RN supports the idea that asylum claims should be processed “exclusively abroad”, effectively undermining the principle of territorial asylum (which guarantees the right of access to the national asylum process upon arrival). Specifically, the RN proposes that asylum claims should be processed in the embassies and consulates of the countries of origin, as outlined in its manifesto for the 2024 European Parliament elections (RN 2024a: 9). The Italian Lega also calls for a reform of the European asylum system to prevent illegal immigrants from reaching European territory. It proposes the creation of migrant identification centers in transit countries, particularly on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, to identify and process asylum applications (Lega 2024: 16). Only two years earlier, the Lega proposed to “encourage” the submission of asylum applications exclusively to Italian or EU diplomatic missions in the migrant’s country of origin or in neighboring countries (Lega 2022: 94), which echoes the RN’s position, though the use of the word “encourage” signals a less firm commitment.

The least restrictive proposals on asylum law are to be found in the manifestos of the Fratelli d’Italia (Fdi).¹⁴

Similar to VOX, Fdi advocates the creation of hotspots in non-European territories, managed by the EU, to assess asylum claims (Fdi 2022: 32). However, it does not demand that asylum claims shall be processed exclusively outside Europe or that asylum must be granted only in safe third countries. Fdi also emphasizes the fair distribution of eligible asylum seekers among the 27 EU member states, while Vox has been more ambiguous in this regard.

Deportation Policy

Far-right parties not only advocate highly restrictive immigration and asylum policies, but also push for more deportations, targeting not only irregular migrants but also legal residents who have committed crimes. The differences are more in tone than in substance, as most of these parties agree that deportation procedures should be made easier. No party openly supports the far-reaching “remigration” plans discussed at the extremist meeting in Potsdam, which sparked criticism of the AfD earlier this year. Italian parties, especially Fdi, are more cautious than others, ensuring that their deportation demands remain within legal bounds by emphasizing cooperation with countries of origin and transit.

VOX appears to take a particularly hard line on deportations when calling for the “immediate expulsion” of “all immigrants” who enter the country illegally, and the detention and expulsion of all illegal immigrants in Spanish territory (VOX 2021: 26, 2023: 100, 2024: 16). It is unclear whether “immediate expulsion” refers to pushbacks at the border or the removal of irregular migrants already within the country, the latter of which would be practically unfeasible. This ambiguity makes it difficult to determine to what extent VOX’s plans would bypass a proper assessment of individual asylum claims,

¹⁴ In November 2023, Italian Prime Minister Meloni announced a scheme under which asylum seekers rescued at sea by Italian ships would be transferred to Albania, where their asylum claims would be processed (except for minors, pregnant women, and individuals considered vulnerable). Unlike the Rwanda scheme, the claims would be processed by the Italian authorities in Albania, and successful claimants would be granted asylum in Italy. Italy would also be responsible for removing unsuccessful applicants. This less rigorous approach compared to the Rwanda plan may explain why Fdi have adopted less restrictive positions on asylum law in its recent manifesto.

potentially violating the principle of non-refoulement. Adding to this veneer of radicalism is the fact that the party also calls for the return of unaccompanied alien minors (although, somewhat confusingly, it states that they should be returned together with their parents, when by definition unaccompanied minors are without their parents) (VOX 2023: 100). It also calls for the expulsion of immigrants who commit serious crimes or who make “petty crimes their way of life”, adding that sentences should be served in the country of origin (VOX 2023: 100). On this point, VOX’s arguments closely mirror those of the AfD, which in its 2021 manifesto calls for facilitating deportations even for minor offenses (AfD 2021: 77).

While VOX simply shows no concerns for legal obstacles to deportations, parties like the AfD and the RN acknowledge that legal obstacles often prevent the deportation of foreign criminals legally residing in the country. While the AfD writes that the legal obstacles to deportation must be reduced and the deportation process streamlined, specifically calling for deportations to be carried out by criminal courts (AfD 2021: 77), the RN seems to go further when advocating the abolition of *all* exceptions that prevent the deportation of foreigners (RN 2024b: 6). The party specifies that the criteria of “necessity” and “proportionality” shall be removed, and that the Parliament shall be allowed to determine the cases in which expulsion applies (RN 2022a: 13).

The AfD, however, devotes considerable attention to deportations, making it a recurring theme in its programs and dedicating an entire section of its manifesto to “deportation and return”. Under the banner of a “deportation offensive,” it presents a series of proposals aimed at simplifying the deportation process by broadening the criteria for those eligible for deportation, thereby reducing the backlog of cases (AfD 2021: 93). The AfD uses a mix of incentives and sanctions, giving much more weight to the latter. On the one hand, it states that voluntary return is always preferable to deportation for financial, organizational and humanitarian reasons, which is why the willingness to return must be promoted more strongly than before. On the other hand, the party takes a harsh stance, calling for the issuance of certificates of obligation to leave the country instead of “Duldungen” (tolerated stay) and for the unconditional deportation of dangerous persons and criminals, including to conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (AfD 2021: 92).

When analyzing the AfD’s deportation policies, it is important to have in mind that, in the German context, the issue is more tightly linked to asylum than in other cases (in light of the larger number of asylum seekers in the country). In accordance, the AfD manifesto emphasizes that the goal of increasing deportations should be achieved through a more controlled and temporary use of asylum. The party states that protection from the consequences of war should be temporary and should not lead to permanent immigration (AfD 2024: 17).

As soon as peace has been restored in most parts of a country of origin, the EU or Germany should immediately negotiate the conditions for the return of asylum seekers and enforce their return (AfD 2024: 17). Similarly, if more succinctly, the FPÖ calls for a stricter approach to deportation, pushing for a “remigration pact” that would include the deportation of all rejected asylum seekers and of criminal migrants (FPÖ 2024a: 7). For the latter, the party calls for an “extraterritorial prison with a deterrent effect for criminal tourists” (FPÖ 2024c: 51).

Compared to other parties, the Italian far-right parties, Lega and especially Fdi, have a less restrictive approach to deportation. The only measure mentioned by the Lega is to increase the length of detention in detention centers. Fdi takes a more moderate stance, advocating the strengthening of the European repatriation system through the implementation of agreements with countries of origin and transit and the negotiation of further agreements on voluntary assisted repatriation. In its recent manifestos, the party not only emphasizes the removal of illegal immigrants, but also focuses on creating a cooperative framework with other countries to ensure the smooth execution of repatriation processes.

When examining deportation proposals, VOX and the RN stand out for their particularly radical stance, calling for widespread deportations. The AfD, on the other hand, distinguishes itself for emphasizing deportation as part of a broader remigration agenda. The party seems to place as much emphasis on deportation as it does on restricting migration, making its concept of remigration more than just a slogan. Ultimately, this means that migration is perceived not as a path to integration into society, but rather as a precursor to “remigration”. This is perhaps best illustrated by their assertion that “for school-age asylum seekers, the aim of schooling must be to prepare them for the possibility of returning to their home country” (AfD 2021: 151).

Border control

Border policy is a key issue for most far-right parties. While some parties primarily advocate strengthening Europe’s external borders, others take a more explicit dual approach, demanding that nation-states be allowed to protect their own national borders as well. Typically, parties in southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, emphasize strengthening the EU’s external borders. In contrast, parties in states affected by secondary migration, such as Germany and France, argue for the reintroduction of national border controls alongside EU measures. Far-right parties also differ in the extent to which they are willing to challenge or revise legal norms. Some openly advocate measures such as pushbacks or restrictions on the free movement of non-EU citizens within Europe, thereby challenging established legal principles, while others simply call for existing measures to be applied more rigorously, for example, by strengthening the role of Frontex.

Among the parties advocating the most restrictive measures is the RN. The party calls for a “double border”, which would involve strengthening controls at both the French and EU borders. More specifically, the RN proposes to amend the Schengen agreements by replacing the absence of border controls with simplified border crossing procedures for EU citizens, which would limit the Schengen privileges currently extended to non-EU citizens (RN 2022a: 15). In addition, the RN advocates a tougher border policy at the gates of Europe, which would allow Frontex to send back illegal immigrants (RN 2024a: 9).

The AfD, while also taking a dual approach, is even more focused on national borders than the RN. While the party seeks to combine national and European border protection measures, it places great emphasis on the need for nation-states to protect their own borders. Accordingly, the AfD advocates reforming the Schengen Agreement to allow nation-states to once again protect their own borders (AfD 2024:15). This would also involve restoring the authority of the Federal Police as a border protection authority at German borders, and notifying the EU Commission of that (AfD 2024: 17).¹⁵ In line with its sovereigntist approach, the party argues that refoulement at the border should be regarded as a self-evident right of sovereign states. In addition, the AfD recommends the installation of physical barriers, such as border fences, to effectively monitor the “green border” – the natural segments of the border that are not covered by official checkpoints or infrastructure (AfD 2021: 90).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, VOX focuses on preventing irregular migration at the southern border. Particularly draconian is its proposal to promote a naval blockade to ensure the immediate return of migrants to the safest nearby ports in countries of origin and transit (VOX 2023: 102). It also calls for the military to be deployed on the borders of Ceuta, Melilla and the Canary Islands. Elsewhere, VOX emphasizes the prevention of sea crossings through combined naval missions, the establishment of regional disembarkation platforms in third countries, and the safe transfer of boats (VOX 2024: 15). In addition, VOX calls for improved control structures and maritime surveillance to secure Europe’s southern border. Overall, VOX’s approach bears some similarity to the so-called Pacific Solution, which aimed to prevent migrants from reaching Australian shores by diverting them to offshore processing centers.

Like VOX, FdI supports a naval blockade to stop human trafficking, in coordination with North African authorities. However, it does not specify what this means and whether it involves military force. In addition, FdI recommends strengthening EU border control by enhancing the role

of Frontex, Europol and Eurodac (FdI 2024: 12). Similarly, the Lega calls for increased security measures, including enhanced border controls and agreements with North African countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt. The Lega advocates EU support for funding tools to prevent illegal maritime and land border crossings. While the FPÖ’s manifestos do not detail specific measures, their general stance is consistent with strict border control measures and reducing immigration (FPÖ 2024a: 7). Instead, the party resorts to catchy linguistic images such as “Fortress Europe” and “Fortress Austria” and boldly calls for a backlash at Austria’s borders (FPÖ 2024c: 46).

In general, far-right parties across Europe display a rather limited range of policies focused on border control, reflecting their geographical contexts. Parties in countries such as Italy and Spain emphasize strengthening Europe’s southern borders to prevent irregular migration, while parties in countries such as Germany and France advocate the reintroduction of national border controls alongside stronger EU measures. In addition, these parties differ in the extent to which they are willing to violate or revise legal norms, as some parties like the AfD and the RN openly advocate pushbacks and restrictions on the free movement of non-EU citizens in Europe. These policies often include proposals for naval blockades and physical barriers, which are difficult to implement and raise significant legal and humanitarian concerns under international law. The AfD stands out for its strong focus on national borders, pushing for nation-states to regain control over their border security.

Labor Migration

Labor migration policies are generally not central to far-right parties, as their strong anti-immigration stance goes hand in hand with a focus on irregular migration. Most far-right parties agree on the need to tailor labor migration to the specific labor market needs of their country and to ensure that native employment is prioritized. Thus, the differences between them are by no means substantial. What is noticeable, however, is that some parties place greater emphasis on national priority and strict limits, arguing that foreign workers should only be admitted if no suitable local workers are available.

Among these parties is the RN. The party has long advocated for a policy of “national priority”. This implies giving priority to national citizens in access to employment, but also to social housing and welfare benefits (RN 2022a: 14). The party emphasizes that only foreigners with the necessary qualifications to fill jobs that cannot be filled by nationals should be admitted to the country. This policy is justified with the need to ensure that labor migration does not undermine job opportunities for French citizens.

¹⁵ Within the Schengen area, the reintroduction of border controls requires notification to the EU Commission and other member states to ensure that such measures are justified and in line with EU law.

The AfD also takes a restrictive stance on labor migration. The party proposes the abolition of the “Spurwechsel” (“track change”) policy (AfD 2021: 91), which allows rejected asylum seekers to switch to other residence permits, e.g. for employment. Instead, the AfD supports the development of the EU Blue Card instrument to attract highly qualified experts, especially in STEM professions (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) (AfD 2024: 19). Furthermore, the AfD advocates the introduction of sectoral quotas for the labor market, modeled on Japan’s approach, to regulate the number of foreign workers admitted to certain industries (AfD 2024: 19). This policy aims to match labor market demand while keeping the number of labor migrants as limited as possible.

While ostensibly more open to labor migrants, VOX prioritizes labor migration from the “Iberosphere”, which includes nations that share linguistic, cultural, and historical ties with Spain. This policy is designed to favor immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries, thereby strengthening cultural and historical ties. By focusing on the Iberosphere, VOX seeks to streamline the integration of immigrants into Spanish society and labor markets, ensuring that newcomers share a common cultural background with the host country (VOX 2021: 36, 104, 2023: 101).

The Fdi advocates the creation of a “balanced and controlled” migration system that responds to the country’s economic needs while maintaining social stability. To this end, it supports the introduction of quotas for regular immigration that match labor supply to demand (Fdi 2024: 12). This is a departure from its 2019 manifesto, which called for “quotas for regular immigration only for nationalities that have demonstrated integration and do not pose a security or terrorism risk” (Fdi 2019: 12).

While the FPÖ does not make any concrete statements on labour migration policy in its election manifesto, it has only recently explicitly emphasized that labor migration should not be seen as a solution to the shortage of skilled workers (FPÖ 2024c: 60). The Lega mentions it briefly in its manifesto. It states that it is considering a “flow decree” (decreto flussi)¹⁶ that would meet the needs of the labor market without leading to another mass regularization process. The decree aims to limit labour market immigration to high-skilled, specialized and seasonal workers, and to allow it only on a temporary basis (Lega 2022: 93). In this sense, the Lega is no exception. Whether through national priority, strict quotas, or cultural preferences, far-right parties emphasize the need to regulate labor migration in order to protect domestic employment opportunities and maintain social stability.

Family Reunification

Although family reunification is a legal form of migration, far-right parties often oppose it, seeking to tighten its conditions, restrict it to specific groups, or ban it altogether. While far-right parties often claim to defend Christian values, they are far from approving of the Church’s sympathetic view to family reunification. On the one hand, this is likely the simple result of their nativist agenda: as far-right parties prioritize the preservation of national identity and cultural homogeneity, family reunification is part of the overall threat to the cultural and social fabric of the nation. On the other hand, these parties argue that family reunification can be exploited as a means to circumvent immigration controls, leading to increased demand for social services, housing, and welfare, and thus straining public resources. They also often equate family reunification with (undesired) permanent migration and with unproductive individuals (as opposed to labor migrants).

The two parties with the strictest or most far-reaching positions are the RN in France and VOX in Spain. Banning family reunification altogether has long been a key pledge of the policy platform of the RN, although in recent programmatic documents the party tones down this demand, speaking of restricting it according to strict economic criteria such as stable employment and well-defined resources (RN 2022a: 14). VOX, on the other hand, does not have a consolidated position on the matter, since it only mentions it in its 2024 European Parliament election manifesto. However, it adopts a very restrictive stance here when proposing that it should be allowed only for children and with two additional requirements: in cases of abandonment of the minor in the country of origin and conditional on the reciprocal acceptance (by the state of origin) of repatriated minors (VOX 2024: 16).

In line with their greater focus on asylum, both the AfD and the FPÖ oppose family reunification for refugees in specific. The AfD manifesto states this succinctly, advocating its outright rejection (AfD 2021: 91). On its website and in its manifesto for the 2024 National Council elections, the FPÖ calls for family reunification to take place in the immigrants’ countries of origin and not in Austria (FPÖ 2024b, 2024c: 47), implying that asylum seekers should return to their home countries instead of bringing their families to Austria.

In Italy, although family reunification was a significant channel of legal entry in 2022, neither far-right party directly addresses the issue in their programs. The Lega mentions it only when criticizing amnesties such as the Bellanova/Lamorgese amnesty of 2020, which it claims attracted new irregular immigrants through family reunification channels (Lega 2022: 92-3). The implicit assumption here is that such policies may create

16 A “flow decree” (decreto flussi) is an administrative measure used in Italy to regulate and manage the entry of foreign workers into the country. It sets annual quotas for the maximum number of non-EU nationals who can be admitted for work purposes, including seasonal and non-seasonal employment.

incentives for irregular migrants to enter Italy in the hope of eventually obtaining legal status through future amnesties and then using family reunification channels to extend their stay. The FdI, on the other hand, does not even mention family reunification in its program.

On the whole, far-right parties across Europe are generally critical of family reunification, advocating severe restrictions. The RN stands out as the most radical party in this regard: in its website it still states that it wants to put an end to “settlement migration” and family reunification. However, VOX, the AfD and the FPÖ also advocate for highly restrictive measures. Italian parties, on the other hand, avoid focusing on the issue in their current programs, despite its relevance among legal migration channels.

Irregular Migration and Regularization

Far-right parties equate irregular migration with illegality or violation of legal norms. In accordance, they typically advocate for stricter measures to combat irregular migration and prioritize deportations over regularizations – which they perceive as legitimizing illegality, undermining the rule of law, and potentially encouraging further illegal immigration. This stance reflects their overarching commitment to a strict legalist approach to immigration enforcement. Their rigid binary thinking implies that parties like the AfD reject categories that fall between legal and illegal, such as “geduldetete” (tolerated) migrants – those who are not granted full legal status but are allowed to stay temporarily.¹⁷

The diversity of approaches to regularization in European countries underscores different national contexts and policies. Historically, countries such as France, Italy, and Spain have implemented regularization programs to address long-standing irregularities within their borders and to regulate the status of certain categories of undocumented migrants. In contrast, Germany has taken a more cautious approach, focusing on temporary suspensions of deportation (*Duldung*) rather than large-scale regularization efforts.

Notwithstanding, far-right parties are generally unified in their opposition to regularizations or to obstacles that stand in the way of increased deportations. VOX takes a strong stance in this regard, stating that no regularization should ever be possible for anyone who has entered the country illegally, calling for the abolition of all regularization channels, and proposing dissuasive measures such as (a) long-term visa bans for those who overstay their visas illegally and (b) prohibiting the registration of irregular migrants and access to corresponding benefits (VOX 2021: 26, 2023: 101-103, 2024: 16).

Similarly, the RN calls for the suspension of all regularizations by prefects – effectively ending any administrative leniency towards irregular migrants –,

defending that regularizations should be prohibited in general and that exceptions should only apply on an individual basis and “for a higher reason of national interest or when the person concerned has rendered eminent services to France” (RN 2022a: 25). It also calls for more severe consequences for illegality when defending that illegal entry or stay should again become an offense or when advocating harsher penalties for employers who hire illegal workers (RN 2022a: 13, RN 2024b).

Italian parties focus instead on amnesties or collective regularization measures, given their relatively common usage in Italy. While the FdI explicitly states that “there will never be a new amnesty” (FdI 2022: 93), emphasizing a restrictive stance given the large number of irregular migrants in Italy, the Lega merely criticizes past regularization efforts, specifically targeting the 2020 Bellanova/Lamorgese regularization of the Conte government, which was supported by the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the center-left Democratic Party (PD). The party argues that such measures signal a willingness to legitimize illegal statuses and attract more irregular migration (Lega 2022: 92-3). It therefore defends that labour market shortages should be addressed via different means other than regularizations.

At first it may seem surprising that neither the AfD nor the FPÖ mention regularization in their manifestos. This is due to the different legal contexts. Specifically, Germany has in the past carried out regularizations for certain groups and nationalities, the so-called “Altfallregelungen”. In recent years, however, various provisions have been introduced into the Residence Act (*AufenthG*) that allow registered persons who are obliged to leave the country to obtain a residence permit and thus legal status. These provisions usually require a temporary suspension of deportation (*Duldung*) and are part of the so-called “Spurwechsel” policy. This explains why the AfD focuses on criticizing “Spurwechsel” rather than regularizations. The party opposes a policy that allows rejected asylum seekers a switch to other residence permits, such as those for employment, for essentially the same reasons that the RN and VOX oppose regularizations.

Aid to Irregular Migrants

Far-right parties are also united in their opposition to non-state aid to irregular migrants, equating it with support for illegality. They view providing assistance to irregular migrants as encouraging further violations of immigration laws or creating a ‘pull effect’, thereby conflating it with human smuggling. This perspective reflects their commitment to a strict legalist approach that prioritizes enforcement and deterrence over humanitarian considerations.

¹⁷ In fact, the AfD explicitly opposes “Duldung” as a legal status, calling for its abolition in its 2021 manifesto in favor of the issuance of mandatory departure certificates.

Italian and Spanish far-right parties are particularly focused on private maritime rescue operations, as many of these activities take place in the Mediterranean right off their shores. In particular, former Italian Interior Minister and current League leader Matteo Salvini has been a strong opponent of NGOs conducting search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean. He has often referred to these organizations as “accomplices” of human traffickers and, during his tenure as Interior Minister, attempted to prevent private rescue ships from docking in Italian ports. The Lega therefore calls for the reintroduction of a ban on the entry, stay and transit of foreign NGOs in national waters (Lega 2022: 94) and proposes a new code of conduct for NGOs, including administrative seizure, confiscation, and fines for those who violate entry bans, emphasizing the need to protect national sovereignty and security (Lega 2022: 94). The FdI similarly focuses on combating NGO activities that facilitate illegal immigration (FdI 2022: 32). Although it does not provide detailed measures in its program, the party’s position is clear: it opposes NGO activities that help irregular migrants.

Similarly, VOX in Spain advocates harsher penalties against “illegal immigration mafias” and their collaborators, including NGOs. VOX’s policy includes outlawing and eliminating public aid to NGOs that assist irregular migrants, reflecting its belief that such organizations contribute to the problem of illegal immigration (VOX 2021: 26, 2023: 100-101, 2024: 16). In a similar vein, the RN in France calls for the prosecution and conviction of individuals who provide direct or indirect assistance to illegal migrants, even if for humanitarian reasons only (RN 2022a: 14). The AfD also calls for tougher penalties when proposing that, in order to combat the business model of criminal trafficking gangs and so-called non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), such actions should be classified as serious crimes (AfD 2024: 18).

In Austria, the FPÖ has taken steps to remove private actors from the asylum process. It defends that the state should take over all asylum services, thus eliminating the influence and activities of private organizations and uncontrolled NGOs. It vindicates this as a means to ensure that asylum procedures are strictly regulated and transparent (FPÖ 2019: 3). However, the FPÖ does not propose any concrete measures in its manifesto, reflecting a less concrete approach compared to other far-right parties.

Cooperation with Source States

Far-right parties across Europe are generally skeptical of development aid, implicitly considering it a ‘globalist’ or cosmopolitan policy that prioritizes “foreigners” over “natives” in the context of scarce resources. These parties emphasize the need to prioritize helping poor citizens at home over those in foreign countries. This does not mean, however, that they simply want to reduce or entirely stop development aid. Instead, they seek to redefine the purpose of aid and development cooperation to serve their own countries’ economic and political interests. One of these interests is, of course, the reduction of irregular migration.

The overall strategy of far-right parties shows little variability, emphasizing stricter controls and conditionality in development aid to curb irregular migration. Many parties, like the RN and VOX, advocate making the provision of aid conditional on the cooperation of source countries in migration management. The RN, for instance, calls for development aid to be contingent on source states’ efforts to keep their populations from

Fig. 2 Latest Far-Right Party Positions on International and EU Law

Policy Aspect	AfD	FPÖ	RN	VOX	Lega	FDI
Primacy of National Law	Yes	No mention	Yes	Yes (but less strongly than RN)	No mention	No mention
EU Migration Policies	Advocates EU migration opt-out	Rejects EU Migration Pact	Rejects EU Migration Pact	Rejects EU Distribution Mechanism	Criticizes EU Migration Pact	No mention
Withdrawal from International Treaties	Advocates withdrawal from UN Migration & Refugee Pacts	Rejects UN migration pact	Advocates withdrawal from multiple treaties, including from the Geneva Refugee Convention	No mention	No mention	No mention

Source: Party election programs / own elaboration

migrating, combat people smuggling, and accept the return of expelled nationals (RN 2024a: 9). Similarly, VOX insists on suspending aid to states that do not cooperate with Spain in controlling migration (VOX 2023: 103) and demands strict monitoring of aid to prevent collaboration with human trafficking networks (VOX 2024: 15).

The Lega and the AfD also tie development aid to source countries' commitments to curb illegal immigration and accept the return of their nationals. The AfD, for example, advocates restricting not only development aid but also visa issuance and market access to the EU for states that do not comply with restrictive immigration policies (AfD 2014: 17).

Fdi is no significant exception when it comes to cooperation with source countries. While it proposes a "Mattei Plan for Africa" aimed at improving living conditions in countries of origin as a way of reducing the incentive for irregular migration, its 2022 manifesto also calls for cooperation agreements to be linked to the willingness of these countries to accept repatriation (Fdi 2022: 32).

International/EU Law

Far-right parties across Europe share a contentious relationship with international law and European Union (EU) law, which they often criticize for encroaching on national sovereignty. Their focus is usually on two main aspects: First, far-right parties reject the primacy of EU or international law over national laws and constitutions, preferring instead intergovernmental cooperation in which national laws take precedence. Second, these parties seek to restore national control over key policy areas, notably asylum and migration, which they see as crucial to protecting vital national interests. However, the degree of criticism varies between these parties. Those with more Eurosceptic and sovereigntist attitudes, such as the RN and, to a lesser extent, the AfD and the FPÖ, tend to be more vehement and principled in their opposition to international and European regulations governing migration, while others – Italian parties in particular – focus more on their perceived ineffectiveness or limitations. This is partially a result of different geographical contexts, as frontline states in Southern Europe bear the brunt of migration flows and rely more heavily on cooperation to manage irregular migration and secure their borders.

The RN advocates the most radical changes to international and EU law on migration. The party proposes to amend the French Constitution to ensure that national law takes precedence over international and EU law, allowing judicial authorities to act without being constrained by EU regulations and international obligations in the areas of migration and border control (RN 2022a: 12, 25, 42). The RN also plans to organize a referendum to reaffirm the primacy of the French Constitution and incorporate a new legal framework on migration on it (RN 2022a, 2024a: 9). These measures aim to drastically reduce the influence of international and EU legal frameworks on French migration policy.

The AfD also opposes the communitarization of the right of residence and asylum and advocates its reversal. For example, it calls for the Common European Asylum System to be removed from the European treaties and for asylum and immigration policy to be returned to national jurisdiction, similar to the current situation in Denmark (AfD 2021: 86). It also advocates the immediate withdrawal from international treaties such as the UN Migration Pact and the UN Refugee Pact. The party argues that although these agreements are non-binding, they will eventually be incorporated into national law (AfD 2021: 96) – a stance reiterated in its recent manifesto for the EU elections (AfD 2024: 14). Similarly, though more succinctly, the FPÖ also opposes European legislation on migration and rejects any EU migration pact that would allegedly "encourage" illegal immigration to Europe (FPÖ 2024a: 7). In addition, the party boasted in 2019 that they had not agreed to the 2018 UN Global Compact on Migration during their time in government (FPÖ 2019: 5). Under the banner of "sovereignty", the party announced in its most recent election manifesto that all international treaties that are detrimental to Austria would be re-examined and that the jurisdiction of supranational courts, for example in the area of family reunification, would no longer be recognized (FPÖ 2024c: 32-33).

VOX equally defends the primacy of national law over European law, though this call is not specifically tied to legislation on migration. Its proposals focus more broadly on recovering or maintaining sovereignty and it is only in the EU Parliament manifesto of 2024 that it incorporates a sentence defending the eliminating quotas and relocation mechanisms from new regulations and the maintenance of the sovereignty of Member States over immigration (VOX 2024: 16). In its 2023 manifesto it spoke instead of the "equitable distribution" of those entitled to asylum.

Compared to other far-right parties, Italian far-right parties tend to be less principled in their stance against international and European regulations on migration and more focused on addressing their limitations and proposing practical solutions. For example, the Lega's 2024 manifesto emphasizes the importance of strengthening Europe's border defenses in response to the EU's Asylum and Migration Pact, which it criticizes for treating Italy as a refugee camp for the EU. The Lega calls for increased EU support for member states by funding measures to prevent illegal border crossings, both at sea and on land (Lega 2024: 15). Similarly, the Fdi supports increased cooperation within the EU, advocating the strengthening of EU agencies such as Frontex, Europol, and Eurodac to better manage migration and border security (Fdi 2024: 12).

These demands are not unique to Italian parties, though. All parties endorse measures to strengthen the protection of EU's external borders. The AfD, for example, states that EU investment in effective border protection measures should be significantly increased (AfD 2024: 17). The RN calls for Frontex to be authorized to push back illegal

migrants (RN 2024). In other words, while all parties share an interest in EU cooperation on the control of external borders, this is more of a pressing issue for frontline states.

4. RESULTS

The AfD is often perceived as one of the most radical far-right party in Europe – a perception that is certainly not unwarranted, given the party's anti-migration rhetoric and its close ties to extremist groups. However, when manifestos and official policy positions are examined, this depiction becomes significantly less clear. While the AfD's positions are obviously hostile to asylum and irregular migration, they are not necessarily more extreme than those of other far-right parties in Europe. This is particularly the case when comparing the AfD to the RN, which in our analysis appears to be no less extreme than the former.

This is surprising in light of the RN's recent efforts to distance itself from the AfD and appear more moderate than its German counterpart. The RN's criticism of the AfD seems therefore to be driven more by "public respectability" concerns rather than by disagreement on concrete policy issues¹⁸ – judging, at least, by the comparison of their manifestos. In fact, the two parties broadly converge on their views on immigration and border policy, with the RN sometimes even standing out as more radical. For example, while the RN opposes family reunification *tout court*, the AfD is focused on curtailing this right in the specific case of refugees and asylum seekers. Similarly, the RN's defense of a regime of national preference – namely on employment – would involve a more significant overhaul of non-discrimination rules than the imposition of sectoral quotas proposed by the AfD.

The RN is not always more radical than the AfD, though. For example, while the AfD supports reforms to the asylum system that would include the transfer of recognized asylum seekers to third countries (as evidenced by its support for the Australian model in 2021 and the Rwanda Plan in 2024), the RN's defence of the processing of asylum applications abroad does not imply denying access to France's territory once asylum is granted. In addition, while the RN advocates the removal of all legal obstacles to deportations, the AfD speaks of an aggressive "deportation offensive" and places greater emphasis on remigration, seeking to repatriate migrants currently living in Germany. This focus on remigration places the AfD politically closer to extremist groups that not only oppose migration, but also actively seek to reverse Germany's migration history of the past decades.

Whereas the FPÖ and VOX, like the RN and the AfD, also espouse a strong sovereigntist stance and sometimes

stand out for proposals that come across as particularly radical (e.g., "a ban on asylum on European soil" [FPÖ]

or the "immediate expulsion of all irregular migrants" [Vox]), it must be acknowledged that their programs lack precision and often sound simplistic – particularly when compared to the RN, who has the most extensive program on migration of all. This difference is in itself interesting and suggest that part of the RN's effort to appear 'fit for government' is to develop a more detailed program.

The content of the proposals of the RN's (as well as the FPÖ's) challenges the general hypothesis that far-right parties consistently become (or appear to become) more moderate as they get closer to power – at least as far as migration is concerned. Nonetheless, this hypothesis seems to find confirmation in the cases of the parties in government included in this study, that is, the Italian Lega and Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), which have largely avoided taking extremely radical positions. This is particularly true of the Fdi, which, while maintaining a core securitarian stance on migration, has softened its position in several areas. For example, while its 2019 platform advocated "quotas for regular immigration only for nationalities that have demonstrated integration potential and do not pose a security or terrorism risk," this year's manifesto merely calls for "quotas for regular immigration based on the matching of labor demand and supply." The Fdi's stance on the EU has also become more moderate, as it no longer emphasizes the supremacy of national law as it did in 2019 (while other far-right parties do).

Despite the differences emphasized in the comparative analysis, the overall picture seems, in fact, to be one of unity. Far-right parties are largely united in defending the externalization of migration policy and asylum procedures, increasing deportation rates, strengthening border controls, making development aid conditional on cooperation on migration, etc. Differences in positions or emphasis often reflect different geographical or migratory contexts, with far-right parties in southern European countries focusing on issues related to maritime migration, while their counterparts in central European countries are more concerned with control over intra-EU migration.

That said, this study faces the obvious limitation of focusing exclusively on parties' manifestos and relying heavily on the choice of words parties make on these documents. If this is the most authoritative source to assess parties' policy pledges, it is certain not the only one and further studies could explore alternative sources and expand the number of countries covered.

¹⁸ This is essentially the same argument that McDonnell and Werner (2018) make when studying the alliance strategies of radical right parties in the European Parliament and the reasons why no single unified group exists.

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PROFILE

The Mercator Forum for Migration and Democracy (MIDEM) examines the impact of migration on democratic institutions, policies and cultures and looks into political decision making processes in the field of migration policies - in individual countries and in a comparative view of Europe. A spotlight is put on the relation between migration and populism.

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