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THE EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION ON THE SUPPORT FOR RADICAL RIGHT IN THE WEST AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Abstract:

This article summarizes recent research on the effects of immigration and refugee admission on the support of populist radical right parties and politicians in the West. According to it, increasing immigration is associated with rising support for such parties. The effects are more visible at the local or regional level and with the arrival of culturally distinct immigrants: Muslims in Western Europe and Latin Americans (Hispanics) in the US. Because radical right parties combine opposition to immigration with opposition to international institutions such as the European Union and NATO, their rise brings important geopolitical implications, especially in the light of Russian support for such parties. This way, culturally distinct immigration has indirect, although far-reaching ramifications in international relations.

Keywords: immigration, refugees, Muslims, populism, far-right, Russia, European Union.

Introduction

For a long time, mainstream political parties and politicians in the West have largely sidelined the issue of perceived negative consequences of immigration and refugee admission. In many countries, the discussion on such issues as limited progress of immigrant integration, crime committed by immigrants, the cost of refugee admission, or the harmful effects of low-skilled immigration on wages and employment has been considered off-limits or severely discouraged. Such attitudes were motivated partly by a desire to avoid possible backlash (increased discrimination or racism) targeted at immigrants and their descendants living in the West.

Besides, according to a belief popular among the left and center of the political spectrum, immigration increases diversity, which brings several benefits to the society (yet the opposite is in fact true if ethnic or religious diversity is concerned).¹ Otherwise, left-wing parties have backed immigration more than others as they hoped for the support of future minority voters. Refugee admission policies have been considered mostly non-negotiable on humanitarian grounds. Finally, more so in the United States than in Europe, business interests have favored large-scale immigration as they could offer immigrants lower wages and increase profits.

Nevertheless, democratic politics cannot stand a vacuum for long. If certain issues are considered important by an increasing number of voters while mainstream political parties fail to consider them, new political actors will likely emerge that will address such issues in order to succeed politically. Hence, the issue of immigration has been taken up by a group of political actors usually labeled as “right wing populist” or “far right.”² Some of these actors had been active on the political scene for many decades, while some emerged or experienced a significant rise of support only after the migrant crisis of 2015. In the US, where the electoral system prevents electoral success of smaller parties, anti-immigration sentiments contributed to Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 Republican presidential primary.

The concept of populist radical right (PRR) parties

Before moving forward, it is necessary to define the political actors in question, as there is much conceptual ambiguity in this regard. In this case I follow the conceptualization developed by Cas Mudde (2007). Mudde’s framework has been adopted by the mainstream scholarly literature on the subject, including in Poland (e.g. Kasprowicz, 2017, 37). The author labels the actors in question as “populist radical right” (PRR) parties. These parties combine the ideologies of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Nativism follows a belief that the state should be inhabited exclusively by natives and that non-native groups or ideas are threatening to the nation. The consequence of nativism is opposition to immigration, in particular, culturally distinct immigration, espoused by PRR parties.

¹ For an overview of this literature, see Wang et al., 2019 (on business performance), Dinesen et al., 2020 (on social trust), and Wilczyński 2017.

² On this mechanism, see e.g. Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2007; Lipnicka, 2014; Kalinowska-Szneider, 2018; Grindheim, 2019; Tomaszewicz, 2019.

Populism is defined as an “ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups” – the elite and the people, and postulating that politics should reflect the people’s “general will”. Under the populist framework, people are understood as morally good while the elites as morally corrupt, cosmopolitan, and detached from the people. The consequence of nativism coupled with populism is the opposition or skepticism of international institutions or organizations, such as the European Union, NATO, World Trade Organization, that are perceived to take away the power from the people or limit the nation’s sovereignty.

Mudde defines authoritarianism as “the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely.” It combines admiration of law and order, “punitive moralism,” and an idea that rightful authorities should be respected and followed. Yet, it does not usually entail opposition to democracy, as PRR parties are “nominally democratic, even if they oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracy” (Mudde, 2007, 23, 32).

Radicalism is defined by Mudde as opposition to or skepticism of some key features of liberal democracy such as constitutional protection of minorities or judicial review. Finally, the “right” is defined as a political inclination to treat inequalities between people as natural and “outside the purview of the state.” Mudde argues that defining the right in economic terms is hardly useful when analyzing PRR parties due to the limited relevance of economic issues to these parties and their diverse economic platforms (Mudde, 2007, 25-26).

In the light of this definition, several important European political parties can be placed under the PRR label. Those include the British National Party, the British Independence Party (whose pressure culminated in the 2016 Brexit referendum), National Rally (France, previously National Front), Sweden Democrats, The Finns Party, Progress Party (Norway), Danish People’s Party, Freedom Party of Austria, Swiss People’s Party, Party for Freedom (the Netherlands), Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*), Alternative for Germany, Vox (Spain), or the League (Italy). All the parties above (with partial exception of UKIP) declare in their official programs and statements opposition to immigration, especially Muslim immigration.

In the United States, the pro-Trump wing of the Republican Party meets the PRR definition because it combines the elements of nativism, populism, and authoritarianism. Several parties operating in post-communist Europe also meet the PRR party definition, but their

activities are not of primary interest in this paper because non-Western immigration to that part of Europe has been so far limited. One should note that per definition, all PRR parties combine the core ideological elements of nativism, populism, and authoritarianism, but different parties put varying emphasis on those ideological elements, and a particular idea mix depends on the country and party.

One could point to several problematic consequences of the rise of PRR parties. There is a danger that the rise of such parties and candidates will undermine democracy because most combine anti-immigration postulates with plans to weaken long-established standards on the rule of law and civil liberties. Another worrying possibility is the introduction of openly discriminatory measures against immigrant minorities already living in Europe (especially Muslims) if these actors achieve power.

Finally, many of the analyzed actors declare opposition to long-established international institutions (especially the NATO and the European Union), hence their rise might have far-reaching implications for these institutions' future. In this situation, external actors interested in the weakening or disintegration of NATO and the EU, in particular Russia, might step up to support PRR parties because both actors' goals align. Connections between Russia and PRR parties will be discussed in the second part of the paper, while the first part will discuss the causal link between rising non-Western, especially Muslim immigration, and these parties' rise.

The relationship between immigration and the rise of PRR parties

There has been, so far, no book or study that would analyze the political effects of immigration comprehensively and from the Europe-wide perspective, hence most studies discussed in the following section analyze a single country or region. Methodologically, most use the "instrumental variable" approach to take into account that immigrants and refugees tend to settle in locations with more pro-immigration attitudes. Immigrants do so when they directly consider a place's political tendencies or because the places where they move due to economic or educational opportunities happen to be politically more liberal.

Moreover, anti-immigration voters tend to move out from the areas with a substantial presence of non-Western immigrants. This results in a lack of spatial correlation between support for pro-immigration parties and the immigrant or refugee population share

(Harmon 2018). A commonly used instrumental variable is immigrant housing availability, which is unrelated to attitudes towards immigrants. Alternatively, the causal relationship between immigrant inflow and the rise in support for PRR parties can be determined with an across-time analysis using units larger than municipalities or neighborhoods.

My review of this literature found a positive connection between the inflow of non-Western immigrants or refugees and increasing vote share for PRR parties. The studies suggest that the rise of PRR parties or actors is more strongly associated with the inflow of non-Western (and even more so Muslim) migrants rather than immigration in general. Such immigration is perceived as a bigger cultural threat and thus creates more vigorous political opposition.

In the period 2002-14 in Europe,³ as immigrant share increased, so did support for PRR parties. Controlling for the country context and individual characteristics, an increase in immigrant population share by one percentage point increased PRR party vote share similarly (e.g. from 5% to 6%). The PRR party support came more so from less educated and more religious voters. According to another study, Western Europeans' support for PRR parties was more strongly associated with Muslim immigration rather than immigration in general. This pattern was evident through a strong correlation (68%) between the projected Muslim population share and the maximum vote share obtained by PRR parties in 2011-17. As the Muslim population increases, people with conservative personalities (who appreciate safety rather than novelty or change) become increasingly critical of immigration and are more likely to vote for PRR parties.⁴

The event that dramatically increased the support for PRR parties in Sweden and Germany was the 2015-16 migrant crisis. The monthly number of asylum applications rose in Germany from about 20k in mid-2015 to 80k in January 2016. In the same period, support for the Alternative for Germany rose from about 5% to 13%. Similarly, in Sweden, as the monthly number of asylum applications rose from about

³ The study covered Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden (Davis & Deole 2017).

⁴ E. Kaufmann, *Why the fear of islamization is driving populist right support – and what to do about it*, London School of Economics (LSE) Blog, March 17. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/03/18/why-the-fear-of-islamization-is-driving-populist-right-support-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

6k to 22k, support for Sweden Democrats increased from 10% to 22% (Steinmayr, 2017; Otto & Steinhardt, 2017). During the crisis, Sweden and Germany admitted the largest number of refugees per capita in Western Europe, most of whom were Muslim.

In Britain, Muslim district population share has been one of the strongest predictors of support for the British National Party, an extreme far-right party. Moving from a district with no Muslims to a district with the largest share of Muslims in Britain increased the BNP vote almost twofold (from 0.64% to 1.06%). On the other hand, the share of non-Muslim Blacks or Hindus did not affect BNP's support, showing that of non-Western immigrants, the strongest immigration-related anxiety was caused by Muslims. Otherwise, being male, older, little educated, and having a working-class background increased the likelihood of supporting BNP. It should be added that the nature of Britain's electoral system suppresses vote for BNP, which is below 1% in parliamentary elections. Yet, the party managed to obtain 6% of the vote in the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, in which proportional representation was used.

In other European countries, lack of data on Muslims' spatial distribution prevents research on the association between their population share and far-right vote. However, some Western European countries release data on the spatial distribution of non-Western immigrants, about half of whom are Muslim.

Therefore, other studies, due to limited data availability, estimate how overall immigration is related to support for PRR parties. The most popular PRR party in France is the National Front. In the 2007 French presidential election, support for this party at the department level was, *ceteris paribus*, positively related to immigrant share at the department level. In a department with 1% of foreigners, the National Front vote share was about 11%, whereas it reached 15% in a department with 11% of foreigners, which was the maximum value. However, there was a negative relationship between immigrant share and National Front vote at the commune level. In a typical department, National Front vote share was 11% in communes with no foreigners and 8.5% in communes with 30% foreigners, *ceteris paribus*. Otherwise, unemployment was positively associated with National Front vote share (about 3% increase when moving from a commune with the lowest to one with the highest unemployment) (Della Posta, 2013).

The authors interpreted the immigration's positive effect on the National Front vote at the department level as resulting from the threat

effect and the negative effect at the commune level as resulting from the contact effect. The latter implies that rooted French become more tolerant due to contacts with foreigners and are less likely to vote for far-right parties. Nevertheless, this explanation does not account for self-selection, that is, the fact that more tolerant natives are likely to live in the communes with larger immigrant share. I also suppose that the detected negative effect would be more substantial if the authors took into account, instead of all foreigners, only Maghrebis and Blacks (*ibidem*).

In order to account for self-selection of immigrants, another study on the effect of immigration on the National Front vote used an instrumental variable, which was the immigrant share in 1968. As of 1968, the number of immigrants in France was still relatively small (and hence was not related to support for radical right), but it was strongly correlated with subsequent immigrant settlement patterns. The study found an association between immigrant share in 1968 and support for PRR parties (primarily the National Front) in the French presidential elections held in 1988-2012: A 1% higher immigrant share in 1968 was associated with 2.02% higher National Front vote share in 1988-2012. The effect was detected at local, departmental, and regional levels. It resulted almost exclusively from the rising share of non-Western poorly educated immigrants. Inflow of Western immigrants of any educational level or well-educated non-European immigrants did not increase the PRR party vote (Edo et al., 2017).

In France, there is no data on the spatial distribution of Muslims. However, Muslim population can be roughly estimated with a density of mosques per capita. This variable was strongly correlated with the Marine Le Pen vote at the first round of the French 2017 election, which indicated that the presence, or increasing share of Muslims, has been a significant popularity driver of the French radical right.⁵

Similar effects of immigration on the support for the radical right were found in other Western European countries. A study from Denmark researched municipal election results over the 1981-2001 period. It found that a 1% non-Western immigrant share increase was associated with a 1.2-2.3% increase in PRR vote (primarily for Danish People's Party), and a 2.1-5.4% decrease in left-wing vote (depending on the specification). Comparable patterns were observed in national elections.

⁵*Et si l'on superposait la carte des résultats avec celle des mosques?* Boulevard Voltaire, April 28, 2017. <https://www.bvoltaire.fr/lon-superposait-carte-resultats-celle-mosques/>

In the period, non-Western population share increased on average by 2.6% per municipality. Ultimately, non-Western immigration contributed to the defeat of the left-wing parties in the 2001 election and loss of political power by the left for ten years. It also convinced Social Democrats to adopt a more anti-immigration program (Harmon, 2018).

In the Netherlands, rising PRR vote was primarily associated with non-Western immigration, whereas Western immigration decreased support for such parties. In national elections held in 2003-12, a 1% higher non-Western population share (at the municipality level) was associated with a 0.2% higher PRR vote share. Contrastingly, a 1% higher Western immigrant population share was associated with a 0.8% lower PRR vote share. The effect was driven primarily by first generation immigrants rather than second generation immigrants (Chasapopoulos, 2018).

In Switzerland since 1970, *ceteris paribus*, a 1 percentage point increase in non-Western immigrant population share⁶ was associated with even greater increase in Swiss People's Party (SPP) vote share (1.6 percentage point). The share of Western immigrants was not related to the SPP vote. The municipalities with more families with children experienced the largest increase in SPP vote, likely reflecting anxieties related to increasing school diversity and school funding problems (Brunner & Kuhn, 2018).

Several studies researched the effect of refugee settlement on support for PRR parties. In Denmark, where incoming refugees are randomly resettled around the country, refugee allocation has been associated with rising support for the Danish People's Party (and its predecessor, Progress Party). The effect was visible outside of larger cities, where people were less accepting of refugees. *Ceteris paribus*, over 13 years, a 1% increase in refugee allocation share⁷ augmented PRR party vote share by 1.4% (outside of the 5% most populous municipalities). This number amounted to 16% of the average PRR vote

⁶ In the 2010s, approximately 18% of such-defined non-Western immigrants in Switzerland were from Muslim-majority Eastern European regions, 31% were from other parts of Eastern Europe, 28% were from Middle East and North Africa, and 23% were from other regions (my own calculation based on European Social Survey data from 2014, 2016, and 2018 waves). Definition of an immigrant encompassed those without Swiss citizenship, which resulted in inclusion of some second-generation immigrants.

⁷ Refugee allocation share was defined as the number of refugees divided by the number of people in the municipality.

share. Most refugees allocated in Denmark at the time came from Muslim-majority countries.

Research from Austria suggests that the opposition to refugee admission might be smaller if they are appropriately accommodated. In the country, refugee admission during the 2015-16 migrant crisis was organized in cooperation with local NGOs. They hosted refugees in buildings not used by locals, introduced them in local newspapers, and organized welcome meetings. The settlement was funded by the state budget, not local taxes. These circumstances might have attenuated the opposition to refugee settlement at the local level. As a result, Upper Austrian municipalities where refugees were hosted with NGO cooperation had a smaller vote for Freedom Party by about 3%.

On the other hand, municipalities on the border with Germany experiencing extensive transit of refugees without their proper accommodation recorded a 2% increase in the Freedom Party support. However, even though Freedom Party support at the local level was not directly related to the local refugee settlement, there was a direct relationship between the two factors at the state level. In Upper Austria, monthly asylum applications increased from about 17k in 2009-14 to 31k at the height of the refugee crisis in the summer of 2015. In the same period, support for the Freedom Party increased from about 17% to 32%. Its vote in the state elections increased from 15% in September 2009 to 30% in September 2015, at the cost of mainstream Social Democrats and Christian Democrats (Steinmayr, 2016).

As discussed, refugee admission has been associated with rising support for PRR parties. Although, as the example from Austria shows, proper refugee accommodation might prevent this process in the short term, there is a doubt if it can prevent it in the long term. In Austria, immigrant share increase at the municipal level explained about one-tenth of Freedom Party support variation in 1971-2013. However, this increase in the PRR support was caused only by low- and medium-skilled immigration (including the refugees), whereas increase in high-skilled immigration did not affect its support. The effect was more robust in the areas with higher unemployment, indicating that immigration exacerbated competition for jobs. Municipalities with a higher immigrant share also suffered from a smaller availability of education and childcare (Halla et al., 2017).

Settlement of refugees, especially if mismanaged by the government, triggered rising support for PRR parties also in other places. In Greece, island municipalities experiencing a large inflow of

refugees observed rising support for the far-right Golden Dawn party (Steinmayr, 2016). In Hamburg state elections in the 1990s, influx of asylum seekers was associated with increased support for far-right parties and decreased support for the pro-immigration Green Party (Otto & Steinhardt, 2017).

It has been argued that globalization-related inequality and job instability cause the rise of PRR parties in Europe. Yet, it is equally likely that the perceptions of cultural threat stemming from Muslim immigration to Western Europe and Hispanic immigration to the United States also play a large role in this regard. With left-wing parties (Democrats in the US and social democrats in Europe) committed, in most instances, to open immigration policies and multiculturalism, one could observe a slow drift of voters concerned about the cultural and economic impacts of immigration towards alternative political options.

In the US, support for Donald Trump in the 2016 election was associated more significantly with cultural and international issues than with economic deprivation. Voters who had seen their incomes decline before the 2016 election were not more likely to vote for Trump. Those who voted for him perceived a growing international threat from China, considered their status as threatened by demographic and economic rise of racial minorities, preferred smaller immigration, and considered international trade unfair to the US. Trump won the Republican primary precisely because he positioned himself closer to a median Republican voter (compared to the previous candidates) on the latter issues, in particular, decreased immigration and opposition to the immigration-related White Americans' status decline. In other words, he capitalized on the fact that previous Republican candidates did not follow their electorate's opinions on those issues (Mutz, 2016).

Sudden and substantial immigration flows can cause dramatic political consequences even if immigrants come from regions that are culturally not too distant, the immigrant-natives group boundaries are relatively thin, and one could reasonably expect full assimilation of their descendants. Eastern European immigration to Britain after the European Union enlargement in 2004 serves as an excellent example of this phenomenon. Although Britain had always been more skeptical of EU membership than other member states, a sudden influx of more than one million Eastern Europeans (about 3% of the UK population) boosted anti-EU attitudes. It was likely a decisive factor tilting the balance in favor of Brexit in the 2016 referendum. Support for Brexit increased

from 17% in 2000-04 (before the enlargement to the East) to 25% in 2012-15 and 42% in 2016 (Harding 2017, 9).

In the regions with the highest influx of Eastern Europeans, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) vote share in the European elections increased by 4% since the EU enlargement (Becker & Fetzer, 2016). Voting for Brexit and UKIP were very strongly correlated (Becker et al., 2018). Because Eastern European immigration decreased wages for low-skilled workers, they perceived it as an economic threat and heavily supported Brexit. This immigration also decreased the supply of public services and housing, but, contrary to common perceptions, had no effect on crime (Bell et al., 2013; Becker & Fetzer, 2016).

PRR parties' foreign policy goals and Russian support for these parties

In addition to anti-immigration goals, PRR parties declare their opposition or skepticism towards transnational institutions, in particular the European Union. In official programs, support for withdrawal from the EU has been declared by The Finns Party, Party for Freedom (the Netherlands), Danish People's Party (which supports a referendum on the issue), and Alternative for Germany (before the 2021 election). Several parties back weakening of the EU by, for example, abandonment of the Euro. This position is shared by the Flemish Interest, Sweden Democrats, National Rally (France) (till 2019 the party had called for withdrawal from the EU), the Vox (Spain), and Freedom Party of Austria. Only the League (Italy) has been relatively pro-EU throughout its history. NATO is rarely mentioned in PRR parties' programs, but one should note that until recently one of them, National Rally (France) favored the country's withdrawal from the organization. Currently, National Rally advocates for withdrawal from the NATO's integrated military command structure.

One should note that PRR parties' foreign policy goals at least partly align with Russia's. Long-term goals of the Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin include weakening and, if possible, dissolution of the European Union and NATO. There are two justifications of these goals. One is support given by members of these organizations, and the EU in general, to the opposition and pro-democracy actors in Russia. Because Western governments and organizations would welcome a regime change in Russia, they are perceived as political enemies by the current government. The other reason is geopolitical. Dissolution of the EU and NATO would lead to relative increase of Russia's power and

leverage as Russia would engage in relations not with two powerful blocks of allied countries but with each individual Western country. These goals correspond to the Russia's vision of a multipolar world in which the country is equal to other great powers (Karlsen, 2019; United States Department of Defense, 2019).

There are two consequences of this situation. The first is Russia's support for those Western political actors that aim to dissolve or weaken NATO and the EU or are otherwise pro-Russian. Those include PRR parties, but also, for example, pro-Brexit actors in Britain or Donald Trump (and isolationists in general) in the US. Secondly, Russia might also act to enable non-Western immigration to the EU given that such immigration leads to increasing support for PRR parties and general political destabilization. Understandably, Russia also backs the actors that share its more intermediate policy goals such as ending the anti-Russian sanctions, recognition of annexation of Crimea, or cooling of relations between Western countries and Ukraine. Such actors usually include PRR parties.

In this section, I will shortly discuss the contacts with PRR parties maintained by the Russian government and its associates. Some of the actors supported by Russia have a long history, such as the National Front (Rally) in France, while some are new parties that emerged or gained significant popularity only after the 2015 migrant crisis.⁸

The PRR party with the longest tradition and continuous parliamentary representation is the National Front (Rally) in France. With the end of the Cold War, Jean-Marie Le Pen reoriented the party ideologically towards rejection of links with the United States (leading him to support dissolution of NATO) and closer ties with Russia. Le Pen was sympathetic to the "traditionalist" philosophy of Alexandr Dugin, who himself has been inspired by the French far-right thought (Fałęcki, 2016). Since the late 2000s, Dugin has been influential in Russian government circles. According to Dugin, Western Europe should reject the transatlantic ties with the Anglo-Saxon world, which are based on liberal cosmopolitan values, and build a common front with Russia based on traditional values (such as the nation, authority, religion, family, or social hierarchies) (Clover, 2016).

⁸ Russia is using every means possible to destabilize Europe. Such is also the purpose of aid to political parties, especially those on the left, but also those on the right and even those belonging to the mainstream, such as social democratic and Christian democratic parties (editor's note).

Yet, intensive contacts between the French National Front and the Russian government began only after 2008 and were related to the French government's support to the anti-government side in the Syrian Civil War. In 2014, Marine Le Pen approved of Russian annexation of Crimea, while Members of the European Parliament from the National Front (alongside other representatives of PRR parties, such as Frank Creyelman from Flemish Interest) observed the referendum in Crimea and elections in the separatist Donetsk People's Republic. National Front French parliamentarians opposed also most anti-Russian initiatives by, for example, voting against imposing sanctions on Russia. As a form of reward, 11 million euros were lent by Russian-associated banks to the National Front to support its campaign in regional and local elections (Falecki, 2016).⁹

Another strongly pro-Russian PRR party is Alternative for Germany (AfD). The party gained popularity as a result of the 2015 migrant crisis and first entered the German Bundestag in 2017. AfD politicians, alongside those from the far-left party *Die Linke*, have espoused strongly pro-Russian views, made repeated calls for an end to the anti-Russian sanctions, recognition of the Russian annexation of Crimea, and closer ties with Russia in general (Applebaum et al., 2017, 10, 13). For example, during a visit to Moscow in March 2021, AfD parliamentarians appealed for improvement in relations between the two countries and an end to the economic sanctions on Russia.¹⁰ Such messages, often spread in Russian, enabled the party to obtain substantial support from ethnic German Russian-speaking immigrants from Russia.

Moreover, especially during the campaign before the 2017 election, AfD and *Die Linke* were supported both by the traditional Russian media outlets (such as Sputnik or RT, broadcasting in German) and misinformation-spreading troll factories. Pro-Russian social media accounts, run both by real persons and bots, amplified news stories critical of immigration or created fake anti-immigration stories to boost support for AfD (Applebaum et al., 2017, 12-13; Mankoff, 2020). In addition, there are credible indications that in 2017 the Russian

⁹ Marine Le Pen did not sign the anti-Russian document passed at the European Summit of the Conservative Congress of Right-Wing Parties in Madrid on January 30, 2022 (editor's note).

¹⁰ *Germany's far-right AfD lawmakers visit Moscow*, Deutsche Welle, March 10. <https://www.isdglobel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Make-Germany-Great-Again-ENG-061217.pdf>

government backed financially election of an AfD member Markus Frohnmaier because it perceived him as absolutely loyal to its interests (Gatehouse, 2019)¹¹. AfD politicians have also frequently visited Moscow and met with Russian pro-government politicians and government officials. In 2017, a Russian businessman paid for their return to Germany in a private jet, which violated German regulations on political financing by foreign actors.

Russian government circles have also maintained contacts with the League (Italy). In October 2018, a meeting was held between Gianluca Savoini, a League politician associated with its leader Matteo Salvini, and persons with close ties to the Russian government, Russian secret services, and Dugin's International Eurasian Movement. The topic was possible financing of the League with Rosneft funds (it is unclear whether any funds have been in fact distributed)¹². Regarding Russian contacts with other PRR parties, the so-called Ibiza Scandal revealed connections between high-profile members of Freedom Party of Austria and the Russian government circles (Schuetze, 2019)¹³.

One can also point out to coordinated efforts of PRR parties aiming to change the EU policy towards Russia. In April 2017 AfD organized a conference at Freiberg (Saxony) whose attendees demanded an end to the sanctions on Russia. The conference participants included, among others, representatives of Austrian Freedom Party, Freedom and Direct Democracy (Czechia), Flemish Interest, and the League (Applebaum et al., 2017, 10). Otherwise, members of AfD, the League, and the National Rally (France) "observed" the 2018 election in Russia to attest to its supposedly democratic character.¹⁴

Among other activities, the Russian government was also interested in Britain leaving the European Union, as it would significantly weaken this organization and limit Britain's anti-Russian influence on other European countries. Before the 2016 Brexit referendum, Russia attempted to influence the result by posting pro-Leave and anti-EU stories on its media outlets and using bots and trolls

¹¹ G. Gatehouse, *German far-right MP 'could be absolutely controlled by Russia,'* BBC, April 5, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47822835>

¹² P. Biondani, *Soldi da Mosca alla Lega: al Metropol con Savoini c'era un'ospite di Vladimir Putin*, L'Espresso, June 25, 2021.

¹³ C. Schuetze, *Highlights from the video that brought down Austria's vice chancellor*, New York Times, May 18, 2019.

¹⁴ <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/documents-link-afd-parliamentarian-to-moscow-a-1261509.html>

to affect the social media debate on Brexit within the UK. However, there is no evidence that Russia financially backed the Leave campaign or maintained close direct contacts with its leaders.

It is also very likely that Russian government circles are aware of political destabilization associated with massive arrival of refugees and migrants, especially from Muslim countries (as it indeed happened after the 2015 refugee crisis, which led to political rise of PRR parties). For that reason, the migrant card has been used by the Russia-allied Belarussian government in its hybrid conflict with the EU. The Lukashenko regime's likely goal is to force the EU to abandon the sanctions imposed after the rigged 2020 presidential elections and the following protests. In the summer of 2021, Belarus eased visa regulations and began organizing or allowing regular flights from Middle Eastern countries, subsequently transporting the arriving migrants to its border with the EU. As of November 2021, when this article was being written, the crisis was ongoing and escalating.

Conclusion and discussion

Given the causal dynamics outlined in this paper, one can make some tentative predictions for the future. The first concerns the effects of immigration and population growth dynamics in Western Europe. Increasing Muslim, and to a smaller extent other immigrant and immigrant-origin population will likely result in increasing social tensions and rising support for PRR parties, especially in the case of rapid migration inflows. Such parties will likely continue to receive Russian support. In a longer term, their electoral success might result in dissolution or weakening of transnational Western institutions and increasingly pro-Russian foreign policy pursued by Western countries. As a result, the influence of Russia as a great power will increase.

This scenario, however, is not a historical necessity. One way to diminish its likelihood is a change in immigration stances of mainstream parties, otherwise committed to the rules of democracy and the preservation of transnational Western institutions. If such parties adopt immigration programs more aligned with mainstream public opinion, it may, coupled with reduced immigration, reduce the popularity of PRR parties and decrease their political influence. The clearest example of such a political change has taken place in Denmark.

In its platform before the 2019 election, Social Democrats (Denmark) acknowledged problems with immigrant integration, such as the emergence of the "parallel societies." They also adopted, although in

a toned-down manner, several postulates already espoused by Danish People's Party. Those included reforming the international refugee protection system (so that refugees are helped in developing rather than in developed countries), fostering integration through obligatory language courses and other programs, work obligation for asylum seekers and refugees taking social benefits, encouraging refugees to return home if they can do so safely, and obligatory deportation of those with criminal offences and, as much as possible, other unauthorized immigrants.¹⁵

Partly because Social Democrats and the mainstream right-wing party, Venstre, adopted immigration stances more closely aligned with the Danish public opinion, Danish People's Party's vote share decreased from 21% in 2015 to 9% in 2019. A similar process was observed in Austria, where Austrian People's Party (Christian Democrats) adopted in 2017 an immigration-critical program under Sebastian Kurz's leadership. The party's vote share increased from 24% in the 2013 election to 32% in 2017. If similar policy changes are adopted by other mainstream parties in the West, and if they are followed by real-life changes in migration flows and immigrant integration outcomes, most of the likely consequences outlined in this paper might as well be avoided.

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Wpływ imigracji na poparcie dla radykalnej prawicy na zachodzie i jego geopolityczne implikacje

Artykuł podsumowuje najnowsze badania dotyczące wpływu imigracji i przyjmowania uchodźców w państwach zachodnich na poparcie dla działających tam populistycznych partii radykalnej prawicy i polityków. Badania te wskazują, że rosnąca imigracja wiąże się ze wzrostem poparcia dla takich partii. Efekty tego są bardziej widoczne na poziomie lokalnym lub regionalnym i dotyczy to szczególnie napływu imigrantów odmiennych kulturowo: muzułmanów w Europie Zachodniej i Latynosów w USA. Ponieważ partie radykalnej prawicy łączą sprzeciw wobec imigracji z opozycją wobec instytucji międzynarodowych, takich jak Unia Europejska i NATO, ich wzrost ma istotne implikacje geopolityczne, zwłaszcza w świetle rosyjskiego poparcia, z którego korzystają. W ten sposób odmienna kulturowo imigracja ma pośrednie, choć dalekosiężne konsekwencje w stosunkach międzynarodowych, wpływając na sytuację geopolityczną w Europie i Ameryce.

Słowa kluczowe: imigracja, muzułmanie, populizm, Rosja, skrajna prawica, uchodźcy, Unia Europejska.