

Abstract

The thesis looks into the rise of right wing parties to parliaments in the European Union through conducting a comparative study between France and its Front National, Austria and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, and the Netherlands' Lijst Pim Fortuyn. These countries have seen a considerable rise in support to right wing parties that manifested itself in their ability to access the countries' parliaments in the 1990s, despite the different historical experiences since World War Two. France, which fell to the Nazis during WWII, presents itself as the country of liberty, equality and fraternity, whereas in 2002 the right wing candidate to the presidential elections Jean Marie Le Pen managed to come second place and to go directly into the second round of voting.

The Netherlands was also occupied by the Nazis, only to find that the Pim Fortuyn list has got the second place in the Dutch general elections in 2002, partially due to the assassination of the Lists leader.

Austria managed always to present itself as a victim of the Nazi regime and alienated itself from the Nazi legacy, but the success of Jurg Haider in the general elections and his party's entry into a coalition government brought past images to the surface.

The thesis defines right wing parties as the party that adopts rightist policies and racial convictions, believing that it talks in the name of the public that is not represented by interest groups, and also believes in a totalitarian form of government though not pressing for immediate change.

The thesis argues that the interaction between four factors impact the decision of the working class individuals that traditionally support right wing parties, and these are:

economic changes, attitudinal patterns, immigration, and systemic factors. During the seventies and the eighties of the past century, economic change swept over the European countries leading to the development of a post industrial society where competition between professionals reigned and the need for new skills to service the rising information technology society grew. This created a class of unskilled workers that found themselves in direct confrontation with immigrant workers for their livelihoods. These workers were not organised in pressure groups to impact government policies, and thus found refuge in right wing parties who spoke to them in their own language utilising their fear for their livelihoods and the lack of government intervention on all levels.

The thesis compares between the three parties in the three countries, focusing on party history, support groups analysis, and party leader and his impact. The comparison concludes that the parties share a history of fragmentation in its historical development till the arrival of a leader with charismatic traits to take control of things, reforming the party as an effective power on the political scene of the country.

The main conclusion presented by the thesis argues that despite the three different historical experiences of the three countries, we find that the interaction of the four factors lead to the same results where the three right wing parties where able to raise their levels of support in the society forming effective powers in their respective political scenes, and thus the European parliament. This indicates that the trend of support for right wing parties will increase after the Union's eastward expansion in 2004.