

Far Right Win In Dutch Elections Shows How Quickly The Right Is Rising In Europe



*Geert Wilders – Photo:
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Geert Wilders's election is an ominous harbinger. The hour has come for Europe to stymie the spread of the far right.

The dramatic victory of the far right provocateur Geert Wilders in the recent Dutch elections is yet another extremely worrisome sign that Europe is shredding the veil of tolerance and becoming more brazenly exclusionary. Indeed, the spread of far right radicalization across the continent signals that Europe is engulfed in a profound political, social and moral crisis.

Wilders's Party for Freedom, or PVV, which has been on a long ascent, took 37 of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber. This was 20 more seats than it won in the 2021 elections, while the other parties lost seats, making the extreme right the largest party in the national parliament. The radical left was hit the hardest, losing nearly half of its elected representatives.

Wilders's political career has been built around anti-Islam and anti-immigration

rhetoric. In fact, in 2016 he was charged with inciting hatred and discrimination against Dutch Moroccans. He always had a solid base of voter support, though it was never previously strong enough to allow him to become a power broker in Dutch politics. Obviously, the political dynamic has now changed, and Wilders is in the process of seeking possible governing coalitions. Eager to become prime minister, Wilders said he is [willing to moderate](#) his positions, but that's only because he is having a hard time luring partners to form a coalition government with his far right party.

As undoubtedly one of Europe's most blatantly racist politicians, Wilders's campaign called for an end to asylum for all refugees, the "de-Islamization" of the Netherlands and a Brexit-style referendum on the European Union (EU). He was seen as a political outsider, but pollsters got it wrong. Nonetheless, that more Dutch voters turned to Wilders's message at this point in time should not come as a surprise to anyone. Across Europe — north, south, east and west — far right parties have broken into [mainstream political consciousness](#) as many voters are fed up with establishment parties. Italians were hardly surprised when Giorgia Meloni's radical right Brothers of Italy won a clear majority in Italy's 2022 snap general election.

Once considered fringe organizations destined to political invisibility, Europe's far right movements and parties have gained ground with frustrated working-class and disappointed middle-class citizens, including youth voters. Moreover, they are having an impact as both right and center-left mainstream parties have adopted an anti-immigration stance while they push the neoliberal agenda even harder, catering to the needs and interests of the rich and the business class. The result of all this is that more voters turn to the far right as anti-immigration policies gain increased support and neoliberalism [shreds the social safety net](#) and widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The Netherlands endured 13 years of neoliberal rule led by the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD, a center-right party which promoted the interests of private enterprise and big business and paid little attention to the needs of the average citizen. A scandal over [government efforts](#) to reduce child welfare payments by subjecting thousands of low- and middle-income families to scrutiny and falsely accusing them of obtaining benefits illegally alienated a sizable segment of voters, as did the [Groningen gas affair](#), in which the authorities put gas profits before the safety of surrounding communities. Such

scandals, along with rising concerns about the cost of living and housing shortages, played a major role in the growing mistrust of the government and fueled the perception that a wind of change was needed in Dutch politics. Moreover, the VVD had decided to make immigration a key campaign issue, so one should not be surprised, as Dutch author and editor Auke van der Berg told me over email, that many voters ultimately opted to select “the original (PVV-Wilders) and not the copy.”

Naturally, Wilders’s victory stiffened other far right leaders’ resolve to carry on with their campaign against a cosmopolitan and multicultural Europe. Congratulations poured in from Hungary’s Viktor Orbán; the Italian deputy minister and leader of the extreme-right party, Matteo Salvini; and France’s Marine Le Pen. But as French Minister Bruno Le Maire [said](#) of Wilders’s election win, this was a consequence of “all the fears that are emerging in Europe” over immigration and the economy.

Indeed, while fearmongering around immigration is surely a factor behind the rise of the far right in Europe, economic issues such as declining standards of living and economic inequality may in fact be the key driver behind the spread of anti-immigration sentiments. The European Union integration project has long been seen by large segments of the continent’s citizenry as undermining national sovereignty and strengthening neoliberal economic policies harmful to the working class. Still, we can’t ignore the role racism and Islamophobia have played, as it is specifically migration flows from non-European countries that have been touted as a threat, and none more so than Muslim migration. The unjustified fear among those who are calling for tougher immigration laws, as many Dutch citizens have been doing over the years, is of Islam. The problem, for them, is that the immigrants are Muslim, not that they are immigrants. Europe welcomed Ukrainian refugees. But as [political scientist Lamis Abdelaaty said](#), “Europeans see Ukrainians as White and Christian, similar to the way that many in European countries see themselves.”

At this point, the question is not whether the far right is surging in Europe, but rather how national governments and the EU alike intend to counter fascism and far right extremism. Fear of the “Other” and the consequences of neoliberalism (economic insecurity, poverty, inequality and deteriorating living standards) are among the main causes behind the increasing public support for far right parties. Left unaddressed, and especially amid organizing conducted via the internet and

social media, hard right politics will only grow, and far right violence will likely increase. What took place recently in Dublin, where hundreds of radical right rioters [went on a rampage](#) over unconfirmed reports on social media that three children had been stabbed by an “illegal immigrant,” may be a prelude to what the future holds for Western societies unwilling to address the factors that contribute to the spread of far right ideologies.

The rising tide of the far right is terrifying and monstrous, but it’s still possible for effective resistance to interrupt this nightmare. Europe’s far right ideologues mix nationalistic and social stances, just like their predecessors did in the 1920s and 1930s. The answer to the threat they pose in the 21st century is clear: tackling the root causes of economic inequality and ensuring that no one is left behind. The return of the social state and the expansion of democracy are the best tools available for fighting fascism and far right extremism. They worked in the past and can still work today.

The far right is a menace to decent society. The hour has come for Europe to face the monsters.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/far-right-win-in-dutch-elections-shows-how-quickly-the-right-is-rising-in-europe/>

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primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).