

# **A Stranger Put His Head There: The Discourse of Fear and the Resurgence of Ethnocentrism in Western Politics**

## **ABSTRACT**

In 1995, the results obtained by France's far right *Front National* and its leader Jean-Marie Le Pen was deemed to be an exception. Today that support has become an important pool of voters to which political parties from both sides of the spectrum scramble to, a trend visible throughout the western world. The aim of this paper is to argue that the discourse of fear that has monopolized the politics and policies of western states since 9/11 has fostered an increase in comfort with far right ideas and positions. First, I assess the evolution of the far right positions and behaviour. I then acknowledge the impact of fledgling western economies on far right support. This paper further argues that the rise in fundamentalism has created a climate of fear and mistrust that has been sustained and reinforced through political rhetoric. This in turn, has led to a resurgence of western ethnocentrism enhanced by an over-emphasis on security that also creates a zone of tolerance and legitimacy for far right political parties and their ideas, thus leading to their increase in appeal. Finally, it is suggested that the increase in far right support potentially represents a greater danger to domestic security than terrorism.

One of the great virtues of hindsight is the "what if?" question and the desire for a different behaviour in the face of tragedy, a feeling well embodied by the poem *First they came* by German pastor Martin Niemöller. In his case, it was the rise of Nazi Germany and to a wider extent, the assertion of far right ideas and governments in Europe and around the world after the fall of the Europe of Alliances and the trauma of the Great War (1914-18). The situation facing western citizens today is analogous: The brutality of the economic and political changes that have defined the post-Cold War era have created unrest and insecurity that have reinvigorated once outcast reactionary movements. Further exacerbated by the trauma of 9/11, security has become the central political preoccupation and consequently, far right affiliated movements and parties have seen their stock rise: France's *Front National* (FN); Britain's *British National Party* (BNP); Germany's *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) or the Netherlands increasing far right offsprings such as the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), the *Freedom Party* (PVV) or the recently founded *Trots op Nederland* (Trots op NL). Instability breeds insecurity and radicals as well fundamentalists tap unabated into the well.

The analogy has its limits however and this is due to co-option. Indeed, mainstream parties such as France's UMP or Britain's Labour Party are scrambling madly to get their share of the increasing far right electorate and this translates into the co-option of themes and issues generally confined to the far right, most notable immigration and security. And

as the current Italian example demonstrates, rejection or appeasement have given way to collaboration and integration, raising for many the spectres of fascist pasts.

In this context, what are the factors behind the resurgence of the ultra-conservative right, non only in Europe but North America as well? What is the impact of fundamentalism on the return of ethnocentrism in western politics? Is terrorism the main culprit? What is the impact of discourse co-option by mainstream parties? Have far right ideas regained a form of legitimacy?

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the West's security focused discourse and policies after 9/11 have created a climate of comfort and legitimacy for far right actors and ideas, thereby renewing their lost legitimacy. I will do so first by examining the common themes of far right politics and how these evolved. I will then analyze the socio-economic factors, namely unemployment and immigration situations of core western countries such as France, Germany or the United Kingdom. This will be followed by an analysis of fundamentalism in the West, Islamic in particular, and how terrorism strengthened the security paradigm, lead to a radicalization of western political discourse. Furthermore, I will examine how this phenomenon translates itself into political support for the far right and finally, it will be suggested that the intensification of this phenomenon, both politically and socially, represents a greater domestic security threat than terrorism.

## **1. Politics of the Far Right: An Overview**

When the issue of the far right comes into discussion, it is usually associated with 1930s politics and essentially confined to Hitler Germany, Mussolini Italy or Franco Spain. But on a more daily aspect, it is associated with neo-nazi skinheads or hate crimes. Modern far right actors however, although generally averse to change, have evolved and adapted to the current political situation. In essence, the ideas have barely changed since the heyday of fascism. Indeed, despite being a century removed from its most ardent promoters, the ideas and principles behind today's radical right wing discourse are still strongly linked to those of what historian Eric Hobsbawm describes as the "Age of Catastrophe"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> HOBBSAWM, Eric (1994). *The Age of Extremes 1914-1991*. Abacus: London, 627pp.

According to him, far right politics of the period 1914-1945 contain three common elements: “All were against social revolution [...], all were authoritarian and hostile to liberal institutions [...] and all tended to be nationalist [...]”<sup>2</sup>. When compared to current definitions of right-wing extremism, these criteria still hold as common denominator. Indeed, the definition used by the German *Verfassungsschutz* (Interior security) describes right-wing extremism as having “its roots in nationalism and racism. It is governed by an affiliation to a nation or race is of the utmost importance for an individual”<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the definition states that “the ideology which is hostile to the constitution and mostly contemptuous of human life vents itself in right-wing extremist and in particular xenophobic acts of violence directed against minorities only because of their ethnic origin”<sup>4</sup>. Amnesty International goes even into further detail as it describes far right positions as having [...] all aversion to abrupt changes, promote hard-core nationalism and favour a more decisive approach to politics<sup>5</sup>, all of which correspond to Hobsbawm’s criteria.

Obviously, the importance of one or all of these three criteria varies according to the interests: Monarchists for example do not share the same positions as fascists or more ethnicity focused groups. But what sticks out in all of them is the conservative, security focused approach of the ideas and position, and conversely, the fear, or more specifically the feeling of insecurity, that underlines them: The decision process of authoritarian rule is not as problematic as the juggling of interests in a democracy; maintaining economic and social stability is not as unsettling as changes, especially rapid ones; and nationalism/ethnic homogeneity does not bring about the feelings of uneasiness associated with confronting the “Other”. This is why most observers describe the far right as a reactionary movement rather than an ideologically rooted one.

The classic image of the far right also follows this apparent demonstration of intransigence: Brash-talking movement leaders, violence associated to skinheads or neo-nazis as well as demonstrations of power through symbolic actions<sup>6</sup> at rallies or on historically significant dates. The modern image however is one that plays within the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> BUNDESVERFASSUNGSSCHUTZ (2008). Rechtsextremismus.  
[www.verfassungsschutz.de/print/en/en\\_fields\\_of\\_work/rightwing\\_extremism/](http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/print/en/en_fields_of_work/rightwing_extremism/)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> D’HOOP, Roland (2005). *Qu’est-ce que l’extrême-droite?*  
<http://www.amnestyinternational.be/doc/article6234.html>

<sup>6</sup> Such actions include marches through the Brandenburg gate in Berlin or more commonly, the public use of the fascist salute, most particularly in Germany, Italy or Spain.

rules, where “[...] smooth, professional men in comfortable offices [...]” who “[...] wear beautiful suits and pastel ties and take to the heights of power like ducks to water”<sup>7</sup> integrate themselves into the prevailing political structure and become part of the decision process. Even the marketing approaches are changing with the use historically Left wing methods such as petitions or family focused events in order to be more appealing and better promote their political visions<sup>8</sup>. In other words, the far right is adapting itself to the information age and the era of “management politics”.

Like any political idea however, the socio-political context must be favourable to allow it to gain appeal and increase its support. Historically, the far right has revelled in conditions that fuel strong insecurity, whether economic, political or social. In the 1920s and 30s, it was

“an old state and its ruling mechanisms which could no longer function; a mass of disenchanted, disoriented and discontented citizens who no longer knew where their loyalties lay: strong socialist movements threatening or appearing to threaten social revolution [...] and a move of nationalist resentment against the peace treaties of 1918-20.” (Hobsbawm, 1994, p.127)

This was an era of abrupt and violent political changes consequent to the First World War: The end of the Europe of Alliances that provided political stability and the consequential dismemberment of centuries and millennium old Empires; the Wilsonian focus of national/cultural recognition and assertion fuelled nationalism and the abysmal situation of the world’s economy plunged western populations into mass poverty and pauperism. In this volatile context, the need for a scapegoat was filled by blaming others for the suffering as well as by the singling out of non-conformist elements. All of this created the absolute breeding ground for far right politics, resulting in the all too tragic rise of Hitler and Mussolini.

As we will further examine below, today’s conditions are not so different. The end of the Cold War’s near 50 years of stability, like World War I, set-up conditions similar to those that followed the latter: Rapid and successive political changes threatening the established ideological order; fledgling world economies as they adapt to globalization, mass speculation as well as new labour structures; and a strong reassertion of nationalist identities in reaction to mass labour migration, open borders and the rise of religious fundamentalism as an identity. Hence, then like now, sudden changes and instability

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<sup>7</sup> POPHAM, Peter (2008). Italian fascism is once again on the rise. *The Independent*, May 6 2008, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

<sup>8</sup> FINGER, Evelyn (2008). Hüpfburg und Hitlergruss. *Die Zeit*. [www.zeit.de/2008/20/Nazi-deutschland](http://www.zeit.de/2008/20/Nazi-deutschland)

define the socio-economic and socio-political situations, conditions in which the far right historically thrives by strongly reacting to the disruption of a stable structure, this again underlying the importance of fear and security in the process.

Considering the similarities, it is essential to examine the modern aspects of these conditions in order to better understand their impact on the far right as well as on the strengthening of the security paradigm in the West.

## **2. Common Market, Common Problems: Assessing Globalization's Role on Socio-Economic Insecurity**

As Francis Fukuyama declared another “End of History” with the liberal West’s “victory” over communism, access to new markets such as Eastern Europe or China were believed to bring about a new age of prosperity and economic health. The last two decades however have been anything but economically stable and sound as over-speculation led to consecutive serious financial crises such as the abrupt fall of the South-Asian economy in the late 1990s, that of Argentina in the early 2000s or the current credit problems sweeping the West. The globalization of labour markets struck a major blow to conventional job security and has led to a redefinition of the Union/Employer relationship. The notion of career has given way to short-term contracting, underscored by the general use of sub-contracting to increase company profits. The main consequences of such financial instability have been massive job cuts, loss of financial security through over-enthusiastic markets and the increase of debt levels by the overwhelming use of credit.

But if investment tactics create huge problems such as the skyrocketing of oil prices over the past two years, no economic problem hits harder and creates more bitterness than unemployment. Beyond financial issues, unemployment becomes a personal issue as dignity and self-confidence become also strongly affected by it, thereby creating conditions for serious psychological health issues<sup>9</sup>, a situation that historically plays into the hands of reactionaries.

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<sup>9</sup> PRICE, Richard H. CHOI, Jin Nam. VINOKUR, Amiram D (2002). Links in the Chain of Adversity Following Job Loss: How Financial Strain and Loss of Personal Control Lead to Depression, Impaired Functioning, and Poor Health. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 302–312

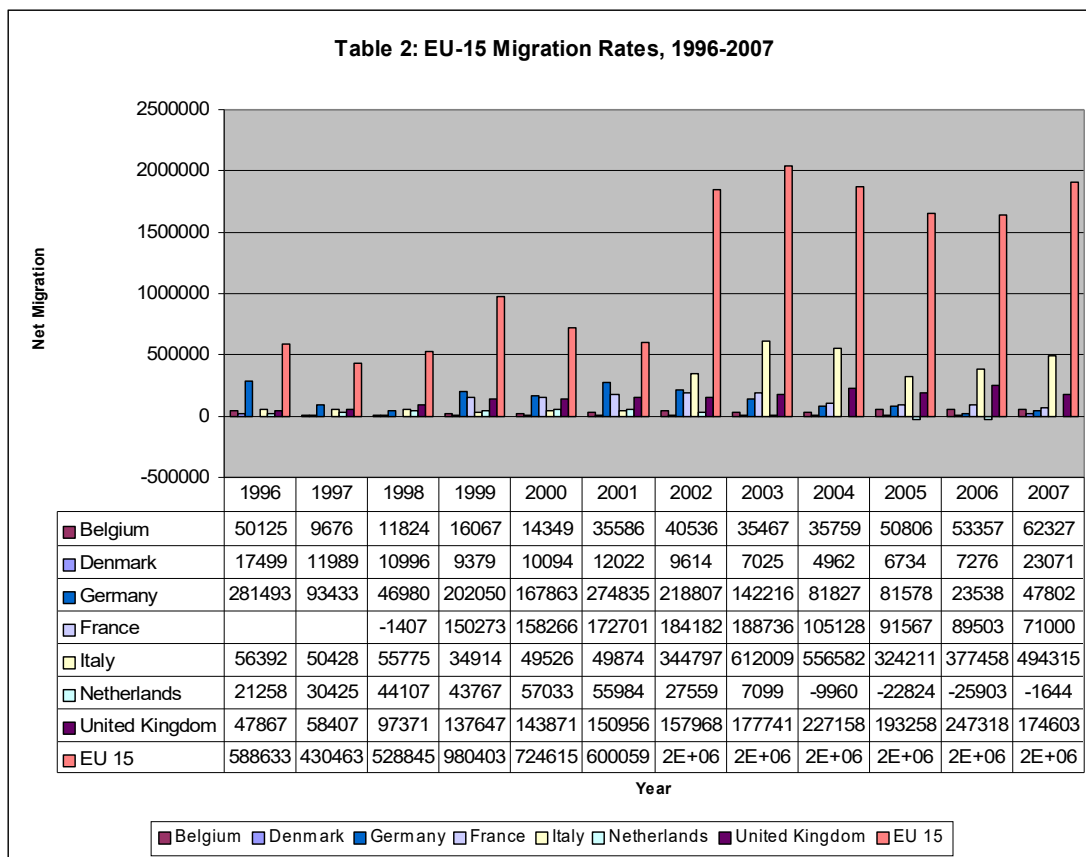
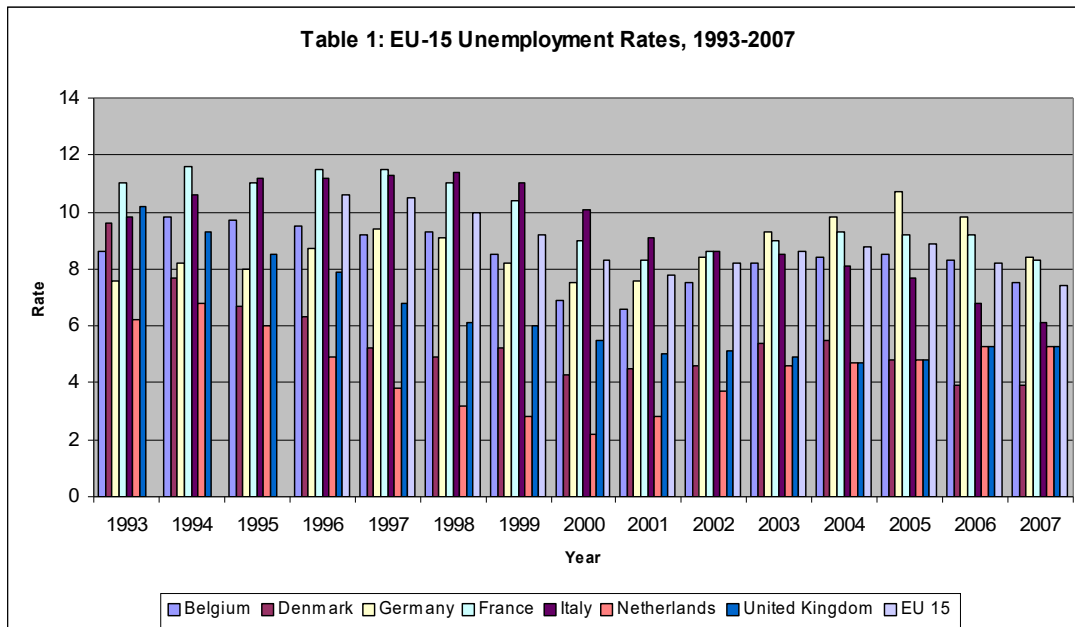
Taking this relationship as a core variable, I have examined the unemployment levels in the EU-15 and in its member countries where support for far right movements is strong (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK), using the 1993 (post-Maastricht) to 2007 period in order to verify the presence of a possible correlation between unemployment and the current increase in support for radical right-wing politics.

In the European Union, the 1993-1996 and 2001-2005 periods show high unemployment rates, peaking at 10.6% in 1996 and 8.9% in 2005<sup>10</sup>, the latter coinciding with the end of the EU-15 era (Table 1). Furthermore, the largest increase in unemployment occurred from 2001 to 2005 where the rate jumped by 1.1%, from 7.8% to 8.9%. All selected countries present the same pattern except for Italy and the United Kingdom who had a decade long steady decrease, from 11.6% in 1998 to 6.1 in 2007 and from 10.2 in 1993 to 5% in 2001 respectively. The German exception due to the still ongoing integration process of the reunification must also be noted as the country's former GDR Länder still have unemployment rates that hover around thirty percent<sup>11</sup>. When examining those statistics, it is possible to observe that the peak years are 1995-96 and that 2002 marked a return to increasing unemployment rates. As I will later show, these years do coincide with an increase in voter support to far right affiliated political actors.

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<sup>10</sup> EUROSTAT (2008). *Harmonized Unemployment Rates, +/- 25 years, yearly averages*. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/extraction/retrieve/en/theme3/une/une\\_rt\\_a?OutputDir=EJOutputDir\\_215&user=unknown&clientsessionid=82C03B0A6D1FCD367E5F1C3842659582.extraction-worker-1&OutputFile=une\\_rt\\_a.htm&OutputMode=U&NumberOfCells=150&Language=en&OutputMime=text%2Fhtml&](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/extraction/retrieve/en/theme3/une/une_rt_a?OutputDir=EJOutputDir_215&user=unknown&clientsessionid=82C03B0A6D1FCD367E5F1C3842659582.extraction-worker-1&OutputFile=une_rt_a.htm&OutputMode=U&NumberOfCells=150&Language=en&OutputMime=text%2Fhtml&)

<sup>11</sup> FINGER, Evelyn (2008). Hüpfburg und Hitlergruss. *Die Zeit*. [www.zeit.de/2008/20/Nazi-deutschland](http://www.zeit.de/2008/20/Nazi-deutschland)



But the main novelty of globalization is the growth of labour migration, particularly in the European context with the integration of former Eastern Block countries into the EU. In this case, net migration levels peaked for the most part during the 2000-2003 period (Table 2) and generally, only Belgium shows a steady increase in net migration. On the

other hand, some show an important decrease, with the Netherlands leading the way with four consecutive year of negative migration numbers<sup>12</sup>. Again, peak migration numbers (2001-2003) occur at the same period as the increase of far right support, and more broadly, the emerging importance of immigration debate. Furthermore, the numbers also relate to the reinforcement of the security paradigm in western political discourse and the implementation of tougher immigration control measures.

As the West was imposing and adapting itself to the realities of globalization, the high unemployment rates of the 1990s, especially in France and Germany, fostered strong levels of discontent among a population where many felt they were paying the price for that swift and brutal expansion. That set the table for far right actors and its reactionary roots, feeding on the socio-economic discontent and disarray of the population, and therefore having the appropriate economic context to develop. With the proper economic factors now in hand, the rise of fundamentalism and its embodiment through terrorism would provide it with the cultural/nationalist resentment it needed to grow even more.

### **3. A Clash of Civilisations? The growing Presence of Fundamentalism in the West**

Although not confined to Islam and also very much part of Christianity, fundamentalism, beginning in the late 1960s to the very early 1990s, became intrinsically linked to the Middle East, the conflict between Israel and Palestine in particular and under its political form, to terrorism. In the West, Muslim fundamentalism gained a face and became labelled as a threat with the Iranian Revolution of 1979 under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. Since 1993, the bond between Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism has attained near synonym status.

Religious fundamentalism is defined as “religious movements that interpret scripture literally and maintain the myth of an idealized past, based on a selective reading of history”<sup>13</sup>. In other words, just like the far right – who could also be deemed as political fundamentalism – it is a conservative, reactionary movement resistant or averse to change. The main difference between the two is actually cultural as the West adheres to a

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<sup>12</sup> EUROSTAT (2008). *Net Migration, including corrections*.  
<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=cac15130>

<sup>13</sup> ZIRING, Lawrence. PLANO, Jack C. OLTON, Ray (1996). *International relations: A Political Dictionary*. Denver: ABC-CLIO, 458 pp.



secular view of politics while in Islam, politics and religion are intertwined<sup>14</sup>. This is a key element to our current analysis because religion and security threat, i.e. Islam and terrorism, have through the multiplication of terrorism acts become nearly inseparable, even more so after the attacks on New York, Madrid and London, sparking the western debate on immigration, integration and cultural tolerance. Though I am fully aware that fundamentalism and violence are not symbiotic, I must nonetheless take into account for the purposes of my analysis the fundamentalism/violence relationship, and to a higher degree Islam and terrorism, as it has been defined by western ruling classes since 1993 and even more so since 2001 as the main threat to western security. This is why I will focus on Islamic acts of terrorism for this part of the study.

*Islamic Terrorism as a Threat to Western Security, Phase 1: 1993-1995*

The 1993-1995 wave of terrorism attacks by Islamic groups set two major precedents: The exportation of Islam based fundamentalist terrorism and its limited use of the Middle-East conflict as justification. Indeed, the 1993 attack on New York's World Trade Center marked the first time Islamists attacked a western target without it being related to an extra-territorial issue – Palestine – as had been the case in the sixties, seventies and eighties. Prior to then, attacks had always been conducted on external targets such as passenger planes or embassies. This was an attack perpetrated by Islam fundamentalists and aimed at damaging a major power because of its behaviour as a major power, in this case the United States.

Two years later, religious terrorism, not solely Islamic, would strike hard and often, thus cementing its emergence as a top priority security threat both in political and security circles. Indeed, three attacks would sear the religion and terrorism bond in western consciousness: The Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway; the Oklahoma City bombing perpetrated by far rights activists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols; and the wave of bombings perpetrated by the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), an Algerian based terrorist group closely tied to the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), the Algerian Islamic party who had won the 1992 national elections but who were overthrown by a coup before formally taking power.

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<sup>14</sup> ZIRING, Lawrence. PLANO, Jack C. OLTON, Ray (1996). *International relations: A Political Dictionary*. Denver: ABC-CLIO, 458 pp.

The main impact of all three attacks, in combination with an increase in media coverage, is that they made terrorism frightening – the “new” terrorism discourse starts to appear during that time – and made counter-terrorism a top priority in political circles. The attack on the Tokyo subway seemed to confirm the fears concerning the use of CBRN materials for mass killings by terrorist groups while the Oklahoma City bombing appeared to confirm the apparent lack of moral restraint of fundamentalist terrorism as the targeted Alfred P. Murrah federal building also contained an occupied day care centre. In response, the United States enacted the 1996 *Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act*, precursor and base document of the current and much vilified *USA Patriot Act*.

In France, unlike its American counterpart, the wave of terrorist attacks by the GIA fused the Islam/terrorism relationship and made Muslims the likely target of reprisal. The justification of the GIA attacks on French soil, beyond the group’s hatred of foreigners, was that France supported the Algerian government and had to be made accountable<sup>15</sup>. The link between Islam and terrorism was further enhanced by France’s colonial history and its very special relationship with Algeria, as resentment for Arabs and Muslims is still widespread and where the colonial counter-insurgency approach is still quite present in security circles<sup>16</sup>. This was further enhanced by France’s response to the attacks as they activated the *Plan Vigipirate*, currently still in force, and organized massive police raids in Muslim communities that led to the arrest of 137 people<sup>17</sup>.

This first wave of fundamentalist terrorism set the tone but appeared to be short lived as its perpetrators were arrested or “homegrown” support was quickly weeded out as in France’s case. If, as far as western countries were concerned, this still looked like the isolated acts of individuals or very small groups, the second phase would give it an internationally recognizable name as well as a face: Osama Ben Laden and Al Qaïda.

### *Islamic Terrorism as a Threat to Western Security, Phase 2: Al Qaïda, 2001 to 2005*

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<sup>15</sup> VRIENS, Lauren (2008). *Armed Islamic Group*.

[http://www.cfr.org/publication/9154/armed\\_islamic\\_group\\_algeria\\_islamists.html?breadcrumb=%2Fissuue%2F456%2Fterrorist\\_organizations](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9154/armed_islamic_group_algeria_islamists.html?breadcrumb=%2Fissuue%2F456%2Fterrorist_organizations)

<sup>16</sup> RIGOUSTE, Mathieu (2008). L’ennemi intérieur, de la guerre coloniale au contrôle sécuritaire, *Cultures & Conflits*, 67, 2008, [En ligne], mis en ligne le 21 février 2008. <http://www.conflits.org/index3128.html>

<sup>17</sup> LEROUGETEL, Antoine (2006). *France: Le juge Bruguière – de l’utilisation de l’anti-terrorisme comme instrument politique*. [www.wsws.org/francais/News/2006/janvier06/260106\\_JugeBruguiereprn.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/francais/News/2006/janvier06/260106_JugeBruguiereprn.shtml)

The wave of Al Qaïda related terrorist attacks began prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Luxor massacre of 58 tourists in November 1997, the bombing of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in July 1998 as well as the attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000 were all linked to Al Qaïda and had already made network leader Osama Ben Laden a household name. But these attacks still occurred in what could be termed as “far away from home” and still in the “typical” eventful region of Africa and the Middle East. However, the attacks on 9/11, as well as the follow-ups in Madrid (3/11/2004) and London (7/7/2005), changed this entirely.

The attacks in New York, Washington and Madrid struck the imagination by their horror (ca. 3200 death combined) and the spectacular way they were conducted, while the London bombings introduced Britain to the daily life of Israeli commuters by striking at the city’s transports system. All three cases claimed themselves to Islamic fundamentalism further cementing in the minds of westerners the now ubiquitous relationship between Islam and terrorism. If we also include the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands or the *Banlieues* riots in France into the mix, violence and Islam have definitely become synonymous in the eyes of many westerners, whether the assessment is right or not. Finally, the multitude of highly publicized failed or foiled plots have done nothing to assuage the intensity of this relationship and actually further enhanced the ostracization endured by western Muslim communities since 9/11<sup>18</sup>.

The main impact of the second phase of Islamic terrorism has been to create paranoia of the “enemy from within”<sup>19</sup>, making the issue of immigration a national security issue and building the path to the currently emerging preventive society<sup>20</sup>. Fear of the homegrown threat raised questions about the efficiency of integration or rather, the need for *proper* integration where migrants would accept and integrate the values of their country of residence. In turn, this naturally sparked an identity crisis in the West where many countries like Canada, France, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom set out to

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<sup>18</sup> MILMO, Cahal (2008). Muslims fell like ‘Jews of Europe’. *The Independent*, July 4 2008, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

<sup>19</sup> OBORNE, Peter (2008). The enemy within? Fear of Islam: Britain’s new disease. *The Independent*, July 4, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

<sup>20</sup> ST-PIERRE, Yan (2008). *Assessing the Real Impact of September 11th 2001 on Western Societies: Shifting from Risk Society to Prevention Society*. <http://www.uq.edu.au/ocis/published-proceedings>

determine what it meant to be Canadian, Dutch, French or British, consequently rekindling the flame of nationalism<sup>21</sup>.

Through terrorism, the far right obtained the ethno-nationalist pride/resentment condition it needed to expand as well as assert itself in face of the Other. It would be dismissive however to state that only the far right benefits from the insecurity or the return of a national pride since 2001, as mainstream politicians have used the context to declare themselves the champions of order and security and try to transform it into political capital.

#### **4. Turning Right: Assessing the Electoral Support of Far Right Affiliated Parties, 1993-2008**

Having examined the socio-political conditions that are usually associated with the development and expansion of far right ideas and movements, I will now examine if this has translated into actual increased support for such parties by examining electoral results<sup>22</sup> for the period 1993-2008 in countries where they appear to have gained in prominence such as Belgium (Vlaams Belang-VB), Denmark (Danish People's Party – DPP), France (Front National-FN), Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands-NPD), Italy (Alleanza Nazionale-AN, Lega Nord-LN), the Netherlands (Lijst Pim Fortuyn-LPM, Freedom Party-PVV, Trots op Nederlands-TopNL) and the United Kingdom (British National Party-BNP).

##### *Belgium*

Since the 1995 general elections, the far right pro-Flemish Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interests) has steadily increased its share of the electorate, from 7.8% and 11 seats in 1995 to 12% and 17 seats in the 2007 elections. Thus, registering an increase of 4.2% in twelve years, its main jump of 2,3% coming during the 1999 elections (Table 4). In light of its 2007 results, it now plays a decisive role in coalition discussions and stability of the Belgian government.

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<sup>21</sup> ST-PIERRE, Yan (2008). *Caught in the Storm: Canada and the Netherlands as Barometers for the West's changing Attitude towards Security and Human Rights after 9/11*.  
<http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/euce/events/conferences/HumanRights-2.html#Pierre>

<sup>22</sup> Unless specified otherwise, the all source material for this portion of the text was found at [www.elections.org](http://www.elections.org)

### *Denmark*

Like its Belgian counterpart, the Danish People's Party has seen its support steadily progress since 1994 to a point where it has also become a major coalition actor in Denmark. Indeed, it has seen its share of the electorate go from 6.4% and 11 seats in 1994 to 13.9% and 25 seats in 2007, with its major jump coming in the 2001 elections – held after 9/11 – at 4.6%.

### *France*

Jean-Marie Le Pen's anti-immigrant *Front National* shocked France's political class and observers in the 1995 presidential elections as it garnered an astonishing 15% to finish third in the race. In 2002, Le Pen unexpectedly made it to the run-off with a tally of 16.9%, increasing not only his voting share but concerns about the country's far right tendencies as well. With Le Pen's semi-retirement and the lack of a charismatic candidate, the FN portion of the vote during the 2007 election stumbled to 10.4%. On the legislative front, the FN's progress went from 12.42% in 1993 to 4.3 in 2007, peaking at 14.94% in 1997<sup>23</sup>.

### *Germany*

On the national front, the German NPD had no significant result until the 1.8% it received during the 2005 elections. Its regional growth however is undeniable, particularly in the former GDR where they won seats in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (6) and Saxony (12) in the latest Land elections in 2006 and 2004 respectively. These results should not only be defined as wins but most of all as a surge, as support for the NPD in the 1990s was quasi inexistent (barely 1%). Indeed, between the 1998/99 elections and those held in 2004/2006, the party registered a 7.8% increase in Saxony and 6.2% in Mecklenburg. These two regions, along with the neighbour Land of Brandenburg, averaged 3% voting shares for the NPD in the 2005 national elections and could be seen as being solely responsible for the party's emergence on the national scene.

### *Italy*

Prior to merging for tactical reasons with Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* in 2008 in order to become the governing Popolo della Liberta, the Alleanza Nazionale – a post-fascist party linked to Mussolini's daughter – and the Lega Nord, an anti-immigrant pro-north party, have seen their stock fluctuate steadily within the Italian electorate. The AN

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.france-politique.fr/resultats-elections-legislatives.htm>

went from 13.5% in 1994 to 12.3% in 2006, peaking in 1996 at 15.7% while the Lega Nord went from 8.3% in 1994 to 4.6% in 2006, peaking at 10.1% in 1996 before brutally plunging to 3.9% in 2001.

As members of the current coalition, they weigh heavily in the decision process and have obtained key posts such as the Ministry of Interior, now under the tutelage of Roberto Morani, a representative of the Lega Nord.

### *The Netherlands*

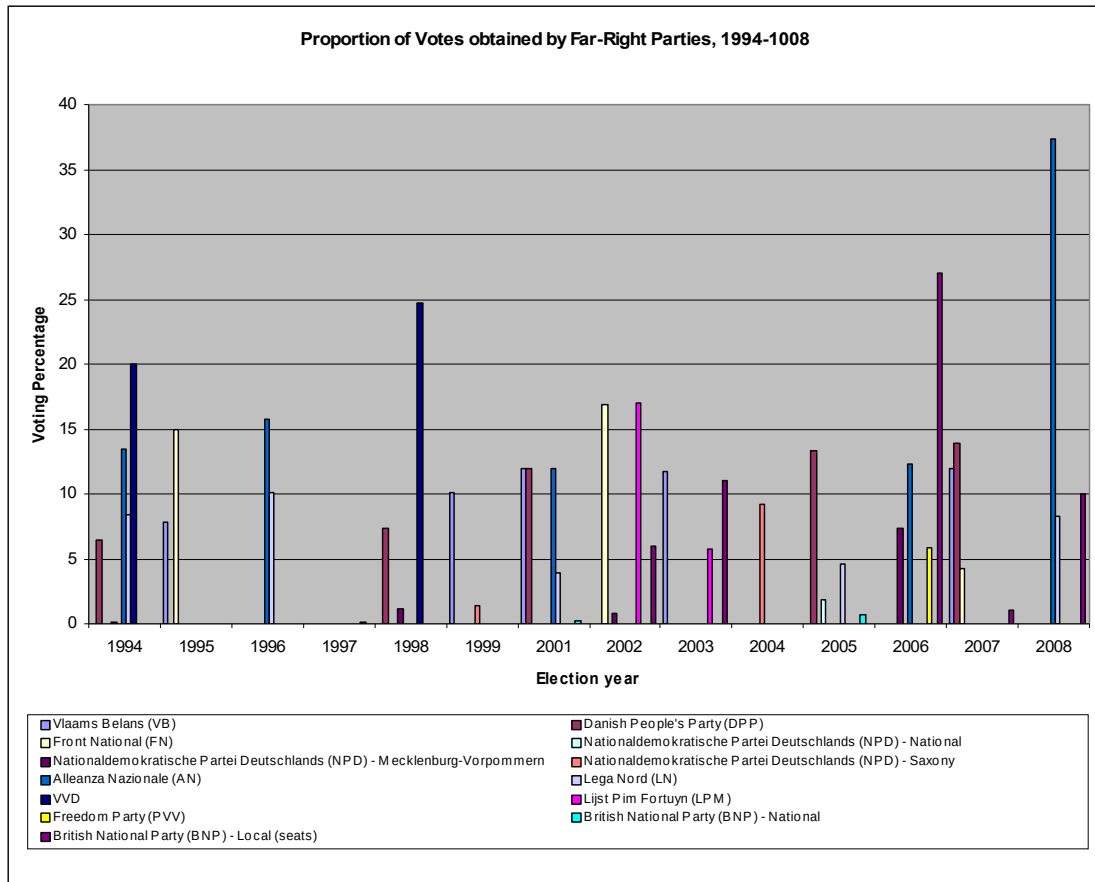
Once hailed as the land of liberal lifestyle and cultural openness, the Netherlands have seen no less than three far right political offsprings from the conservative liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD): the Lijst Pim Fortuyn; the Party for Freedom (PVV) and the recent Proud of the Netherlands (Trots op NL). The latter being only recently founded by former VVD member Rita Verdonk, it has yet to obtain any electoral results.

In the 1990s, the VVD saw its support increase from 20% in 1994 to 24.7% in 1998, its best result ever, thus maintaining the country's "Purple coalition" in power. However, increasing rifts between the party's conservative and liberal wings led to the foundation of the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, a far right party led by Pim Fortuyn. Fortuyn was openly against immigration and Islam – he described Muslims as a threat to the Dutch way of life – and was assassinated by an animal activist, although many first thought he had been murdered by Islamic fundamentalists, shortly before the 2002 elections. That year, his party obtained a staggering 17% of the votes to become the country's second largest party. Deprived of their leader, the party rapidly faded in the 2003 and 2006 elections. On the other hand, the Freedom Party, founded by VVD maverick Geert Wilders in late 2005, gained a respectable 5.9% in the surprise anticipated elections of 2006 using a political platform based on anti-immigration and denouncement of Islam as a threat and security.

### *The United Kingdom*

Much like Germany's NPD, the British National Party's increasing support lies more in local constituencies than at the national level. Nationally, the BNP's – whose leader, Nick Griffin has gone on record describing Islam as a wicked vicious faith – support has swollen from 0,02% in 1992 to 0.7% in 2005, remaining insignificant. Locally however, it has gained no less than 49 seats in various constituencies since 2002, gaining 27 in the

2006 elections alone. Furthermore, it gained its first seat in the London Assembly during the 2008 local elections and scored better than the Labour party in the Henley by-elections in June, getting 3.58% of the vote, nearly 3% more than their latest national result.



What does all of the preceding indicate and how does it relate to the socio-political and socio-economic conditions determined to be favourable to the development of far right tendencies?

First, that parties linked to the far right portion of the political spectrum became significant on local or national levels during the first elections that were held either during or at the end of peak unemployment phases of 1995-1996 and/or 2002-2004. Second, as can particularly be observed in Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, these parties either surged or peaked following terrorist attacks or issues with fundamentalists, corresponding once again to the development and implementation phases of fundamentalist terrorism in the West, 1993-1995 and 2001-2005. In this case, the notable exception would be Denmark as the “Mohammad Caricature” scandal occurred in early 2007 and may have played a major role in the

election results. This, however, does not negate the DPP's steady, decade long progress in electoral support gains. Third, it is quite clear that regardless of minor fluctuations and the wave of Leftist governments that swept the West in the mid to late 1990's, far right parties have enjoyed considerable, at worst steady progression in electoral support over the past fifteen years, averaging in most cases ca. 15% of the electorate. Finally, it is also clear that the latter has become a major factor not only in coalition politics but bipartisan as well because it represents a vast pool, if not massive in most cases, of voters that could make a difference in an election campaign. As we will see, their political capital value for mainstream parties has not gone unnoticed.

## **5. Political Gold Rush: The Political Focus on Immigration and Security after 9/11**

To say that there is an actual "before and after" the terrorist attacks of 9/11 remains highly debatable, but the fact that since this infamous date western political discourses have evolved around the themes of immigration and security is not. It tossed the issue of terrorism, and consequently the issue of integration, to the front of the socio-political debate making the security paradigm a top priority. As we have seen, as a reactionary movement the far right thrives on insecurity and makes the provision of security its main concern, and the near obsessive use of the thematic plays adequately into its hands. In this era defined by fear and insecurity, its electoral base has grown enough to attract attention of apparently stagnant or declining mainstream political parties in order to attain or maintain power.

I will by no means argue that mainstream political figures have adopted a far right stance on these issues but as we will see, 9/11 launched a political bidding war around the subject of security that can be observed in the increasingly tougher approaches against immigration, terrorism as well as anti-social behaviour. Examples of this abound throughout the western world to various degrees but all have in common the creation of "comfort zones" for a more muscled approach that is usually favoured by tenants of the far right. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy's stance on immigration and security during the 2007 presidential campaign was so strong that he was accused by the Front National's Bruno Gollnisch of "having stolen their votes"<sup>24</sup> while more interestingly, socialist challenger Ségolène Royal recommended that young delinquents be confined to a military environment. Indeed, a few months after the first Paris *Banlieues* riots of 2005,

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<sup>24</sup> <http://fr.news.yahoo.com/14052007/5/legislatives-le-fn-se-prepare-pour-un-match-retour-victorieux.html>



she played the security card and presented a set of recommendations on how to deal with delinquency and anti-social behaviour among French youth. Her recommendations called for the “provisional tutorship of government allocations upon the child first anti-social act” as well as the need for parents to attend a child parenting class<sup>25</sup>. Children who disrupt the proper functioning of “school life” are to be removed immediately and placed in a “halfway” pension<sup>26</sup>. Finally, children 16 and older are to be “placed in military institutions upon the first act of delinquency”<sup>27</sup>. Such proposals are usually part of the program of far right parties and yet, it was submitted and defended by the socialist presidential candidate.

The French Socialist Party is not the only one to go against its historical position as the “New Labour”, first under Tony Blair and now under Gordon Brown, and who exploits the security discourse to its maximum. Beside the enactment of numerous and very strong security driven laws – five anti-terror laws, data mining procedures, extended preventive detention powers and a strong anti-social behaviour act – Labour cabinet members provide security related quotes on a daily basis. The particular aspect of these quotes is a need to demonstrate a stronger, tougher approach towards security than its Tory opponents as the Labour, struggling for political gains, is regularly accused of “going soft”<sup>28</sup> by the opposition. An example of this can be observed in a speech given in May by current Home Secretary Jacqui Smith where she stated “there can be no excuse for inaction while people still fear for the safety of the streets and estates where they live. We will do more to protect them”<sup>29</sup>. This statement comes on the heels of a February 2008 report published by the Home Office which showed that crime rate in the United Kingdom had fallen for the fifth consecutive year<sup>30</sup>.

In Germany, Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU, right) is regularly quoted as underlining that the country is “really under constant terrorist threat and that the possibility for a terrorist attack has never been so high”<sup>31</sup> while his colleague Justice Minister Brigitte Zypries (SPD, left), was recently quoted as saying that “the condition

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<sup>25</sup> SOUDAIS, Michel (2006). *Où va le Parti socialiste?* <http://www.politis.fr/article1726.html>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> WINTOUR, Patrick (2008). Police should harass young thugs – Smith. *The Guardian*, May 8, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>29</sup> Op Cit.

<sup>30</sup> TRAVIS, Alan (2008). Murder rate falls for fifth successive year, but concern over “hidden” family violence. *The Guardian*, February 1, [HYPERLINK](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/feb/01/uk.ukcrime)

["http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/feb/01/uk.ukcrime"](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/feb/01/uk.ukcrime)

<sup>31</sup> SCHÄUBLE, Wolfgang (2007). Es kann uns jederzeit treffen. *Der Spiegel*, number 28, pp 31-33.

for freedom is security”<sup>32</sup> as she justified the cabinet’s approval of the country’s new warrant-less searches law. Furthermore, the regional CDU party of Hessen and its leader Roland Koch were accused of using the race and fear mongering cards during the 2008 legislative campaign as it abundantly denounced “young immigrant criminals”<sup>33</sup>, compared Green Party leader Tarek al-Wazir to Joseph Goebbels and used “fear mongering billboards” declaring that “Ypsilanti, al-Wazir and the Communists must be stopped”, focusing on the left candidates foreign last names in order to discredit them<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, is the example of Italy’s *Popolo della Libertà*, a coalition of right-wing parties composed most notably of Silvio Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* and the aforementioned *Alleanza Nazionale* and *Lega Nord*, that swept the legislative, senate and Rome mayoral elections in April. Aware that he would not be able to secure a majority by himself, Berlusconi sought an alliance with far right partners in order to ensure a majority, a strategy that worked to perfection. In this case, the comfort zone created by the co-option of far right themes – security and immigration – goes beyond discourse and into fact as these parties are integrated into the government sphere and therefore are granted both credibility and legitimacy, no matter if their supporters publicly congratulate their candidate’s victory with a fascist salute<sup>35</sup>. Strategically and practically speaking, this creates a huge precedent that may in all likelihood be followed by political entities that are in Berlusconi’s position, thereby generalizing its effect.

These are but a trifle of numerous examples presented by mainstream western politicians as they focus immensely on exploiting the security thematic in order to increase or secure the largest part of their respective electorates, in particular since 2001. Although it doesn’t necessarily translate into success, as both Koch in Germany and Britain’s Labour are finding out, it nonetheless creates precedents and standards and perhaps inadvertently, opens the door to far right movements who had we have seen, present themselves in a more open and appealing fashion. The co-option of the discourse not only creates a form of legitimacy that had been missing from the far right for decades but also creates

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<sup>32</sup> BIERMANN, Kai (2008). Die Zeit.

<sup>33</sup> Jugendkriminalität: Breite Front gegen Verschärfung des Jugendstrafrechts. *Die Zeit*, [www.zeit.de/news/artikel/2007/12/28/2446125.xml](http://www.zeit.de/news/artikel/2007/12/28/2446125.xml)

<sup>34</sup> SCHLIEBEN, Michael (2008). Die Nerven liegen blank. *Die Zeit*, [www.zeit.de/online/2008/05/wahlkampf-schluss](http://www.zeit.de/online/2008/05/wahlkampf-schluss)

<sup>35</sup> POPHAM, Peter (2008). Italian fascism is once again on the rise. *The Independent*, May 6 2008, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

familiarity with the themes they raise, perhaps explaining the emergence and steady growth of these parties.

## **6. Conclusion**

Throughout this article, I have aimed at understanding the rapid growth of the far right support in western politics, most notably in Europe, though North America is not without its significance in this case. I have done so by arguing that beyond the proper socio-economic and socio-political conditions, it is the co-option of the far right's immigration and security themes as well as the exploitation of insecurity by mainstream political parties that is actually responsible for accelerating the increase in support of far right movements and parties as well as providing them with newfound legitimacy.

The far right, despite retaining the common reactionary characteristics of its glory years – authoritarian, ethno-nationalist and averse to social change – has adapted its tactics and approaches to the Information Age as it now plays along with the system in place, trying to convey a more receptive message and to break with its historically violent and intolerant fascist image. It nonetheless still thrives on insecurity and fear brought about by rapid political change, economic instability and the real or imagined threat of the Other. As I have demonstrated, the conditions of the post-Cold War era are quite similar to those that prevailed in the twenties and thirties when far right parties took power in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain: The change of a long-standing and stable political order, high unemployment rates and security concerns, in our case that of Islamic terrorism.

Indeed, if a horrendous economic situation was the main security concern prior to World War II, that of public safety appears to be today's main concern and seduction area of the far right, especially from 2001 on as terrorism struck hard and often on western soil. In the process, these acts of terror cemented the idea that Islam and terrorism are one, transforming the various Muslim communities into scapegoats and instruments of power, linking immigration to security levels in the process.

As my research indicates, the main increases in far right support occurred in periods of high unemployment and following a spree of spectacular terrorism acts, in this case the 1993-1995 and 2001-2005 periods, confirming the idea according to which the far right

thrives and expands in particular conditions. More importantly, all far right related parties and movements have shown steady progress from 1993 on, gaining in prominence in the 2000s, making incursion at the national level in areas (Germany, United Kingdom) where it had previously been limited to regional successes.

Finally, I have demonstrated that mainstream political parties have adopted a much tougher stance and discourse on security and immigration, sometimes playing the race card and sustaining high levels of insecurity, even if it meant going against historical party lines as in the French Socialists and British Labour cases, or literally using far right parties as coalition partners for strategic purposes as in the Italian case. In my opinion, this regular promotion and co-option of historically far right themes – insecurity above all – grants the latter's discourse new found legitimacy and creates comfort levels with it among the electorate, thus fuelling its growth.

Just as alarming, as well as an issue for further research, is the surge in hate crimes across the West<sup>36</sup>. Whether or not a correlation can be established between the far right's increasing appeal and that particular surge remains to be seen. In the mean time, the politics of this era remain centred on insecurity, risk as an object of power as Ulrich Beck would say, and the suspicion of others, enhancing fear, mistrust and hate – fostering the proper conditions for far right movements. Consequently, the lines of social unrest are being drawn in the sand, very much like a century ago, creating a volatile domestic situation that will represent a greater threat to public safety and the western way of life than the one it is currently fighting and perhaps, sadly, add a verse to Niemöller's tragic poem.

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<sup>36</sup> Since 2000, hate-related crimes have exploded on the European scene, increasing by 30% on average per country. See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Annual Report 2008 at [http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ar08/ar08\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ar08/ar08_en.pdf)