

# Choosing who to hate? The Extreme and Radical Right's Foreign Policy between Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Russophilia

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## Abstract

Although extensive research has been conducted on the extreme right (ER) and radical right (RR), their foreign policy remains understudied. Hence, we provide a comparative analysis of 42 ER and RR parties in Europe to identify their stances on two key issues of contemporary international politics: the Israeli-Palestinian and the Russia-Ukraine conflicts. The results suggest that ER and RR parties do not choose who to like but who to hate more: either Israel (Jews) or Palestine (Muslims); either Russia or the West (and Ukraine as its proxy). However, ER and RR parties are substantially different in their positions towards both conflicts, and a stance in one conflict corresponds to a specific position in the other: the ER tends to be supportive of Palestine and Russia, while the RR supportive of Israel and Ukraine. We argue that these profound differences are due to a combination of ideological and competitive incentives.

## KEYWORDS

Extreme right, Foreign policy, Israel-Palestinian conflict, Populist radical right, Russian invasion of Ukraine

## Zusammenfassung

Obwohl die extreme Rechte und die radikale Rechte umfassend erforscht wurden, wissen wir noch wenig über ihre Außenpolitiken. Dieser Artikel erbringt eine vergleichende Analyse von 42 Parteien der extremen und radikalen Rechten in Europa und ermittelt deren Haltung zu zwei gegenwärtigen internationalen Konflikten: den Konflikten zwischen Israel und Palästina und zwischen

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Russland und der Ukraine. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Parteien der extremen und der radikalen Rechten weniger auswählen, wen sie mögen, sondern eher, wen sie mehr hassen: Israel (Juden) oder Palästina (Muslime); Russland oder den Westen (die Ukraine als Stellvertreter). Jedoch unterscheiden sich die Positionen der extremen und der radikalen rechten Parteien zu beiden Konflikten erheblich. Eine Haltung zu dem einen Konflikt entspricht zudem einer bestimmten Haltung zum anderen Konflikt: Extrem rechte Parteien unterstützen tendenziell Palästina und Russland, radikale rechte Parteien Israel und die Ukraine. Diese gewichtigen Unterschiede sind auf eine Kombination aus ideologischen und Wettbewerbsanreizen zurückzuführen.

### Résumé

Bien que de nombreuses recherches aient été menées sur l'extrême droite et la droite radicale, leurs politiques étrangères restent peu étudiées. Nous proposons une analyse comparative de 42 partis de l'extrême droite et de la droite radicale en Europe afin d'identifier leurs positions sur deux conflits clés de la politique internationale contemporaine: celui entre Israël et la Palestine et celui entre la Russie et l'Ukraine. Les résultats suggèrent que les partis de l'extrême droite et de la droite radicale ne choisissent pas qui aimer mais qui haïr le plus: Israël (Juifs) ou Palestine (Musulmans); la Russie ou l'Occident (et l'Ukraine comme son mandataire). Cependant, les partis de l'extrême droite et de la droite radicale sont fondamentalement différents dans leurs positions vis-à-vis des deux conflits, et une position sur un conflit correspond à une position spécifique sur l'autre: l'extrême droite a tendance à soutenir la Palestine et la Russie tandis que la droite radicale soutient Israël et l'Ukraine. Nous soutenons que ces différences profondes sont dues à une combinaison d'incitations idéologiques et concurrentielles.

### Riassunto

Sebbene siano state condotte numerose ricerche sull'estrema destra e sulla destra radicale, la loro politica estera rimane poco studiata. Partendo da tale costa articolo offre un'analisi comparata di 42 partiti di estrema destra e di destra radicale in Europa al fine di identificare le loro posizioni su due questioni chiave della politica internazionale contemporanea: i conflitti israelo-palestinese e russo-ucraino. I risultati dimostrano che i partiti di estrema destra e di destra radicale non scelgono tanto chi amare ma piuttosto chi odiare di più: Israele (ebrei) o Palestina (musulmani); la Russia o l'Occidente (e l'Ucraina come suo proxy). Questi partiti sono sostanzialmente diversi nelle loro posizioni nei confronti di entrambi i

conflitti, e una posizione in un conflitto corrisponde a una posizione specifica nell'altro: l'estrema destra tende a sostenere la Palestina e la Russia, mentre la destra radicale sostiene Israele e l'Ucraina. Riteniamo che queste profonde differenze siano dovute a una combinazione di incentivi legati all'ideologia e a una questione di concorrenza.

Foreign policy has been traditionally studied through the prism of international relations, and only more recently attention has been given to analysing the positions of political parties and their potential impact (e.g. Chrystosogelos et al., 2023; Hofmann & Martill, 2021; Kaarbo, 2015; Rathbun, 2004; Raunio & Wagner, 2020; Wagner et al., 2017). In this respect, even though the study of the extreme right (ER) and radical right (RR) is among the most popular research topics in comparative politics, the analyses on their foreign policy are still rare. Of course, there are some studies on the RR's foreign policy (Ostermann & Stahl, 2022; Schori Liang, 2007; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2015), but we know very little about if and to what extent the foreign policy positions of this party family and that of the ER are similar. For this reason, we provide a comprehensive overview of the European ER and RR parties' stances on the two most salient issues of contemporary foreign policy: the conflict between Israel and Palestine and between Russia and Ukraine.

By systematically analysing the positions of 42 parties towards both conflicts, we argue that partisan choices are not necessarily a matter of preference or liking; rather, they tend to be a matter of non-preference or (even) hatred. ER and RR parties do thus not choose *who to like* but *who to hate*, or better *who to hate more*: either Israel (Jews) or Palestine (Muslims); either Russia or the West (and Ukraine as its proxy). Moreover, we expect that the ER and the RR will each adopt a different combination of positions on the two conflicts: this is due to ideological differences between them and linked to the distinctive competitive incentives they face. Consequentially, we argue that a singular foreign policy common to the ER and RR is unlikely.

## THE PUZZLE: THE EXTREME AND RADICAL RIGHT'S FOREIGN POLICY

The resurgence of ER parties (ERPs) in various countries and an increasing number of RR parties (RRPs) in governments, invites us to explore these parties' foreign policy positions, a topic that has so far received little attention. An explicit comparison between these two party families is also urgent in the context of the increasing usage of the umbrella term 'far right' (Pirro, 2023), which tends to stress similarities rather than differences between ERPs and RRP. In this respect, it is well-known that both share two common core ideological features – nativism and authoritarianism – but have different stances towards democracy: the ER rejects the very ideal of democracy per se, while the RR opposes liberal democracy (Mudde, 2007). Empirically speaking RRP also tend to be populist (i.e. the populist radical right), but here we are interested in comparing the main features of the two broad party families, the RR and the ER.

We distinguish between ERPs and RRP, as we maintain that lumping them together into a single group can be counterproductive when exploring if and to what extent they differ in non-core ideological positions, such as foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> Consequentially, rather

<sup>1</sup>We are aware that this distinction is at times difficult to be operated in practice given the different features of national party systems, the eventual incentives for parties to hide their extremism, and their possible internal heterogeneity (e.g. presence of more extreme wings). However, we argue that borderline cases are a clear minority, and are rather due to a lack of information about the parties themselves than to a truly ambiguous ideological position. In general, we maintain that the distinction between the RR and ER can be operated on empirical grounds in the vast majority of the cases (see below for the actual criteria used in this article).

than assuming that their foreign policies are similar given the shared nativist and authoritarian core, we believe that this should be an empirical question to be tested through an explicit comparison. The assumption that the far right is constituted by *sic et simpliciter* ideologically interchangeable actors is increasingly common, but this also increasingly leads to misleading interpretations even in the case of foreign policy, as expert and non-expert commentaries are replete with hasty conclusions, like ‘the far-right is pro-Russia’ (Wondreys, 2023).

Taking sides in the large-scale conflicts we analyse can be a real dilemma for ERPs and RRP. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it may seem logical to support Israel in its fight against the prevalently Muslim population of Palestine, as many ERPs and RRP are Islamophobic. However, Israel's key ally is the USA, the historical *Archi-nemesis* of the ER but also that of some RRP as well, and the Palestinian struggle for independence can be portrayed through nativism. Furthermore, the ‘anti-Israel alliance’ is led by anti-Western authoritarian political actors (e.g. Iran, Hezbollah, Syria), whose views of the ideal political regime are very close to those of ERPs and may exert, at least in part, a fascination for some RRP.

As regards the Russia-Ukraine conflict, many ERPs and RRP have long been considered as Russia's allies, given their alleged admiration of Putin and shared anti-Westernism (see Shekhovtsov, 2018). However, several European countries have troubled histories with Russia. Consequently, it is counterintuitive (to say the least) for parties from these countries to support Putin, especially after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which made these countries feel threatened (Hooghe et al., 2024; Wondreys, 2023). Moreover, Putin's justifications for the invasion, especially the emphasis on the alleged Ukrainian nativism and the role of Ukrainian ‘Nazis’ in the conflict, may be difficult to accept for ERPs, especially, but possibly for some on the RR as well.

## HYPOTHESES

Although limited, the existing literature (see below) helps us to generate some testable hypotheses to solve these puzzles. An overarching argument is that the ER will adopt different positions than the RR on both conflicts and that a particular position on the first conflict typically corresponds to a particular position on the second. This is due to ideological differences, which also open the way to different competitive incentives.

As regards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Camus' (2013) division of ERPs and RRP according to their stances on Islam and Judaism proves particularly useful. In a nutshell, he suggests that ‘the more one moves towards the fringe of the neo-Nazi or National-Revolutionary extreme right, the more one is likely to find parties that are totally committed to anti-Semitism and to supporting militant Islam’, which is seen as ‘an ally in the fight against US imperialism, Israel and Zionism’ (see also Hafez, 2014, p. 481; Shroufi, 2024). In addition, we suggest that as these political actors have an intrinsically revolutionary and anti-democratic character, they have fewer pragmatic concerns. Arguably, ERPs are primarily interested in emphasizing their ideological commitment and purity, which become an end in itself given their isolation in the political scene. Hence, they can adopt positions that range from highly controversial to unacceptable (i.e. outright anti-Semitism). For this combination of motives, we propose that ERPs likely support Palestine and oppose Israel (*Hypothesis 1a*).

Conversely, RRP have an incentive to find a balance between ideological consistency and pragmatism to improve their reputation and expand their voter base; differently from ERPs, they are not against democracy per se, which allows them to invest resources in building an image of credible actors of government. Notably, most RRP have comprehended

that anti-Semitism is a toxic issue that can prevent them from gaining votes from more moderate voters (Bunzl, 2005; Hafez, 2014), and many have begun to view the ‘militarized Jew’ as ‘a potential ally in their fight against Islam in Europe’ (Schori Liang, 2007, p. 26). The support of Israel thus, in an instrumental sense, may primarily serve to emphasize Islamophobia (Brubaker, 2017; Kahmann, 2017). However, it may also be influenced by the ideological compatibility between parties included in the current Israeli government, as well as the Israeli Settler Movement, and the European RR (Hirsch-Hoefler & Mudde, 2020; Zur & Bakker, 2023). Consequentially, we argue that RRP likely support Israel and oppose Palestine (*Hypothesis 1b*).

As regards the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Wondreys (2023) divides ERPs and RRP into three categories: *Russia-friendly*; *Russia-hostile*; and *Neutral* (see below). While his analysis concentrates almost exclusively on RRP, the 2 ERPs included (the Dutch *Forum for Democracy*; the Slovak *Republic*) are classified into the *Russia-friendly* category. RRP are distributed across all three categories: however, only 4 out of 19 are considered *Russia-friendly*, while an overwhelming majority (11) are in the *Russia-hostile* category. ERPs included in other studies (e.g. Snegovaya, 2022), like the Hungarian *Our Homeland Movement* (MH) and the German *National Democratic Party of Germany*, are also seen to be primary examples of strongly pro-Kremlin actors. Indeed, considering the different incentives mentioned above, it is arguably less problematic for the ER to adopt a more controversial position on Russia (and Ukraine) than for the RR: the latter needs to take into account the fact, at least for competitive and pragmatic considerations, that public opinion tends to be anti-Russia and pro-Ukraine (e.g. Biscaia & Salgado, 2023, p. 238). Consequently, we argue that ERPs will likely be *Russia-friendly*, and thus supportive of Russia rather than Ukraine (*Hypothesis 2a*), while RRP will likely be *Russia-hostile*, and thus supportive of Ukraine rather than Russia (*Hypothesis 2b*).

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To distinguish between ERPs and RRP, we mainly rely on the lists developed by Zulianello (2020; Zulianello & Larsen, 2021), which allow explicitly identifying (populist) RRP, and on country-expert reports in the *PopuList* dataset (Rooduijn et al., 2023), which sometimes specifically indicate whether a party is either ER or RR. Then, we classify the more recent cases of RRP and identify other ERPs not included in the *PopuList*.<sup>2</sup> Following the established criteria in the literature, we classify as ER the parties that are *nativist*, *authoritarian*, and explicitly *reject* democracy per se. At the same time, we classify as RR those that are *nativist*, *authoritarian* and explicitly *accept* democracy as an ideal, even though they tend to oppose a specific form: liberal democracy.<sup>3</sup> In total, we include 16 ERPs and 26 RRP from 21 European Union countries (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup>

We first investigate the parties' positions on Israel and Palestine in the aftermath of the Hamas terrorist attack in October 2023. Given the unprecedented scale of the attack, it had a high resonance amongst the European public and politicians alike. Consequentially, even if parties may not have previously talked about the issue, arguably they had to take a stance now,

<sup>2</sup>We included the parties that (as of 31 October 2023) i) could be classified as ER or RR (i.e. no borderline cases) on the grounds of available information or to the best of our knowledge (see the online appendix 1 for details), ii) either participated in a recent election (at any level) or remain active after that election.

<sup>3</sup>The key sources used in our own classification are listed in the table in the online Appendix 1.

<sup>4</sup>We exclude 6 parties that we consider to be borderline between ER and RR: The Bulgarian *Revival* (V); the Cypriot *National People's Front* (ELAM); the Greek *Victory* (NIKI) and *Spartans*; the Lithuanian *Nationalist and Republican Union* (LTS), and the Swedish *Alternative for Sweden* (AfS).

TABLE 1 Classification of Parties.

Extreme Right ( $n = 16$ )	<i>The III. Way</i> (GER); <i>CasaPound</i> (ITA); <i>Confederation</i> (POL); <i>Blue-and-Black Movement</i> (FIN); <i>The Falange</i> (SPA); <i>Forum for Democracy</i> (NED); <i>The Homeland</i> (GER); <i>Nation</i> (BEL); <i>National Democracy</i> (CZE); <i>National Democracy</i> (SPA); <i>New Force</i> (ITA); <i>New Right</i> (ROM); <i>Our Homeland</i> (HUN); <i>People's Party Our Slovakia</i> (SVK); <i>Republic</i> (SVK); <i>Rise Up</i> (POR)
Radical Right ( $n = 26$ )	<i>Alliance for the Union of Romanians</i> (ROM); <i>Alternative for Germany</i> (GER); <i>Brothers of Italy</i> (ITA); <i>Conservative People's Party of Estonia</i> (EST); <i>Denmark Democrats</i> (DEN); <i>Danish People's Party</i> (DEN); <i>Enough</i> (POR); <i>Fidesz</i> (HUN); <i>Finns Party</i> (FIN); <i>Flemish Interest</i> (BEL); <i>Freedom and Direct Democracy</i> (CZE); <i>Freedom Party of Austria</i> (AUS); <i>Greek Solution</i> (GRE); <i>JA21</i> (NED); <i>League</i> (ITA); <i>National Alliance</i> (LAT); <i>National Rally</i> (FRA); <i>New Right</i> (DEN); <i>Party for Freedom</i> (NED); <i>Reconquest</i> (FRA); <i>Slovenian Democratic Party</i> (SLO); <i>Slovenian National Party</i> (SLO); <i>Sweden Democrats</i> (SWE); <i>VMRO – Bulgarian National Movement</i> (BUL); <i>VOX</i> (SPA); <i>We are Family</i> (SVK)

enabling a large-scale comparative analysis of their positions. Considering a relatively large number of cases, we carry out a qualitative content analysis that is focused on a selection of press releases, media interviews, and party leaders' proclamations explicitly stating the position on the issue from October 7 (the day of the attack) to October 31, 2023. These are mostly retrieved from parties' official online channels (websites, social media profiles). However, if these channels do not include enough relevant information in the analysed period to code a party's position, we rely on secondary sources, mainly the mainstream media.<sup>5</sup> To identify the main topics and positions of the parties under analysis in languages not spoken by us, we employed Google Translate. This approach represents a good trade-off capable of retrieving the essential positions for each actor under investigation while ensuring a wide geographical scope. In this way, we can have a good idea about parties' positions for the period of our interest; however, we recognize that these positions cannot be taken as definitive given the selective nature of our content analysis.

Following Camus' (2013) framework and Wondreys' (2023) terminology for the sake of consistency, we carry out the analysis by focusing on three categories, the previously mentioned 'friendly', 'hostile' and 'neutral'. In this respect, we maintain that using the terms 'friendly' and 'neutral' is more adequate than a more explicit one (i.e. pro/anti) as political parties are often rather reluctant to take a truly explicit stance on more controversial issues. Hence, we consider these three categories to be particularly appropriate especially for a qualitative content analysis like ours, as they allow to identify the parties' leaning on both the Israeli-Palestinian and Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Our analysis proceeds as follows. First, we classify the ERPs and RRP into three categories, according to their position on Israel and Palestine:

- a. *Israel-friendly*: Openly condemn the Hamas attack, argue that Israel has a right to defend itself by every means necessary, do not mention alleged violations of human rights of Palestinians in the retaliation operation by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), argue for cutting all aid to Palestine;
- b. *Israel-hostile*: Do not explicitly condemn the Hamas attack, and/or argue that it is a response to/consequence of oppression and illegal occupation of Palestine, emphasize alleged violations of human rights of Palestinians by the IDF;
- c. *Neutral*: Reject to take a side, condemn the Hamas attack but are reluctant to go any further, especially in terms of the open support of Israel and collective punishment of Palestinians,

<sup>5</sup>For details on sources used in each case, see the online Appendices 2 and 3. We exclude six parties for which we have not found enough evidence to convincingly code a position on either one or both conflicts.

argue for continuing aid to Palestine and the two-state solution; are openly anti-Israel/anti-Semitic but also anti-Hamas/Muslim; or are internally divided on the issue.

Second, we compare the positions of our cases on Israel and Palestine with those on Russia (and Ukraine). Here, we build upon and expand the recent comprehensive analysis conducted by Wondreys (2023), which contains information about approximately half of our cases (19 out of 42). Hence, we retrieved original information and analysed all remaining 23 parties, using the approach developed by the same author. This categorization is based on a combination of parties' stances on responsibility for the conflict and sanctions against Russia and, as already mentioned, it divides parties into three categories:

- a. *Russia-friendly*: Blame the West (and/or Ukraine), oppose sanctions against Russia;
- b. *Russia-hostile*: Condemn and blame Russia, support sanctions against Russia; [Correction added on October 5, 2024, after first online publication: Few modification has been made in the previous points.]
- c. *Neutral*: Express conflicting views (e.g. condemn and blame Russia but oppose sanctions) and/or are internally divided.

Although there are some clear differences between the two conflicts, the criteria we use to classify parties' positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are very similar to those used by Wondreys (2023), thanks to our focus on functional equivalents that can make them comparable. For instance, the extent of condemnation of the Hamas attack (i.e. blaming Palestinians) and presence (or lack thereof) of mentions to the role of oppression against Palestinians (i.e. blaming Israel) can be considered to be a functional equivalent to the *responsibility* criterion in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, while cutting all aid to Palestine can be considered to be a functional equivalent to the *sanctions* criterion.

## FINDINGS

In the aftermath of the 2023 Hamas attack, more than one in two of the parties under investigation took an *Israel-friendly* stance, less than one in four were openly *Israel-hostile*, while the rest were *Neutral*. However, the difference between ERPs and RRP is evident. Out of 16 ERPs, none were *Israel-friendly*, while more than one in two (nine) were *Israel-hostile* (see Table 2). For instance, the Finnish *Blue-and-Black Movement* (SML) stated that 'it supports

TABLE 2 Extreme right.

	<i>Israel-friendly</i>	<i>Israel-hostile</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	N (%)
<i>Russia-friendly</i>		<i>The Falange</i> (SPA); <i>The Homeland</i> (GER); <i>National Democracy</i> (CZE); <i>National Democracy</i> (SPA); <i>New Force</i> (ITA); <i>People's Party Our Slovakia</i> (SVK); <i>Republic</i> (SVK)	<i>Forum for Democracy</i> (NED); <i>Nation</i> (BEL)	<b>9 (56.3)</b>
<i>Russia-hostile</i>		<i>CasaPound</i> (ITA); <i>Blue-and-Black Movement</i> (FIN)	<i>Rise Up</i> (POR)	3 (18.8)
<i>Neutral</i>			<i>The III. Way</i> (GER); <i>Confederation</i> (POL); <i>Our Homeland</i> (HUN); <i>New Right</i> (ROM)	4 (25.0)
N (%)	0 (0)	<b>9 (56.3)</b>	7 (43.8)	16 (100)

The bold values, for N(%), express the most frequent outcome for each category.

the freedom struggle of the Palestinians in their own homeland against the local occupier' and called for a 'Europe-wide boycott of Israel until the illegal Jewish settlements are dismantled and the Palestinians are finally given the opportunity for their own national self-expression in their own independent homeland' (Sinimusta Liike, 2023). In addition, the Italian *New Force* (FN) argued that the only real solution to the problem was the end of 'the dangerous Zionist adventure' (Fiore, 2023). The remaining ERPs fit well into the *Neutral* category. For instance, one of the currently most successful ERPs, the Hungarian MH, argued that the 'massacre of unarmed civilians' has been committed by 'both sides during the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict' (Mi Hazánk, 2023) while the Belgian party *Nation* (2023) stated that its official position is 'neither kippah nor keffiyeh'.

Instead, out of 26 RRP, an overwhelming majority (almost 90 percent) was supportive of Israel (see Table 3). For instance, the *National Rally* (RN) in France argued that for many French Jews, the party is 'the shield against Islamist ideology' (Bardella, 2023) while the *Freedom Party of Austria* stated that by not suspending payments to Palestinians, the EU 'promotes anti-Semitism' (FPÖ, 2023). Conversely, none of analysed RRP was *Israel-hostile*. Finally, only three parties adopted the *Neutral* position: for instance, the Italian government, led by the RR *Brothers of Italy*, has sent humanitarian aid to Palestinians claiming that this documents the party's position, which mixes the 'Israel's right for existence' with a 'right of Palestinians for a State and humanitarian support to Gaza' (Fratelli d'Italia, 2023). Overall, these results lend considerable support to hypotheses 1a and 1b.

In the second step of our analysis, we have expanded previous research on the parties' positions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. We find a majority (over 56 percent) of ERPs manifesting a *Russia-friendly* position, with the others being almost evenly split between *Russia-hostile* and *Neutral* (see Table 2). Our analysis also confirms the previous findings for the RR: a majority of parties adopted a *Russia-hostile* position, while only slightly over one-fifth (six out of 26) were *Russia-friendly*, with the remaining six parties taking the *Neutral* stance (see Table 3). In sum, ERPs are more likely to be *Russia-friendly* when compared to RRP and vice versa, confirming our hypotheses 2a and 2b.

The analysis thus suggests some affinity in terms of the ER and RR's positions on the two analysed foreign policy issues. ERPs tend to be more *Israel-hostile* and *Russia-friendly*, while

TABLE 3 Radical right.

	<i>Israel-friendly</i>	<i>Israel-hostile</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	N (%)
<b><i>Russia-friendly</i></b>	<i>Alternative for Germany</i> (GER); <i>Freedom and Direct Democracy</i> (CZE); <i>Freedom Party of Austria</i> (AUS); <i>Greek Solution</i> (GRE); <i>Reconquest</i> (FRA)		<i>Slovenian National Party</i> (SLO)	6 (23.1)
<b><i>Russia-hostile</i></b>	<i>Conservative People's Party of Estonia</i> (EST); <i>Denmark Democrats</i> (DEN); <i>Danish People's Party</i> (DEN); <i>Enough</i> (POR); <i>Finns Party</i> (FIN); <i>JA21</i> (NED); <i>National Alliance</i> (LAT); <i>New Right</i> (DEN); <i>Slovenian Democratic Party</i> (SLO); <i>Sweden Democrats</i> (SWE); <i>We are Family</i> (SVK); <i>VOX</i> (SPA)		<i>Brothers of Italy</i> (ITA); <i>VMRO – Bulgarian National Movement</i> (BUL)	<b>14 (53.8)</b>
<b><i>Neutral</i></b>	<i>Alliance for the Union of Romanians</i> (ROM); <i>Fidesz</i> (HUN); <i>Flemish Interest</i> (BEL); <i>League</i> (ITA); <i>National Rally</i> (FRA); <i>Party for Freedom</i> (NED)			6 (23.1)
<b>N (%)</b>	<b>23 (88.5)</b>	0 (0)	3 (11.5)	26 (100)

The bold values, for N(%), express the most frequent outcome for each category.

the RRP's tend to be more *Israel-friendly* and *Russia-hostile*. We argue that a broad set of ideological and competitive incentives, which are interconnected, can explain these diverging patterns. On the one hand, we argue that it is precisely the qualitatively different ideological position towards democracy by the ER (i.e. against democracy itself, as an ideal) and the RR (i.e. against liberal democracy) that largely explains their contrasting foreign policy positions. On the other, also because of their different stance towards democracy, ERPs and RRP's have a substantially different competitive status in contemporary European party systems. ERPs are at the margins with virtually zero coalition potential and can afford to embrace potentially controversial foreign policy positions linked to ER's anti-democratic credo without the need to be overly pragmatic. RRP's, instead, are increasingly integrated into the mainstream and must find a trade-off between ideological consistency and incentive to invest in reputation to develop or consolidate their credentials as potential actors of government.

## The Extreme Right: Committed to Anti-Semitism, Anti-Westernism and Ideological Purity

The combination of *Israel-hostile* and *Russia-friendly* positions that characterize most ERPs can be primarily understood in terms of their anti-Semitism and anti-Westernism, which are in part interrelated. It is undeniable that Islamophobia is an important part of the agenda of most ERPs today; however, while they emphasize it in terms of domestic politics, in foreign policy they adopt the opposite position when the Israeli issue becomes more salient. This is due to their 'commitment' to anti-Semitism, consistent with their emphasis on maintaining a fascist heritage (Ignazi, 1992). Consequentially, ERPs can support the enemies of the Jewish state, notwithstanding that they often are radical Islamists, which they loudly oppose in domestic arenas.

However, ERPs' stances are not purely driven by the instrumental 'enemy of my enemy is my friend' logic. Some of these parties are not just sworn enemies of Israel and Jews but arguably feel ideologically close to specific political actors in the Muslim world. The West is seen as importing anti-traditionalist values and extending rights to minorities, hence acting in direct opposition to the view of a society organized around Mussolini's concept of 'god-homeland-family' or the Hitlerian idea of 'one *Volk*' that many ERPs still hold. The West is also considered to be imperialist, given that it exports and imposes these values on those opposed to them: this also applies to the very nature of the political regime, as the ER considers liberal democracy to be a 'foreign' product. Hence its main goal is its replacement with a non-democratic regime, which, in many cases, would resemble fascism and/or national socialism. The regimes in countries like Iran and Syria, and parties and movements like the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas, contest the West on very similar grounds and are thus seen as valuable 'allies'. The ER, hence, arguably does not see the Muslim world as necessarily monolithic but rather distinguishes between potential 'friends' and 'foes'.

The opposition of ERPs to the democratic ideal in general, and the Western liberal democratic order in particular, also explains why they tend to be more supportive of Putin's Russia. Putin's regime contests the West and its alleged expansionism and supports other 'friendly' regimes, like the Assad regime in Syria. Ukraine, conversely, is seen as a 'victim' of Western imperialism that only Russia can save. Moreover, considering the ER's commitment to anti-Semitism, the fact that Ukraine currently has a Jewish president might also play a role.

However, as already mentioned, Putin's rhetoric used to justify Russia's actions against Ukraine can also be at odds with the ER's ideology. Especially, the argument about a 'denazification' of Ukraine might be a hard pill to swallow for these parties. Conversely, it might be difficult for them not to sympathize with Ukrainian ER groups directly involved in the conflict, especially if they have some personal ties with these groups. This dilemma can explain a

few deviant cases in our analysis, mainly the Finnish SML and the Italian *CasaPound*, which were the only two parties adopting a *Russia-hostile* stance. In both cases, their members have directly participated in the conflict, fighting on the side of Ukraine.

Finally, there is an additional moderating factor that can help explain the hesitancy of a few important ERPs to support Russia: the troubled histories of their countries with Russia. We believe that ‘Russophobia’ can counter-balance the commitment to anti-Westernism, and therefore, explains why parties like the Polish *Confederation* and the Hungarian MH are rather reluctant to explicitly support either side of the conflict.

## The Radical Right: Committed to Islamophobia and Pragmatism

A majority of RRP combine *Israel-friendly* and *Russia-hostile* positions. While some prominent parties like the Austrian FPÖ, the French RN, or the Sweden Democrats (SD) have a problematic past in this matter, they now categorically reject anti-Semitism. This is consistent with their attempt to distance themselves from possible associations with fascism in the mind of the average voter. Perhaps to precisely avoid accusations in this sense, it has often led to becoming one of the most vocal alleged supporters of Israel and Jewish communities in their countries. Eliminating anti-Semitism is then accompanied by Islamophobia becoming the core feature (Camus & Lebourg, 2017). This is also arguably driven by tolerability of Islamophobia ‘not only on the margins of European societies but also at the centre’ (Hafez, 2014, p. 479). The strongest demonstration, in terms of foreign policy, of this ‘shift’ is a depiction of Israel as the only democracy that shares European values in the Middle East and fights against the ‘barbaric’ Islamists. Muslim countries, conversely, are argued to be a monolithic entity that directly threatens the European way of life, while Islam is seen as incompatible with democracy (see also Hafez, 2014, p. 479).

Consequentially, while for the ER its commitment to anti-Semitism trumps domestic Islamophobia in foreign policy, things are different for the RR. If there is any anti-Semitism left in RRP’s stances in domestic politics, which is rare though not completely uncommon (Shroufi, 2024; Wodak, 2018), it is usually completely abandoned in foreign policy, especially when it comes to the conflict between Israel (i.e. Jews) and Palestine (i.e. Muslims). Moreover, Israel can be seen as a valuable ‘ally’, as the support of the Jewish state can potentially help to gain the support of Jewish communities back home, or at least to avoid facing their opposition, also helping to reinforce the reputation that these parties have nothing to do with anti-Semitism. While this may again seem like a rather instrumentally chosen position, as we have noted, there is also some ideological affinity between the Israeli government and the European RR. The Italian FdI represents a somewhat deviant case, being the only major RRP that manifests a neutral stance. This peculiarity could be due to a combination of factors that make FdI almost unique in competitive terms (Zulianello, 2022): it is in power for the first time, it leads the first government dominated by the populist RR in the Western European context, and it is also a key player in contemporary EU politics. Giorgia Meloni’s party’s balanced stance could be seen as an attempt to foster its credibility as a responsible actor at both national and supra-national levels, especially considering the persisting controversies surrounding its historical background in the so-called ‘post-fascism’ (see Puleo & Piccolino, 2022).

The combination of strategic and (to a lesser extent) ideological considerations also explains the tendency towards the adoption of *Russia-hostile* positions by RRP. Especially in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine, which caught many by surprise, it was somewhat clear that the public opinion in most European countries would quickly take the side of the attacked rather than the attacker (Flash Eurobarometer, 2022). Supporting Russia, even for those parties that had previously had good relations with the Kremlin, like the Italian *League* (Lega) or the French RN, became unsustainable. Again, reputation became a crucial factor. Indeed,

it has been shown that the ‘marriage of convenience’ between the RR and Russia can lead to a quick ‘divorce’ when the context is no longer favourable (Carlotti, 2023; Makarychev & Terry, 2020). Moreover, in cases where RRP were already strongly ‘Russophobic’, like Finland or Poland, the invasion logically only exacerbated these feelings (Wondreys, 2023).

However, there are still some outlier cases in terms of RRP’s stances on Russia (and Ukraine). Indeed, although there is a clear pattern of hostility towards Russia after the invasion, the RR is more divided on this issue than on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as existing research has also demonstrated. A potential explanation for these deviations is that, like the ER, many RRP are anti-Western (Gressel, 2017). They often criticize the Western ‘liberal democratic order’ and moral decadence. Those RRP, for which this antagonism is at the core of their policy agenda, might thus find it difficult to explicitly support Ukraine because this can be interpreted as supporting the West. However, they are still more pragmatic than ERPs, and thus do not explicitly support Russia and its aggressive politics neither. This may explain the *Neutral* stance adopted by several major European RRP like the French RN, which condemned Russia’s attack but refused to go any further and thus, for instance, argued against sending weapons and money to Ukraine.

Nevertheless, a few RRP do not mind adopting *Russia-friendly* positions neither. We suggest that in their case, a strong opposition against the West is probably accompanied by an absence of ‘Russophobia’ and, conversely, presence of ‘Russophilia’ (and anti-Ukraine sentiments) in a larger part of the public opinion in their countries. Connectedly, given financial hardships stemming from sanctions against Russia and support of Ukraine, as well as increasingly negative views on Ukraine refugees, some parties can see an opportunity in adopting an explicitly opposite stance. In the Czech Republic, for instance, mass pro-Russia demonstrations, in the name of contestation of price increases caused by the sanctions, as well as attacks on Ukrainians, become common soon after Russia’s invasion. In this respect, it can be understood why the Czech *Freedom and Direct Democracy* (SPD) is one of the deviant cases in our analysis. Finally, it is worth spending a few words on Alternative for Germany (AfD), another of the few RRP that deviate from the main pattern identified by our analysis. Even though there are some internal divisions between the Eastern and Western wings of the party, the overall stance adopted by the leadership of the AfD can be classified as Russia-friendly. This position appears to be motivated, in particular, by the choice to appeal to specific group of voters: first of all East Germans (Olsen, 2018), but also Russian Germans (Spies et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS

This article fills an important gap in the literature by exploring the foreign policy of the ER and the RR, focusing on their responses to the Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine conflicts. Our analysis reveals that ERPs and RRP are similar in their choice to prioritize whom to dislike rather than whom to support. Nevertheless, there are substantial differences in their positions: a majority of ERPs combines *Israel-hostile* and *Russia-friendly* positions, while most RRP are more inclined to be *Israel-friendly* and *Russia-hostile*. For both ERPs and RRP, the positions are clearer in case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while there is more internal diversity within both ER and RR when it comes to Russia and Ukraine. Some of the factors that can explain more deviations from the pattern in the latter conflict compared to the former have been theorized in our study, and future in-depth case studies could provide additional nuance in this respect. Nevertheless, albeit not perfect, our analysis reveals clear tendencies in the positions adopted by ERPs and RRP on the two foreign policy issues.

One of the key implications of these findings is that an undifferentiated use of the umbrella term ‘far right’ to encompass both the ER and the RR can be problematic. As we have seen in our analysis of their foreign policy positions, overlooking the essential difference between the two

groups of political actors results in oversimplistic conclusions and, ultimately, creates confusion. Most notably, we argue that while ERPs and RRP share a common nativist and authoritarian core, their different orientations toward democracy have a major impact in shaping their ideological morphology on other non-core ideological positions, like foreign policy. In particular, we suggest that it is precisely this decisive ideological difference between the ER and RR (opposing democracy in principle vs. opposing liberal democracy) that provides the best explanation for our findings, in combination with the contrasting competitive incentives that ensue from it. More broadly, our findings imply that while party ideology generally matters in foreign policy (Hofmann & Martill, 2021), to fully understand how and why it matters we need to explore if and to what extent there are variations even among the actors that are often grouped into a single category. A possible limitation of our research points to the different temporal scopes of the two conflicts: our analysis necessarily covered a shorter time frame in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the 7th October 2023 terrorist attack took place more than 19 months after the Russian full-scale attack of Ukraine. Despite this caveat, our data are strong and reveal important patterns that substantially improve our knowledge of the foreign policy positions of the ER and RR.

Interestingly, our analysis also reveals that ERPs and RRP are more different from one another in their foreign policy than they are from other actors. Specifically, in the case of the ER, there are evident similarities with the radical and extreme left. They all have their lowest common denominator in anti-Zionism and share the goal to end the 'Judeo-American domination' (Wistrich, 2004), a position that can be more easily articulated from the fringes. Similarly and connectedly, in terms of their stances on Russia and Ukraine, they share the negative stance on the West, especially the USA, and the goal to stop its alleged expansionism (i.e. anti-imperialism).

RRPs, instead, are increasingly part of the mainstream party politics in many countries (Zulianello, 2020), and their foreign policy positions tend to be more similar to that of more centrist parties. This is not only to deliver the idea of responsible parties that are fit for government but also to accommodate their constituency, which is less extreme and less ideologically homogenous than the ER's. This can also potentially explain why the RR is more heterogeneous when it comes to the stances on Putin's Russia. Most notably, compared to anti-Semitism and opposition against Israel, the hesitancy to completely condemn Russia's politics is not completely uncommon for (parts of) the political mainstream in Europe (Gressel, 2017), and is perceived to be more acceptable for some Europeans.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the supplementary material of this article.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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