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Xenophobia: Is it enough?  
Far right populist parties in  
Australia and Europe

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## **Abstract**

The rise and fall of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party remains a fascinating episode in recent Australian political history. Australia's flirtation with this example of far right populism lasted less than a decade. Elsewhere far right populist political parties have proved to be far more successful and enduring. This paper is interested in why Australia's One Nation Party withered while European far right counterparts thrive. The paper thus focuses on recent developments in France, the Netherlands and Austria in looking for clues to explain the Australian experience. While the far right populist experience in these European countries and in Australia has much in common including a strong anti-immigrant stance, there are also elements that are significantly different. This comparative research focuses on three key areas. First, it investigates the degree to which a particular country's electoral method contributes to both the emergence and endurance of their populist parties. Second, clues to explain endurance are sought in comparisons of party dynamics. Finally, the contribution that the incorporation of populist policies into the platforms of mainstream parties is also explored. Overall, what this research shows is that there are no simple explanations for the rise of these parties and we need to avoid crude generalisations.

## Introduction

It was only a few years ago that Australians were in considerable turmoil, or rapture, over the intrusion into Australian political culture of a novel far right populist party (FRPP). Pauline Hanson's arrival on the political stage was unexpected. The major parties had long dominated the Australian political scene and minor parties had found it difficult to make any headway. Hanson's maiden Parliamentary speech generated considerable attention, attacking long held shibboleths and proposing significant policy re-orientations. She used her sudden notoriety to launch a new political party – Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON). However, despite some spectacular successes, primarily in the 1998 Queensland state election, her star soon faded. PHON failed to achieve anywhere near the same profile in the 2001 elections, at either the state or federal levels.

This experience contrasts with that elsewhere. In 2002, parties pursuing similar anti-immigration lines have prospered in Western Europe, including France, Austria and the Netherlands. This paper is interested in why One Nation faded in Australia while far right populist parties thrive elsewhere. It hypothesizes that success for far right populist parties is largely determined by a combination of factors, in particular electoral systems, party dynamics and policy trajectories. These factors are commonly identified in the literature as central to explaining the rise and successes of these parties (see Kitschelt, 1995; Howard, 2001; Mickenburg, 2001). This paper explores the degree to which these factors have combined to transform some of Europe's far right parties into successful political players. It focuses on the National Front (FN) in France, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria and Pim Fortuyn's List (LPF) in the Netherlands. Conversely, it explores the degree to which these factors have contributed to the demise of One Nation in Australia. The overall argument is that while each of these factors is important, on their own they do not provide adequate explanations of these parties' fortunes. It is the distinctively national combination of these factors, along with the specific behaviours and skills of these actors, that best explain success or failure. Crude generalisations about FRPPs should thus be avoided.

We distinguish far right populist parties from the extreme far right. The former are characterised by a willingness to operate within the constraints of democratic institutions. The extreme far right, on the other hand, questions the legitimacy of such institutions and often condones violence in its virulent xenophobic quests (Betz, 1998). FRPPs incorporate

classic populist characteristics such as charismatic leadership, 'anti-party' sentiments, anti-immigration or anti-foreigner stances, and an appeal to the allegedly disenfranchised mainstream. The extreme right and the far right share a penchant for charismatic leadership. However, populist 'anti-parties', unlike the extreme right, seek to mould themselves into successful political parties competing in the mainstream democratic terrain.

## **Three far right political parties**

### **The parties**

The party dynamics of both individual FRPPs and the broader party system within which they operate, are important components in explaining the relative successes of these parties. Recent changes to the organisation and operation of the party system in different countries have generated considerable opportunities for FRPPs. The most significant changes include the political convergence of major parties; 'ossification' of the major parties into distant political elites or patronage driven organisations; disintegration of 'consociational' party coalitions in some Western European countries; and the decreased salience of the conventional right/left political spectrum in generating party identification and electoral support. These factors have all contributed in different degrees to the rise of FRPPs. Equally, the different strategic responses to these factors have also contributed to these parties' successes or failures.

In France, two factors were particularly important in catapulting the FN into the electoral spotlight: the independence of Algeria in the early 1960s and the election of the socialist president Mitterand in 1981 (Mayer, 1998:11). The first began to fuel the anti-immigration, anti-Islamic fires that would blaze in the 1990s, especially as the collapse of communism triggered increasing people movements across Europe. The second cemented the growing electoral disillusionment with both the Right and the Left. The political convergence that took place in the 1980s and 1990s – abetted by two lengthy periods of 'cohabitation' between a Right president and a Left prime minister – reduced perceived electoral choice. This was especially so as the major parties collapsed into a hazy centre. Electoral disillusionment was further exacerbated by a series of political scandals. As Mayer

(1998:120 concludes, '[b]oth developments contributed decisively to the progression of the Front National'.

During these periods of political volatility, the FN's Le Pen was slowly consolidating his power. First elected deputy on the Poujadist List (an extreme right wing group) in 1956, Le Pen went on to create the National Front in 1972 out of a motley collection of extreme right wing groups and some disillusioned intellectuals. He shifted the FN away from the strident anti-capitalist sentiments of the Poujadists by mixing neo-liberal economic principles with anti-immigration and law and order positions. While the electoral fortunes of the FN ebbed and flowed during the next two decades, Le Pen gradually built support and the FN performed creditably in several sub-national contests and in European Parliament elections throughout the 1980s and 1990s, giving it both visibility and legitimacy.

The FN has consistently achieved strong outcomes in elections to the European Parliament. They use a proportionate list method based on a whole country electorate with a 5% quota. The FN cleared the 5% bar in 1984, when the FN list headed by Le Pen received 11% of the vote which translated into 10 deputies (Marcus 1995:57). Since then, the FN vote has frequently exceeded 10% and on several occasions the party has sent a phalanx of deputies to Strasbourg.

The FN has also had successes at the sub-national level. France has a complex system of local and regional authorities which employ different electoral methods. The lowest, or communal, level, a complicated semi-proportional two-ballot list method is used to elect municipal representatives every six years in all but the smallest communes. This method has enabled the FN to not only secure seats but also gain control of local authorities on several occasions. However, the method also facilitates the formation of alliances to defeat the FN (Schlesinger and Schlesinger 1998:72-3). For example, in the 1995 municipal elections, FN failed to capture the majority in a number of important cities because of agreements between other parties to drop out of the second round despite a tripling of successful FN candidates (Simmons, 1996:111)

However, at the national level, France's two round plurality majority system made it difficult for the FN to translate its support, which consistently figured in the low teens, into seats in the National Assembly. This is partly because the French electoral method poses considerable barriers for minor parties who are shunned by other parties. Assembly elections are conducted over two rounds, unless one candidate receives over 50% of the vote in the first round. Only contenders with at least 12.5% of the first round vote can progress to the second round. It is not uncommon for parties to use second round

elections strategically with weaker contenders dropping out and in effect directing their preferences to their preferred leading candidate. Over the years, this practice has seen the French Communist Party win seats while effectively excluding the FN which has only picked up a couple of seats over the years, and only in unusual circumstances despite garnering considerable support in the first rounds (Schlesinger and Schlesinger 1998:72-3). In the 1993 elections for example, one FN candidate received 49.8% of the second round vote but was defeated by an alliance between the other contenders (Marcus, 1995:69)

The only real exception occurred in 1986 when France experimented with proportional representation (PR). In this instance, the FN secured 35 of the 577 seats with 9.8% of the vote (Machin, 1990:34; Stevens, 1993:248). Despite only limited electoral success Kitshelt and others argue that the FN's participation has been important in raising the profile of the FN - in part by increasing media attention, as well as building the political and parliamentary experience essential to success (see Kitshelt, 1995:99). This point was highlighted in the 2002 Presidential elections in which a similar two round system operates although all but the two leading candidates are eliminated after the first round. Le Pen emerged from the first round as one of the two most preferred candidates with 17.4%. In the lead up to the second round the defeated Socialist party threw its support behind its long term opponent, the Gaullist Jacques Chirac ensuring he swept to victory with a massive 82% support. Despite his ultimate defeat however, Le Pen's initial success reinforced his position as a real contender.

However, unlike PHON, the FN has managed to prosper despite an unfavourable electoral method. It has used electoral contests to build profile, legitimacy and support, especially at the subnational level where very limited success has provided the party with scope for party development at a local level and a platform for ongoing publicity (see Simmons, 1996:113).

Austria provides a contrasting picture where the FPÖ has held long established 'third party' status and has taken on a FRPP tone over recent years. In this country, post-war party competition was characterised until the 1980s by 'pillarisation', especially between socialist and conservative catholic groupings (Luther, 1999:123). Pillarisation - social, religious or ideological cleavages - was successfully exploited by the major parties to consolidate their electorates as well as to ensure the exclusion or formation of other parties (Luther, 1999:123). One of the reasons for comparatively high political party membership in Austria was the system of 'proporz' - where access to benefits such as public sector employment, housing and other privileges derived from party membership. Indeed, 'the two dominant parties structured the distribution of the majority of public sector posts and state resources ... in rough proportion to their relative electoral weight' (Luther, 1999:125)

In addition, Austria's post-war party system readily accommodated 'grand coalitions' between key ideological rivals – the SPO Socialist Party and the conservative OVP Peoples Party. Such accommodation gradually led to significant political and policy convergence. The SPO and the OVP used the 'consociationalism' of these grand coalitions to exclude other parties. The domination of these grand coalitions began to unravel in the mid 1980s, creating political opportunities for the consolidation of significant minor parties such as the Freedom Party. The Freedom Party (FPÖ) replaced the neo-fascist Association of Independents (VdU) in 1956. Haider assumed the party leadership in 1986 and consolidated its far right credentials when the more liberal wing of the FPÖ split off in 1993 (see for example Plasser et al 1992).

Haider's 1986 electoral success was in large part due to his articulation of issues – immigration, nationhood, law and order – that the major parties collaboratively ignored. With 'depillarisation', attachments and electoral loyalties to the major parties weakened and some of the accordingly 'liberated' voters began to look elsewhere to lodge their vote. By 1986 the FPÖ began to pick up significant proportions of the disaffected ex-SPO and OVP vote. Indeed by the early 1990s the FPÖ had forced the SPO to share 'its traditional role as the party of the working class' and the OVP its traditional farmer, small business and self-employed constituencies. (Luther, 1999:132-133).

The FPÖ has also benefited from Austria's PR list electoral method. Austria's 1992 electoral reforms attempted to combine a commitment to PR with local representation within a Federal structure. To elect the 183 members of its *Nationalrat* (lower house), the country is first divided into its nine constituent provinces, and the provinces are then further divided into a total of 43 regional constituencies. Unlike the Australian Senate, members returned by each of the provinces vary. Hence, the largest province, Vienna can return a maximum of 34 members while the smallest Burgenland, returns a maximum of seven. Moreover, the number of candidates returned by each of the regional, or primary, constituencies also ranges from one for *Osttiron* to seven for Linz and South Vienna. The final results are determined in stages. Initially, each list is allocated seats proportional to their vote at a primary (regional) level. The remainder are then allocated at the secondary (provincial) level, and finally at a national level (Austria Interior Ministry 2002). This method has enabled the FPÖ to build on its regional strengths especially in Carinthia. In its most successful election, in 1999 the FPÖ secured 52 seats with 26.9% of the vote and went on to join with the OVP in forming a governing coalition.

The FPÖ has also benefited from successes in so-called secondary arenas of European and provincial elections both of which also use a PR method. Most notably, FPÖ leader, Jörg Haider used his position as Governor of Carinthia, which he held between 1989 and 1991,



and again in 1999 as a platform for his party in the national arena. Carinthia has a threshold of 10% (Joncus, 1999). Muller (1993:124) argues that governors are extremely powerful and visible because of their dual role as elected head of provincial assembly and senior representative of the federal government. Moreover, because of the federal distribution of powers, provincial governments have the 'more popular' tasks of spending without the responsibility of taxing. Hence Austria's federal structure and electoral method has helped the FPO translate its electoral support into institutional power.

Unlike France and Austria, the Netherlands has had a limited history of extreme right movements. Instead it has been renowned for its cultural and racial tolerance earning it the title 'the capital of social tolerance'. It accommodates a diversity of religious and political minorities as reflected in its multi-party system. Despite its fundamentally plural nature, religion and social class have traditionally been the Netherlands' key cleavages or 'pillars'. These pillars, and the associated political parties that they generated, began to modify as generational and cultural change set in from the 1960s onwards (Ten Napel, 1999:164-5). Nonetheless, the Netherlands' largely consensual multi-party system and key 'right' and 'left' parties were retained. Van der Brug (1999:87) argues that as the pillars deteriorate, competing political parties sought to attract voters from all segments of society. Competition is now generally between the more liberal parties who see the recent desecularisation and cultural liberalisation of Dutch society as a positive, and the more circumspect and conservative Christian Democrats (Ten Napel, 1999:179).

Similar issues fuelled the consolidation of FRPPs in The Netherlands as elsewhere: immigration, foreigners, national identity and the demands of a global economy. LPF developed from the Livable Netherlands Party, which began as an anti-establishment party of the left in 1998. With the election of Fortuyn to the party leadership in November 2001, the party swung considerably to the right. His extreme views on Muslims soon saw his ousting from the party, followed promptly by the formation of his own separate party - LPF. Of course, whether the spectacular electoral results for the LPF - forming coalition government with the resurrected Christian Democrats in May this year - were conditioned by Fortuyn's assassination will never be known. The fact remains, however, that the LDF performed extremely well in local elections before his assassination and in national elections after.

LPF's impressive electoral run began in municipal elections in March 2002 when LPF secured 17 of the 45 seats in Rotterdam, the second largest city in the Netherlands (Finn, 2002). A few months later, LPF won 26 lower house seats with 17% of the vote in national elections becoming the second largest party in the parliament, and ultimately forming government in coalition with the Christian Democrats and Liberals. This spectacular

performance was facilitated by the Netherlands' application of the list PR method which establishes a low threshold for entry into the legislature. In the Netherlands, the whole country constitutes a single electorate and successful candidates effectively need a mere 0.67% of the vote (about 60,000 votes) to be elected (Lijphart 1994:22). This made it easier for LPF to ride a wave of popularity.

## **The policies**

Similar policies motivated the FRPPs in our chosen countries and help account for their rise. Thus, an important variable that contributes to explaining the success of the far-right parties has to do with their distinctive policies. They have articulated policies which have not been expressed explicitly by mainstream parties. The policies of the four parties are very noticeably associated with particular issues: immigration and economic security. The parties support protecting an ethnically pure nation and are hostile towards further immigration to their respective countries. They skilfully exploit fear and resentment against the large number of immigrants attempting to find new homes. The parties maintain that migrants are responsible for problems such as unemployment, rising crime, drug issues, crowded public housing, overburdened social services and the general decline of quality of life in the cities where they congregate.

Migrants are the main policy focus of these parties. Like One Nation, the European parties strongly oppose immigration, arguing that this leads to unemployment and social dislocation. Hanson warned about the danger of Australians being 'swamped by Asians' in her famous maiden speech to Parliament in 1996. Like the others, Hanson argues that if migrants do enter a country, they should be assimilated into their new homeland. The parties do not support the notion or practice of multiculturalism. For example, One Nation argues for a migration program that 'does not smother our culture and destroy the very values that make Australia the desired destination of most migrants' (2002). The European parties have adopted similar policies, arguing strongly for assimilation of migrants who are already in their new country.

The FN sees itself as the stronghold and bastion of national identity against cosmopolitan projects aimed at mixing peoples and cultures. Le Pen's website (2002) states that, far from being racist or xenophobe, he aims to defend the French people so that their rights are respected and they are given priority over foreigners. His party believes that Europe should not be 'constructed' in Brussels according to the utopian schemes of Eurocrats who dream of controlling a European super-state, destroying nations and opening Europe to

third-world immigrants and foreign products. Europe should be organised around the common identity of Europeans and should form a force against external threats. The party also wants to expose corruption and the fraudulent misuse of funds. In addition, Le Pen argues that the state is neglecting its essential duties: defence, national security, law and order and education. The FN equates immigration with unemployment, quite boldly and explicitly setting migrants up as scapegoats. For example, it states that 3 million immigrants lead to 3 million unemployed, thus justifying the removal of immigrants from France as a solution to unemployment (Matas 1997:103).

Fortuyn was a charismatic leader whose flamboyant style added colour to Dutch politics. His party bases many of its policies on anti-immigration, but with a twist. What makes Fortuyn's policies distinctive is his contention that religions such as Islam are dangerous because they have the potential to undermine the Netherlands' celebrated liberal values. In Islamic culture, women are inferior to men. In the Netherlands homosexuality has the same status as heterosexuality. Fortuyn supported same-sex marriages and gender equality – freedoms, he argued, intolerant cultures threaten to undermine. Thus, he reasoned that unless migrants were assimilated, Dutch society would be divided between different sets of social and religious values. Policies include banning Muslim immigration, cutting migrant intake by 75% and scrapping a constitutional clause that makes it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of race (Fray 2002). Fortuyn states: 'the Netherlands is not an immigration country. The annual stream of tens of thousands of newcomers, who largely end up as illegal aliens, must stop. Full is full. We're living on a small piece of land here' (cited in Osborn 2002). His policies advocated better integration of the two million immigrants already in the Netherlands and financial aid to would-be refugees to stay in their own country. Fortuyn rejects suggestions that he is racist or a member of the far right. His spokesman described comparisons between Fortuyn and Le Pen as 'insulting'. Fortuyn further advocates downsizing the bureaucracy, reducing taxation and increasing privatisation.

In Austria, the FPÖ supports significant reduction of immigration, deregulation and neo-liberal policies. Its *Austria First* program (1993) included 12 propositions, most discriminating against foreigners. This initiative called for an end to immigration until problems with accommodation shortages and unemployment had been resolved. It also wanted a 30 per cent cap on foreign children in public schools, the creation of permanent border controls, no right to vote for foreigners in general elections, and rigorous measures against the illegal business activities of foreigners and their abuse of social benefits. 417,278 people signed this initiative, mobilising and polarising the public and increasing pressure on the established parties (Minkenberg, 2001:14). Some of the initiative's elements, such as obliging migrants to learn German, were passed into law in the

twentieth legislative session (1995-99), when the FPO introduced 100 bills on various issues. The main aim was to attack the large parties – OVP and SPO. The FPO's proposals included limiting the parties' public funding, lowering the number of legally employed foreigners in Austria from 8 to 6 per cent, tightening asylum law, and revising citizenship law to include the passage 'Austria is not an immigration country'.

## Analysis

### Party organisation

Political convergence and party system changes help explain the rise and political opportunities afforded FRPPs. Whether this rise is sustained, however, is more likely to depend on internal party organisation, strategic 'nous', party professionalism and the capacity to contain internal factional dissent. Studies show that 'electoral and party system factors interact with each other to account for the response that these parties have generated from voters' (Jackman & Volpert, 1996:510). Certain unique features of PHON were able to nullify, for a time, the disadvantages of the electoral system and of its own political inexperience. However, other factors – poor party professionalism and strategic inadequacies – ensured that it could not sustain adequate competition with the more 'savvy' major parties, and in particular the formidable political strategist – John Howard.

To ensure success, these parties needed to resolve 'a quintessential dilemma' peculiar to FRPPs: 'how to be an effective party at the same time as being an anti-party' (Taggart, 1995:38). The FN and the FPO did build an effective party structure (it is too early to tell for Livable Netherlands and the PFL). These party structures were not necessarily democratic or exemplary, but they were organisationally coherent, largely disciplined and professionalised. PHON succeeded very well in being an 'anti-party'. However, it failed to grasp, as the others did, the seeming paradox that 'anti-party' success is still largely conditioned by traditional political party requirements – that is, organisational consistency, order and control and feasible policies.

From the start, in France Le Pen exercised a tight, authoritarian control over his party. This control was exercised internally over the party structure and externally in his role as charismatic conduit between his party and the electorate. His primary role was not simply

to garner electoral support by dispersing his charismatic appeal, as was partly the case with Hanson. For Le Pen, there was no 'power behind the throne' as there was for Hanson with her powerful party executives – David Oldfield and David Ettridge. The internal organisation of the FN was professional and efficient. Under the deputy control of experienced political veterans, it was transformed into a 'disciplined and centralised party machine' (Mayer, 1998:14). At all times, however, Le Pen was in complete charge, assisted by a small coterie of senior officials. Le Pen's determination to broker no opposition, and no leadership challenge, was most recently evidenced in the expulsion of one of these senior officials – Megret – who went on to form a separate party.

The FN's skilled strategic planning and delegate preparation contributed significantly to its success. It was 'armed with sophisticated guides that teach the basics of the perfect party activist – from canvassing, leafletting, and billsticking, to the editing of local newspapers – [the party's] grassroots militants play an essential part in the consolidation of the party's electoral success' (Mayer, 1998:15). Party recruitment is also sophisticated and extensive. Specific groups – the young (with high school branches), professionals, farmers, business people – are strategically targeted and recruited (Mayer, 1998:15-16). The party has also strategically adapted its policies, reducing its racist extremism in particular, in order to accommodate the larger constituency it worked hard to attract. Nonetheless, its largest support base remains blue-collar male workers and small business people in the most industrialised areas of France (Mayer, 1998:18). Overall, while the FN has not had the electoral successes of its European counterparts, 'its influence has been manifested not so much in the institutional context ... but more in both its ability to shape the political agenda ... and its capacity to cause trouble for its political opponents' (Elgie, 1999:4).

In Austria, Haider developed considerable political skills through his roles as governor, parliamentary representative and coalition government partner with the SPO between 1983 – 1986. He also successfully exploited the period of grand coalition between the SPO and the OVP from 1986 to 1999. He consolidated his party's legitimacy through its successful Opposition role during a period characterised by 'the cozy corruption and complacency ... of grand coalition governments' (Howard, 2001:4). Party system fragmentation, however, only partly explains the FPÖ's success. While Haider successfully exploited the political opportunity space that opened up, his considerable charisma, political skills and party's organisational professionalism consolidated his gains. His political savviness has ensured that he is the indisputable leader of the FPÖ (even when he officially is not). His charismatic and relatively single-handed elevation of the party to such a heady height, has ensured him unwavering loyalty, especially since most of his party's elite owe their positions to him. His lengthy political experience has also conferred him considerable legitimacy. Both his supporters and enemies view Haider as a

professional politician who understands the system well and operates strategically and successfully within it. Indeed, Helm (1997:44) identifies Haider's 'extraordinary skills in exploiting the existing favourable potential ... as a key explanatory variable' in the success of the FPÖ.

## **Leadership and party control**

The capacity of a charismatic leader to generate support from a broad cross section of the voting community is pivotal to FRPP success. Thus, effective FRPP leadership – in particular, the relationship between the leader and his or her party and between the leader and the support base – is critical. This is because the 'losers of globalisation' thesis is not always an adequate explanation of FRPP success. These 'losers' – the unskilled, poorly educated working classes and rural sector workers – only partly account for FRPP support. There are other significant support bases – in particular, the more affluent, educated, professional middle classes as well as the young – who have done well from globalisation and largely support it. These constituents are often drawn to FRPPs in an effort to protect their gains from those – immigrants, foreigners, asylum seekers, refugees – who would seek a share. A glance at the supporters of FRPPs in Austria and Netherlands, and to lesser degree France dispels the myth that supporters are largely the disaffected unskilled poor. This is in contrast to Australia, where, by and large, 'archetypal' One Nation supporters tend to match the 'losers of globalisation' profile (see Reynolds, cited in Goot and Watson, 2001:164). Unlike their counterparts in France and Austria, PHON's relative failure to attract support from a more diverse cross-section of the Australian community and, arguably more importantly, to attract professional, quality candidates, in part accounts for its early demise.

The original gains won by the charismatic appeal of Hanson – an essential ingredient of successful FRPPs – were also not sustained. The experience of the more successful FRPPs in Austria and France indicate that to be effective charismatic leadership needs to be underpinned by party professionalism and control. Taggart (1995:37) argues that party ideology, and associated electoral appeal, is expressed as much by its party organisation and political style as by its policy platform. FRPP organisation is commonly very centralised and relies on charismatic, 'personalised' leadership. Indeed, while leadership issues are important for all parties, for FRPPs 'leadership is not merely an ingredient: it is the essence of both their message and their party' (Taggart, 1995:39). Thus Le Pen's perceived authoritarianism – expressed both as part of his charismatic persona as well as the grip he has over his party – is a significant part of his appeal. Haider continues to

wield a very strong grip over the Freedom Party, despite his passing of party leadership over to his former deputy – Susanne Riess-Passer. Thus ideology has ‘profound implications for the way [the “new populists”] institutionalise as parties’ (Taggart, 1995:39).

Unlike Le Pen and Haider, a split between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ party control distinguishes Hanson’s personalised leadership. In short, she exercised the authority that derives from charisma over the external electorate but not necessarily over her internal party organisation. While she charismatically mobilised support, ‘the two Davids’, exploiting her naivete and political inexperience, exercised internal party rule. The corporate party structure they erected eventually brought the party undone. Lacking Le Pen and Haider’s direct control, Hanson was less able to unite and discipline her party when it began to fracture. Hanson thus failed to combine her largely charismatic appeal in the electorate with decisive control over her party organisation (see Ward, 2000). This – along with her own naivete and inexperience – contrasts significantly with the leadership styles of Haider, Le Pen and the late Fortuyn. Fortuyn’s replacement seems to lack both his charisma and party control. It will be interesting to see how this impacts on the LPF’s fortunes.

A colourful, charismatic personality, Fortuyn was adept at taking advantage of an emerging electoral opportunity and responding accordingly. Like Hanson, Fortuyn’s ‘difference’ – he was gay and she a woman – attracted significant media attention, quickly catapulting both to quasi-celebrity status. Compared to Haider, Le Pen and Hanson, Fortuyn presided over quite a distinctive FRPP in the Netherlands. Fortuyn straddled a very fine left-right ideological divide – being vehemently anti-Muslim on the one hand but very morally liberal on the other. As ‘depillarisation’ and national identity pressures accelerated it seemed that ‘four electoral groups – feminists, gays, Jews and the proletariat – [were pushed away] from their traditional left allegiance towards new allies on the right’ (O’Sullivan, 2002:17) and eventually into the electoral hands of the LDF. Fortuyn successfully rallied against the ‘polder’ consensus model between business, government and unions, blaming them for the isolation and lack of responsiveness of an ossified political elite. Fortuyn was thus able to take advantage of ‘politically incorrect’ issues this elite allegedly chose to ignore: increasing crime, immigration and economic insecurity. He claimed, like the early Hanson, to ‘say it like it is’, reinforcing his message by the personalised, charismatic manner in which it was delivered.

The political learning that other European FRPPs embraced seemed to be squandered by PHON in a series of dramatic public conflicts. This is not to suggest that the European FRPPs did not experience quite similar divisions and conflicts. Indeed, the LPF is currently

embroiled in significant internal conflict over the future direction of the party. The key difference is the degree to which these parties were able to – and will continue to be able to – contain such conflict without doing their parties irretrievable damage. As Mayer (1998:22) contends ‘a charismatic leader, a structured party machine, a detailed political program, and a diversified electoral base are the main assets of the Front national’ in France. The FPO in Austria also possessed most of these assets. In Australia, however, a limited charismatic leadership, a weak party machine, politically inexperienced candidates, a naïve and impractical policy program, and a comparatively narrower electoral base hampered Hanson.

## **Policy incorporation**

Despite the varied levels of party professionalism, the policy trajectory of FRPP is still very important. As we have argued, a high profile party is in part shaped by the nature of its electoral system. Like PHON, in France the FN has struggled to win in the National Assembly. The PR systems in Austria and the Netherlands, however, have facilitated these parties’ participation in coalition government. Thus while all these FRPPs promote similar policy positions, the nature of the take up of these policies is, in part, an outcome of the electoral method. In PR systems, for example, these FRPPs retain ownership of – and perhaps even more importantly, take credit for the implementation of – these policies. This is a factor of these parties’ visibility and participation in coalition government – capacities afforded by the PR electoral method. Such visibility and participation thus enhances these parties’ overall credibility and ‘opportunities for electoral success.

Ascherson (2002) argues that the European far-right parties combine on three policy issues, even if they are expressed and constructed differently. First, they oppose immigration. Second, they argue that law and order is threatened by an increase in crime committed by immigrants and asylum-seekers. Third, the parties see themselves as whistle-blowers, attempting to make ‘the truth’ heard over a chorus of hypocritical propaganda which insists that the government is deeply caring and concerned about the fashionable causes of the day. Consequently, what Ascherson describes as ‘the new populists’ argue that the state should provide jobs, healthcare and schools to the natives first. The state should also use its coercive power to pass laws and recruit more police to keep immigrants out and punish those who ‘abuse our hospitality’.

While the far-right parties provided little policy analysis, they did threaten the major political parties. How the major parties responded to these threats helps explain these



parties' different fortunes. FRPPs raise important political concerns for the major parties attempting to placate many dissatisfied and disillusioned voters. Hanson, Le Pen, Haider and Fortuyn were all willing to speak about controversial issues which, they claimed, have been silenced due to political correctness. They argued that governments were not confronting the public's valid fears about crime, overcrowding and national identity. Failure to conduct discussions about these issues gave people like Fortuyn and Hanson opportunities to get their views heard by anxious sections of the population. Consequently, most of the mainstream parties have taken up far-right concerns about immigration and incorporated some of their policies.

In Australia, the Liberal Coalition government has implemented a number of PHON's policies. In the 2001 election campaign, immigration and particularly the 'boat people' became a major issue. One Nation's policy is clear: 'Australia is not responsible for people who pay for passage on 'organised cruises' that find their way to Australia bypassing other points of refuge. Most of these people are not refugees but migrants jumping the queue' (2002:5). Howard's campaign slogan - 'We decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' - closely mirrored One Nation's policy (Courier Mail, 2001:11). PHON further states that Australia 'will not tolerate being seen as a haven for intending migrants that wish to jump the queue' (2002). The Coalition government's policies thus reflected the anti-immigration stance taken by PHON and in 'stealing' its policy thunder seriously marginalised PHON.

In France, the FN has tapped into the alarm concerning immigrants and growing unemployment, arguing that these issues disrupt the French lifestyle. Wilson (1999:141) contends that in its strongly law and order and anti-foreigner rhetoric, the FN makes little attempt to disguise its appeal to the racist sentiments against North African and Middle Eastern immigrants. Matas (1997:103) claims that the rise of the extreme right has led to a rightward shift in French politics across the political spectrum. The FN's 'logic' has been accepted through sheer repetition. Such thinking is now a legitimate part of political debate and is a striking feature of French politics. Consequently, Matas (1997:104) argues that the FN has changed the terms of political debate in France, introducing racist categories and racist discourse as respectable ways to articulate and respond to the issues raised by the FN.

It remains to be seen whether France's new right wing government will 'steal' the FN's policies and the impact that this will have on future FN support. Like Australia, France's electoral method limits opportunities for minor parties to participate in parliament and coalition government. Strategic major parties can thus capitalise on the minor parties' reduced visibility by incorporating their policies into their own policy platforms. In this

way the major parties can assume ownership of FRPP policies. Importantly – particularly in the eyes of the voting public – the major parties can then take credit for the implementation of these policies.

Fortuyn's policies were very liberal in many ways and he even distinguished his more 'inclusive' style from that of Le Pen's authoritarianism (Chancellor, 2002). Indeed, Fortuyn regarded tolerance and permissiveness as the great glories of western civilisation and saw Islamic culture as a threat to such tolerance. The incoming 2002 Christian Democrat leader, Balkenende, confirmed Europe's wide shift towards the right. While Balkenende's party opposed euthanasia and policies on soft drugs (Black, 2002), Fortuyn's views have struck a chord with many, perhaps because he was not a classical far-right politician. Following a trend across Europe, and the LPF's coalition partner status, tighter immigration and asylum rules are now likely to be introduced in the Netherlands. No Dutch government is likely to go as far as Fortuyn suggested, however, because the Netherlands needs newcomers to supplement a plummeting birth rate and an aging population. Nonetheless, the new coalition government is likely to deal more harshly with would-be immigrants and with those already in the country.

Exploiting people's fears of foreigners has reinforced the xenophobic policies of these far-right parties. Consequently, a range of governments that do not necessarily support far-right positions have adopted stricter, less tolerant immigration and refugee policies. However, the trajectory of these policies is affected by the different electoral methods. In Austria and the Netherlands, coalition government status has ensured that anti-immigration policies are still owned and promoted by the FPÖ and LPF respectively. The visibility of the FRPPs thus remains intact. The electoral methods in Australia and France, however, advantage the major parties by allowing them to more easily claim ownership of these policies, thus marginalising their original promoters – PHON and the FN. The capacity to fight such potential marginalisation then rests on the FRPP's professionalism and political experience.

## Conclusion

'Attractive' xenophobic policies drive the significant support for new FRPPs in all the countries examined. The maintenance of such support, however, also depends on the effectiveness of the party's organisation and leadership. A range of factors outside the control of the FRPPs also helps explain FRPP success. These factors include the major

parties' strategic responses to FRPPs, as well as how effectively the major parties 'steal' the FRPPs policies. Even the most professionalised FRPP cannot always outmaneuver smart strategic moves by the major parties. This is particularly so when major party strategy is coupled with opportune events that work in their favour. In Australia these events included the fortuitous pre-election Tampa 'crisis' against the backdrop of September 11.

Similar sets of conditions, albeit in the context of different national cultures and circumstances, give rise to FRPPs in various countries. The capacity of these FRPPs to capitalise on these conditions and the political opportunities they present, depends on their own political professionalism and experience. A FRPP will not succeed simply because it expresses anti-immigration and anti-foreigner rhetoric. How it packages and delivers its message is critical to its capacity to capture the public imagination. Charisma, flamboyance and 'difference' are qualities that attract both electoral support and media exposure. Since proportional electoral systems are more accommodating of minor parties, FRPPs are also more likely to thrive in proportional systems than elsewhere. However, the most 'attractive' anti-immigration policies, the most extensive media attention and the most sympathetic electoral system do not always guarantee FRPP success. Despite systemic advantages or disadvantages, the fact remains that political actors 'can and do (at least in part) shape their own environment and effect their own futures through their behaviour and the strategic choices they make' (Luther, 1999:140). The paradox is that 'anti-parties' are still judged by their capacity to act as quasi-traditional professional party organisations. In the end, PHON's inept political behaviour and poor strategic choices marred its perceived professionalism and brought it undone.

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