

The Sahel Stands Up And The World Must Pay Attention



Vijay Prashad

07-10-2024 ~ On July 6 and 7, the leaders of the three main countries in Africa's Sahel region—just south of the Sahara Desert—met in Niamey, Niger, to [deepen](#) their Alliance of Sahel States (AES). This was the first summit of the three heads of state of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, who now constitute the Confederation of the AES. This was not a hasty decision, since it had been in the works since 2023 when the leaders and their associates held meetings in Bamako (Mali), Niamey (Niger), and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso); in May 2024, in Niamey, the foreign ministers of the three countries had developed the elements of the Confederation. After meeting with General Abdourahmane Tiani (Niger), foreign minister Abdoulaye Diop (Mali) [said](#) in May, “We can consider very clearly today that the Confederation of the Alliance of Sahel States is born.”

There is a straight line that runs from the formation of this Confederation to the pan-African sentiments that shaped the anti-colonial movements in the Sahel over 60 years ago (with the line from the African Democratic Rally formed in 1946 led by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and through the Sawaba party in Niger formed in 1954 and led by Djibo Bakary). In 1956, Bakary [wrote](#) that France, the old colonial ruler, needs to be told that the “overwhelming majority of the people” want their interests served and not to use the country's resources “to satisfy desires for luxury and power.” To that end, Bakary noted, “We need to grapple with our problems *by ourselves* and *for ourselves* and have the will to solve them first on our own, later with the help of others, but always taking account of our African realities.” The promise of that earlier generation was not met, largely due to France's continued interventions in preventing the political sovereignty of the

region and in tightening its grip on the monetary policy of the Sahel. But the leaders—even those who were tied to Paris—continued to try and build platforms for regional integration, including in 1970 the [Liptako-Gourma Authority](#) to develop the energy and agricultural resources in the three countries.

Departure From Subordination

The current trend emerged because of the deep [frustration](#) in these countries with a host of problems, largely associated with the interventions of France. These include: the creation of a dangerous situation of al-Qaeda militancy fostered by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's destruction of Libya (2011); the failure of the French military intervention to stem that militancy and the anger at the civilian casualties due to the French and U.S. military operations in the three countries; the use of the French exchequer to benefit from all financial transactions in the three countries; and the manipulation of anti-terrorist discourse to create an anti-migration infrastructure to benefit Europe more than Africa.

These frustrations resulted in five coup d'états in the three countries since 2020. The three leaders of the countries are all products of these coups, although they have drawn in civilian leaders to assist them. What unites them personally is that two of them are very young (Assimi Goïta of Mali was born in 1983, while Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso was born in 1988), all of them have had military careers, each of them seems to be informed by the frustrations against the French that they share with each other and with their populations, and none of them has any patience for the pro-Western "stability" politics of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In January 2024, the AES states [said](#) that they would not seek to rejoin ECOWAS after their expulsions over the past few years. "Under the influence of foreign powers and betraying its founding principles," the AES leaders said, ECOWAS "has become a threat to member states and peoples." ECOWAS was founded in 1975 as part of the pan-African dynamic and in close association with the Organization of African States (OAS), set up under the leadership of Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah in 1963. ECOWAS expelled the three Sahel countries because of the military coups, when in fact ECOWAS itself was the product of several military Generals who ran their countries (such as Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon, Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma, and Ghana's Ignatius Kutu Acheampong). At the founding of ECOWAS, General Acheampong [said](#), "The major purpose of the

formation of the community was to remove centuries of division and artificial barriers imposed on West Africa from outside, and to recreate together the kind of homogeneous society which existed before the colonialists invaded our shores.” At the Niamey summit to create the Confederation, the leaders said that they would no longer want to return to ECOWAS even though they have laid out plans for transitions to civilian rule.

Economics of the Confederation

In his powerful [speech](#) at the closing of the AES summit, Burkina Faso’s Traoré said that the “imperialists see Africa as an empire of slaves” and that they believe that “Africans belong to them, our lands belong to them, our subsoils belong to them.” Niger’s uranium lights up Europe, he said, but its own streets remain dark. This, Traoré noted, has to change. At the summit, agreements were made to allow for the free movement of people and goods, to create a stabilization fund in place of dependence upon the International Monetary Fund, and to develop an investment bank rather than rely upon the World Bank.

In February 2024, the UN Development Program (UNDP) [released](#) the *Sahel Human Development Report 2023*, which noted the immense wealth of the region that sits alongside the poverty of its people. These countries are blessed with reserves of gold and uranium, lithium and diamonds, but it is largely Western multinational mining companies that have been leeching the profits, [including](#) through illicit accounting practices. The UNDP report notes that the Sahel has “one of the world’s highest solar production capacities—13.9 billion kWh/y compared to the total global consumption of 20 billion kWh/y,” while the World Economic Forum [notes](#) that the region is capable of earning hundreds of billions of dollars from the export of health foods produced in the Great Green Wall that runs from Senegal to Ethiopia (such as Balanites, Baobab, Moringa, and Shea). These are untapped potentials for the people of the region.

In 1956, Niger’s Bakary had written that the people of Sahel needed to fix their problems by themselves and for themselves. In November 2023, the government of Mali hosted a [meeting](#) of ministers of the economy from the three countries along with experts from the region. They spent three days developing innovative projects in common. But none of this can advance, they said, in the context of the sanctions placed on them by their neighbors in ECOWAS. Sixty-three years after independence, [said](#) Niger’s Minister of Finance Boubacar Saïdou Moumouni “our countries are still seeking true independence.” This journey into the

Confederation is one step in that process.

By Vijay Prashad

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Source: Globetrotter

Photographers' (Grand) Daughter



Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

Photography played a central role in the life of my family when I was growing up in Curaçao. This was certainly not the case for most others in the nineteen fifties and early sixties as it is today, when everyone carries a camera in their pocket and visual culture dominates our life. Then it was a matter of privilege that not many had.

Paíto, as we called my maternal grandfather Benjamin Gomes Casseres, began to photograph as a young man before 1910, and continued to do so throughout his life. Undoubtedly, he had the time and resources to devote himself to his passion of black and white photography. His many photo albums attest to his outstanding talent as an artist.

As the co-owner of a local camera store, my father, Frank Mendes Chumaceiro, and my mother, Tita Mendes Chumaceiro, had access to the latest equipment, allowing my father to become a pioneering cinematographer on the island, while my mother took color slides, having shifted her artistic talents from painting to photography. Through the years, she won many prizes with her color slides, and her photos of the island's different flowers were chosen for a series of stamps of the Netherlands Antilles in 1955.

Together, my parents edited my father's films into documentaries with

soundtracks of music and narration and graphically designed titles and credits. Sometimes these films were commissioned by various organizations and government institutions, including the documentation of visits by members of the Dutch royal family. Movie screenings were regularly held in our living room and at the houses of family and friends who would invite my parents to show their work, as well as at some public events. That was our entertainment in the nineteen fifties, long before television came to the island.

Both my brother Fred and I owned simple box cameras from a young age, working up to SLR cameras as we grew older. Still, I did not take photography seriously as an art until the digital age, when I began to feel I could finally have more control over my output. That was in 2005, when I got my first digital point- and-shoot camera, gradually professionalizing my equipment through the years.



My father and mother with their cameras on top of the Christoffel, 1956, photographer unknown



It was only recently that I began to think about the many ways my rich photographic lineage impacted my life and the directions I have taken as an artist, how it has influenced the development of my own photography. I have discerned six ways that account for this influence by my background - ranging from the circumstances in which the photographs were produced and viewed, to the attitudes that underlie the practice of photography as an art.

A. A treasure trove of photographs

Countless photo albums could be found in our home in Curaçao, with photos by both my parents in their younger years, and later by my brother and me.

After Paíto died in 1955, my mother inherited his albums with family photos, as well as albums with larger prints of his more artistic photographs. Paíto's family albums documented his leaving Curaçao for Cuba with my grandmother in 1912, where he joined another member of the Curaçao Sephardic Jewish community in buying a sugar cane plantation, which seemed a good business opportunity that also sparked his adventurous spirit.

My mother, Tita, her sister Luisa, and their much younger brother Charlie were born in Havanna. Paíto took their photos from infancy through their teenage years, mostly studio photos often printed in sepia, with the children dressed up for costume parties and other special occasions, posing with their toys and bicycles and with their friends. Paíto would set up his studio in a closed balcony in their house in Havanna with special lighting and curtains or a large painting of a landscape in the background.

The albums also contain photos of their excursions to the beach, where the children learned to swim at an early age, unlike their Curaçao agemates of the same social class, as well as many photographs of trips to the sugar cane plantation, a day's train ride from Havana, showing various stages of sugar cane growth and sugar production. With the fall of sugar prices in the twenties, the family was forced to move to a small town much closer to the plantation, where life would be less expensive. Those were exciting years for my mother, when they would play tennis on an improvised court, and ride horses into the fields - years that laid the foundation for her love of nature.

In 1929 my grandparents, returned to Curaçao with their Cuban-born children - totally bankrupt. With the help of his extended Curaçao family, my grandfather was able to establish himself again in business. Here he continued to photograph - landscapes and people in the Curaçao countryside, and especially his grandchildren playing in the yard of their house in Scharloo, as well on his photographic excursions in nature.

The many photo albums in our house encouraged the ritual of listening to our family members' stories, to imagine growing up in a different country. In today's era of digital photography and especially after the cellphone camera came into popular use, every event in life is recorded, and immediately shared on social media. But do we preserve these photographs? Do they remain for others to see, in later generations? Do we view them together, telling their stories?

I am fortunate to have grown up with such a wealth of photographs to document our family history, to bring back memories that have strengthened my sense of who I am, that have fostered a sense of security and connection to the past and to a loving family. It is a sense of grounding. Clearly, many others who grew up in less secure material and emotional circumstances, did not have the same visual record of their families and of their own early years, especially people whose lives were uprooted and had to flee, leaving all visual relics behind.

B. The photographic excursion

The many Sunday trips with Païto to the Curaçao countryside were what planted the seeds of my own spirit of exploration in nature. He took photos of us, his grandchildren, climbing heaps of salt mined from the island's saltpans or resting under the huge mango or coconut trees in the shady groves. On these trips Païto

also took photos of old abandoned plantation houses, the ruins of cisterns or stone bridges from the times of slavery, and of the North Coast where the wild sea would splash against the rocks.



*Photograph by Benjamin Gomes
Casseres*

Access to many of the island's most beautiful places indeed depended on privilege - to have the right connections to people who owned private plantations, to get permission to enter what was private property and closed to most of the island's population, often due to racial discrimination. All that, added to the fact that photography in those years was an expensive undertaking, and many could not afford the equipment, the development, and printing of the exposed film.

Owning a car that allowed one to travel on the dirt roads outside the city was also a question of financial privilege. Paíto had a chauffeur who drove his shiny black car and who would clean off the dust and mud when he returned. I don't remember if Paíto drove himself within the city, but on these excursions, it was Marty, the chauffeur who did the driving, allowing Paíto to fully concentrate on his photography and not to worry about losing the way or getting stuck on the bumpy country roads.

Our photographic excursions continued with my own parents, when they made documentary films about the island, while my mother would take her beautiful color slides. Particularly the nature film "*Rots en Water*" in 1956, took us to many wild places on the island - to climb the Christoffel for the first time, the highest

hill on the island, before there was a park that laid easier access roads; to explore the cave of Hato with a guide carrying a torch of a dried datu organ-pipe cactus; and to visit the eastern tip of the island, where few would get permission to enter.

My own love of the countryside led to my becoming an avid hiker, going on treks especially in the deserts of Israel, where I moved after attending college in the US. It was while hiking that I started to photograph more seriously, as an art. I was excited to discover how framing through the lens allowed me to penetrate deeper into the landscape, into the textures of the rocks, the interstices between them, as I sought abstractions and a sense of place.

C. Being the subject of the photograph

I was the only girl among Paíto's four grandchildren. He loved to say, in Spanish, "*tres varones y una hembra*", three males and one female, terms that refer to the gender of animals but were clearly meant in an affectionate way and made me feel special. His fourth grandson was born just a month after his death and was named after him.



*Photograph of me, by
Benjamin Gomes
Casseres, around 1952*

As the only girl, I was his favorite subject. Perhaps also because I was always a calm and introverted child, able to concentrate on what I was doing without being

aware of his photographing me. He did not have to ask me to pose, which might have been annoying. He captured so many different faces of me – pensive, deep in thought, playful and mischievous, or bursting out with joy – as if he could see deep inside me. Through his photographs, I came to know myself.

The attention I got from being photographed so frequently gave me a sense of being loved, being special. That feeling was strengthened by the home movies that my parents took of me dancing my improvisations to the records playing on our gramophone, and of my brother and I riding our bikes in the yard, walking on stilts, or acrobatically climbing between two walls in a narrow passage. Seeing those movies through the years reminded us of that love, while also shaping our memories of childhood.



Photograph of me, by
Benjamin Gomes
Casseres, around 1952

D. Understanding Photography as Art

In the summer of 2006, only a few months before my uncle Charlie died, I interviewed him about Paíto's photographic practice. He made a drawing of the camera Paíto used in his earlier years as a photographer, the Graflex – a pioneering camera with extension bellows. Paíto would send his photos to be developed in a laboratory in England and he drew lines on the contact prints, indicating where they should be cropped, then sent them back to England with the negatives to be enlarged. Long before Photoshop, he would ask the laboratory

to add a sky from a different photo to one of his landscapes. It must have taken a very long time to get the finished photos when mail was mostly carried by ship across the Atlantic.

Paíto's photographs were admired immensely, though I am not sure if anyone else who was not a family member or friend would see them, as his photographs were never part of a public exhibit - they were in family photo albums, to be viewed only in intimate circumstances. I do not even remember seeing them framed on the wall. Paíto was known in our circles, the Sephardic Jewish community, as one who photographed beautifully - though I am not sure if he was referred to as an "artist". I always understood his work was different from the snapshots that others made, I could tell there was a lot more to these black and white photographs that were carefully composed, beautifully capturing a different era, mystery, serenity, and longing.



Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

As a child, I would observe how he worked with depth and devotion - never cutting corners. I noticed his patience, measuring light with an external light meter, figuring out the exposures, choosing the right angle, waiting for the sun to come out from behind the clouds. It was not a question of capturing the moment - but of looking deeper and further into a place and time - all for just one final image. Then he would select the best shots from his many prints, pasting them in his albums, after carefully drawing guidelines on the pages.

I must have understood at an early age, that is how you do art. That this is the seriousness with which the artist works. I am also one who goes through a long process to arrive at the final work, though I don't believe I have the patience and sense of perfection he had.

Perhaps I also developed a feel for composition by looking at his photographs, intuitively understanding what made them special, as well as how he captured a feeling of mystery, space and distance in his work. I certainly noticed his subject matter - a romantic preference for remnants of the past, old plantation houses, ruins of forts and towers, a lonely house in the fields, the peaceful atmosphere in the old groves of tall, shady trees - the *hòfis* - that he set as the goal of his

excursions, ships sailing away into the distance, as well as his attraction to the old crafts, trades and festivals that were slowly disappearing from the island.

E. Witnessing teamwork



My parents' editing setup - photo by Frank M. Chumaceiro

My parents started out by making family films and went on to create a large body of mostly documentary films. Their studio was in our living room and study, complete with editing machine, sound equipment, projector, and portable screen. They were assisted by the writer Sini van Iterson in their very early days and later by others, most notably Jan Doedel as narrator and sound technician.

"Curafilms" is what they called their joint venture. The titles always said: *"by Frank and Tita M. Chumaceiro"*, without specifying the functions of director, cinematographer, editor, art director, sound designer. Though it was my father who held the film camera and physically spliced the film in the editing machine on the desk in his study, my mother was a full participant in all the stages of production - sharing her creative insights; scouting locations; discussing the editing options and coming up with new ideas. To have parents doing creative work, and especially when they do it together, was not the norm in the environment I grew up in.

In many ways it was also a project of the entire family, as our parents always shared their ideas with us, and most of the time, we participated in the search for locations and were present at the filming of the movies that involved excursions

to lesser-known places of the island. Even when I was still in elementary school, they would share their thoughts about the making of each film with us, and we were there to watch the film-in-progress when they projected it its various stages on the screen in our living room. However, when they worked at night, we had to go to sleep, and I was upset I could not be part of the action.

I learned from my parents the benefits and pleasures of teamwork, even though I am a loner, preferring to do all the work by myself, not because I need to get all the credit, but rather out of a need to be self-sufficient. When I was a curator, and the director of the Antea Gallery for feminist art that I founded in Jerusalem, together with another artist, Nomi Tannhauser, I worked closely with the artists we exhibited, as well as with other curators, when it was a co-curated exhibit. There is a tremendous joy in working together, inspiring each other, and the feeling of satisfaction in completing a shared project, when the finished work is more important than the ego.



Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

F. The photographer as both outsider and insider

Studying Paíto's photographs, I realize that what made them so remarkable is that he saw beyond the familiar, exploring the boundaries of what is seen with the eyes, what it means, what it evokes, seeking to see the aura of his subject.

It is an act of looking deeper and further into space and time. In his photographs of ruins and relics he conjures a whole era that once was and is no more; in his closeups he penetrates deeper into the details of what is; and in photos of his landscapes and those of the ships he loved to photograph, he looks out into the distance, past the horizon.

The act of photographing required him to take a step back, to look from the outside, at a distance, with the attitude of the outsider. But the photographic act also required him to penetrate beyond the surface, to have the intimacy of the insider, to look lovingly, to acknowledge the other as a subject. In other words, his photography shows that he was both insider and outsider.

With this realization of the outsider/insider stance that is inherent in the practice of my grandfather's photography, I have come to better understand my own relation to the medium, being myself both an insider and outsider to my native Curaçao, which I left in 1965, and where I return only as a visitor.

I arrive at the island with the eyes of the outsider - even being a bit of an outsider as I was growing up - but with an insider's familiarity. I am searching for something - perhaps of the past, perhaps of the hidden secrets that eluded me as a child yet continue to fascinate me today. As I photograph the island, I deepen my vision as outsider/insider as I develop my art, seeking to look beyond the

surface, into the interstices, deep into the unconscious - thankful for everything my photographic lineage has given me.



Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

Jerusalem, May 21, 2024

For my own photographs, see www.ritamendesflohr.com

PVV Blog 10 ~ The Ideology Of The PVV (Party for Freedom) In Practice



With the arrival of the new Dutch cabinet under prime minister Schoof, we will witness the ideology of the PVV put into practice. How will the ideas of the PVV be realized in daily policy?

We previously started this series under the name “*The PVV in Power and Muslims*” and in this ‘new’ series, the focus will again be on the Muslim community in the Netherlands and the effects of PVV policy on them. However, it doesn’t really matter what the series is called, as every decision and action by PVV powerholders always has negative effects on Muslims, migrants, and anyone who is not Dutch.

Today, the kickoff: about the government statement and the subsequent debate.

The ‘Rule of Law Paper’

The Debate

Political enthusiasts likely followed [the debate](#) that ensued after the government statement of the Schoof cabinet on Thursday, July 4, with cringing toes, raised eyebrows, clenched buttocks, pricked ears, and weary eyes. The opposition rose up against PVV ministers

Marjolein Faber and Reinette Klever due to their statements about “replacement” and the wearing of headscarves. The opposition parties were outraged, arguing that the two mentioned PVV ministers, with their statements, had already violated

the unity of cabinet policy on day one. Prime Minister Schoof responded by asserting that his cabinet was there for all Dutch citizens, and, to emphasize his point, he looked at Labour - Green Left Party [MP Lahlah](#), who wears a headscarf, and declared that he saw a person who is one of us.

On Paper, Everything is Correct

What is the issue here? Well, columnist Sita Sitalising articulated it strongly in the Dutch newspaper [De Volkskrant](#) on Saturday, July 6. Everyone is lulled into complacency by the fact that the entire team of ministers, including the PVV officials, as well as the leaders of PVV and its coalition partners VVD, NSC, and BBB, have signed [a document](#) declaring their adherence to the principles of the rule of law and democracy. This paper reality is something the prime minister never fails to emphasize: "My team is there for everyone, and we all adhere to democratic rules." As everyone knows, paper is patient, but the law, also written on paper, exists precisely to indicate how to act when someone breaks the rules. The document signed by the cabinet and coalition parties is a kind of law: it comes into effect because we can assume that the rules will be broken. After all, if there are no violations, there is no need for a law.

Reduce it 'a bit'

In the debate, the following discussion took place. DENK (Islamic party) MP Stefan van Baarle told Wilders, "Those people in djellabas, that Islamic butcher, that is the Netherlands. That belongs to the Netherlands. Get used to it, I say to Mr. Wilders." Wilders, however, responded, "We have gone too far. People are rightly worried about it (i.e. foreigners living in the cities; he said earlier). And I say: guys, we can't handle it anymore. We need to reduce it a bit. That is finally going to happen now. That's really good." The attentive listener hears Wilders use the word 'reduce', albeit 'a bit', but still reducing, and in this fragment, he means to say that he looks forward to 'people who feel strange in their own neighborhood and city' feeling at home again because 'reducing that is going to happen now' and 'that's really good.'

The House paid little attention to these words, especially not the leaders of the other coalition parties, nor the prime minister. This, despite these words being a violation of the solemnly signed rule of law document. After all, does 'reducing'; not mean an ethnic cleansing of the neighborhood and city?

Football match Turkey-Netherlands

And there were more violations of the document of the rule of law by the leader of the largest party. On Saturday, July 6, the European Championship football match between Turkey and the

Netherlands took place, with the Netherlands winning. Wilders posted [this tweet](#) online, and this was the text: ‘They curse us and hate us. Leave for Turkey, no one is forcing you to stay here!’

This is why the PVV is the largest party in the Netherlands. Legally, this statement is undoubtedly allowed in light of freedom of speech, but morally it stands in stark contrast to the rule of law document also signed by Wilders, which has already been degraded to a rag.

Patriots for Europe

[Another action](#) Wilders took was aligning his party with the new group in the European Parliament, ‘Patriots for Europe,’ an initiative of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This

group consists of similar parties to the PVV, with Orbán’s Fidesz party being the most prominent. Orbán has reduced his country to the democratic pariah of Europe, and one of his first actions,

now that Hungary holds the EU presidency for this half-year, was to visit Russian President Vladimir Putin: [My goal was to open the channels of direct communication and start a dialogue](#)

on the shortest road to #peace ,said Orbán, whom I consider a useful idiot who has likely never signed a ‘rule of law document’. Meanwhile, Dutch Defense Minister Brekelmans (VVD) and Foreign Minister Veldkamp (NSC) visited Kyiv around the same time to support Ukraine: the new Dutch cabinet continues to back the country. But how credible is that when the now most powerful man in the Netherlands aligns himself even more closely with Putin’s friend Orbán?

What does the rule of law document say about this?

Use the ‘Rule of Law Paper’ Against the Cabinet

The opposition would do well to challenge this cabinet primarily on ideological grounds: address the ideological principles underpinning its actions; do not attack the individual PVV ministers

personally, as that is ineffective. Confront the government with the ‘rule of law paper’ knowing that it functions like a law and also knowing that laws exist because they are broken. The prime minister still believes in the paper, but we now know better (and perhaps he does too), and the more often the paper is

violated, the greater the pressure on the other coalition parties, aside from the PVV, to ideologically expose the PVV faction. For my part, I will continue to do this in this series, and I fear there will be many more parts to come.

[*The debate about the government statement \(it only takes 11 h and 54 min\)*](#)

See: <https://rozenbergquarterly.com/pvv-blog-introduction>

Neoliberalism Fueled Far Right Win In First Round Of France's Snap Election



C.J. Polychroniou

07-04-2024 ~ *The far right led in the first round of France's parliamentary elections. The second round takes place July 7.*

President Emmanuel Macron's risky gamble to call a snap legislative election after his party suffered a humiliating defeat at the European Parliament elections on June 6-9 did not pay off. In fact, it backfired in a big way as voters, who turned out in [record numbers](#), abandoned the center and cast their ballot for the far right and the left-wing parties that came together to form a new "Popular Front." But arrogance, such as ripping up labor law and making it easier for companies to fire

employees, has defined Macron's long-term tenure in power (he won office in 2017 and was reelected in 2022) and his political legacy will be as the president who made the far right National Rally the dominant French political party, opening the path that would lead the fascists to power.

Marine Le Pen's far right National Rally (RN) party came first in the first round of France's parliamentary elections by securing 33.1 percent of the vote. The leftist New Popular Front (NPF) followed in second place with 27.99 percent, while Macron's center-right Ensemble alliance came third with just 20.76 percent of the vote. RN did not cross the 289-seat mark for an absolute majority, but as Macron's prime minister Gabriel Attal said, noting the obvious, the far right is now "[at the gates of power](#)" and the second round will indeed be decisive.

According to France's complicated political system, if no candidate reaches 50 percent in the first round, the top two finishers automatically qualify for the second round, as well as those with over 12.5 percent. Thus, the second voting round, which takes place on July 7, will be a three-way contest, and this will work to the advantage of RN. But indicative of the fear that has spread across the rest of the political spectrum of the prospect of a far right government taking power in Paris, [Gabriel Attal](#) said that candidates from the Ensemble alliance that qualify for the second round but have no chance of winning will be withdrawn so as to give non RN candidates the best chance to win, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the veteran leftist who leads the NPF, will withdraw all its candidates who placed third in the first round. The strategy is to block RN from gaining any more votes. Even the European Trade Union Confederation chairperson called for a "blockade" of the far right.

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the first round's results are nothing short of historic. This is the first time that the far right has won the first round of a French parliamentary election and the prospect of the 28-year-old RN party leader [Jordan Bardella](#) being installed as prime minister looms quite large. Indeed, RN is projected to win between 230 and 280 seats once the run-off election is over, a huge bump from the 88 that it had before the National Assembly was dissolved by president Macron on June 9.

Macron is expected to stay on as president until his term expires in 2027, so France will experience yet again one of its political cohabitation moments. The last time France had a divided government was under conservative president

Jacques Chirac, with socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin, from 1997 to 2002. The two men clashed openly many times on domestic issues, especially around combatting unemployment. The second round will likely yield a forced “cohabitation” between Macron and a prime minister from another political tendency, so the risk of political paralysis should not be underestimated as the government will surely seek to implement policies that conflict with the president’s plans.

The critical question here is this: How could a party that is a “political heir” of the Vichy regime (i.e., the French government that ruled in collaboration with the Nazis during the occupation) become so popular to the point of becoming the dominant French party? After all, France has a grim colonial legacy but is also a country with long-established progressive values and traditions (for example, unlike in the U.S., in France there were never laws prohibiting interracial marriage, even back in the 18th and 19th centuries) and a rich history of revolutionary politics.

Up until a few decades ago, the far right was a political pariah in France as it was widely regarded to be a danger to democracy. In 1973, the National Front (FN), which was founded a year earlier by Marine Le Pen’s father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and presented itself as an ultranationalist, anti-communist and xenophobic movement, garnered less than 1 percent of the vote. Back then, the French public would not tolerate an apologist of French colonialism and someone who insisted on the rehabilitation of the Collaborationists. Accordingly, even nearly a decade later, Jean-Marie Le Pen failed to secure enough support from elected officials to run for the presidential election of 1981.

Nonetheless, slowly but gradually, and thanks to deteriorating socioeconomic conditions under President Francois Mitterrand who by 1983 had made a radical neoliberal U-turn and subsequently abandoned his previous commitment to a break with capitalism, the National Front began to make inroads into mainstream French politics, and in 1986 gained its first seats (35 in total) in the National Assembly by winning [9.65 percent](#) of the votes. The party’s electoral success in the 1986 legislative election was also helped by the change made in 1985 by President Mitterrand in the French electoral system from a plurality voting system to a party-list proportional representation system, which made it easier for smaller parties like the National Front to win seats in legislative bodies.

In addition, Mitterrand had also relaxed immigration policy, which led to a substantial increase of immigrants from North Africa, a development that Jean-Marie Le Pen fully exploited. Fearmongering about Islam and Muslim immigrants became one of National Front's main political priorities, helping Le Pen to win 14.4 percent of the votes in the 1988 presidential election.

In the 2002 presidential election, Le Pen won 16.9 percent of the votes, enough to qualify for a second round of voting. However, this sent shockwaves across French society and sparked a massive anti-FN mobilization. Right, center-right and left politicians came together in order to block Le Pen from winning the second round. Moreover, in one of the largest turnouts on [May Day](#), an estimated 1 million people took part in anti-Le Pen protests across the country. On May 5, Chirac won 80 percent of the vote in the run-off.

In 2007, Le Pen felt confident about that year's presidential election, especially after he had seen his approval rating in public polls increase after the [2005 riots](#), but he finished fourth with 10.4 percent of the vote. This was the FN's weakest showing in a legislative election in over twenty years, and it was not simply because of the criminal investigation that the French authorities had launched against Le Pen two years earlier for [antisemitic comments](#) he had made about the Nazi occupation of France during World War II; it was due mainly to the fact that Sarkozy had run on a hard-right campaign based around "law and order" and immigration. In other words, Sarkozy had "[stolen Le Pen's clothes](#)" in his campaign and effectively made the far right's program and rhetoric integral components of the mainstream right.

In 2011, the National Front's leadership was transferred to Marine Le Pen, who renamed it the National Rally in 2018. She said that the party had evolved and that it had left behind her father's racist and fascist ideology. In fact, she had [expelled](#) her father from the party in August 2015 after he had reiterated his comments about the Nazi gas chambers. But identity built around the idea of the nation remains at the core of the RN's ideological framework and the obsession with immigration is still there. Nonetheless, Marine Le Pen has succeeded where her father failed, which is to normalize the vision and politics of the far right, by basically turning down the volume and by also doing impressive ideological somersaults such as her 2017 promise to take France out of the eurozone. And shortly after Steve Bannon spoke at the National Rally congress in 2018, in which he told the audience to wear as a badge of honor the charge that they are racists,

Le Pen distanced herself from Donald Trump's former aide by describing him as an American, not European, with no role to play in the battle to ["save Europe."](#)

But none of these image management tactics would be working if it wasn't for the appeal that Marine Le Pen's plans for the economy have for a broad audience. For starters, she opposes free trade and globalization and vows to turn the page on Macronism on key issues and policies which are unpopular with voters, such as labor market reforms and raising the retirement age from 62 to 64. Le Pen champions public services — for French citizens — and presents herself as a protector of workers and farmers. But with regard to nationality and immigration, RN's policy objectives haven't really changed since the days of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front: French nationality will be restricted to blood, migrants will be stripped of social benefits, undocumented migrants will be deported, and immigration levels will be cut dramatically.

Le Pen pairs her attacks on immigrants' rights with an economic vision for France that seeks to transcend the traditional left-right divide on economic policies, and findings before the election showed that [French voters trust RN more than any other party](#) when it comes to running the economy. It should not be surprising, therefore, that support for RN in the first round of the snap election surged ["in nearly every city, town and village in France."](#)

Of course, counting on Marine Le Pen to turn her plans for the economy into actual policies in the event that RN forms a government is a risky proposition. [Jean-Philippe Tanguy](#), head of RN's economic policy, has already gone on record promising fiscal discipline and a pro-business stance. Fascism is a form of capitalism, and fascists have always had a cozy relationship with big business.

Be that as it may, there is hardly any doubt that Macron's neoliberalism has been the key factor behind the electoral success of RN in the first round of the snap election and in the actual legitimization of the program of the extreme right. Macron embraced neoliberalism with untamed passion once he became president. Not only that, but he adopted authoritarian politics (such as using constitutional tricks for bypassing the power of the parliament) for the implementation of his unpopular policies and even [banned protests](#) and authorized the use of state violence against protesters to the point that made fascism the next logical step. At the same time, Macron and his inner circle have gone to extreme lengths to [demonize the left](#) (which, incidentally, faced accusations of antisemitism during

the campaign on account of some problematic remarks made by Jean-Luc Mélenchon), yet they begged the left to protect democracy from the surge of the far right.

It is unclear how the General Assembly will be shaped before the second round of voting has been completed. What is clear is that the Macron era is over, as his hold on domestic policy will be severely diminished with a prime minister from the opposition in government. We can also say with a degree of confidence that what lies ahead for French politics, with far-reaching effects across Europe and even other parts of the globe, is a war between the left and the far right. And in such momentous political moments, one has to take sides. As historian Howard Zinn, who had a fondness for French radical politics, used to say: “One can’t be neutral on a moving train.”

The New Popular Front, a coalition of left-wing parties that includes Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s France Unbowed, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Greens, has an ambitious economic program that if implemented, will put an end to the dominance of neoliberal orthodoxy in France. Among other things, it calls for raising the monthly minimum wage to 1,600 euros (from 1,398 euros), imposing price ceilings on all basic necessities, investing massively in the green transition and public services, and lowering the retirement age to 60. It’s a [realistic agenda](#). While in opposition, NPF is expected to play a crucial role in limiting the damage of a far-right government. With labor unions as allies, strikes will undoubtedly become the primary tool used by NPF to send a message to the government that no decisions that harm workers will be accepted as *fait accompli*.

In sum, any way you slice it, NPF is the political force most likely to halt the right-wing lurch in French politics.

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The Growing Weaponization Of Open-Source Information



*John P. Ruehl -
Independent Media
institute*

07-04-2024 ~ *Open-source information and intelligence are fueling global*

participation in the war in Ukraine and other global hotspots, changing how the private sector, the public, and governments influence conflicts.

[Within a day](#) of the June 2, 2024, release of a video documenting the abuse of prisoners of war by a Russian soldier in Ukraine, open-source intelligence (OSINT) researchers had identified the Russian citizen and his involvement in Ukraine going back a decade. [Ukrainian officials subsequently sent letters](#) to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations to document the abuse for potential use in a future criminal trial.

This case is just one example of how OSINT is influencing the war in Ukraine. Online platforms have allowed citizens to broadcast updates to the world, democratizing information and intelligence dissemination. Powerful commercial satellites enable both sides to constantly detect troop and vehicle movements, while [georeferencing](#) allows internet users to pinpoint targets through photos and videos. Additionally, social media analysis can track public sentiment and propaganda efforts, providing crucial local and international insights into the psychological nature of the war.

Though the Russia-Ukraine war has shown the latest innovations in wartime OSINT, online platforms and global technologies have [increased](#) public involvement in conflicts for years recently. OSINT is being used to shape perceptions of wars, aid in military operations, provide insight into military performances, and expose wrongdoing. Driven by innovations from the private sector, the public, and governments, the growth of OSINT is expected to pose increasing risks to [national security](#) and personal privacy.

Foreign maps, news, and propaganda sources have been gathered for centuries to gain insights into the capabilities, preparedness, and strategies of foreign militaries. However, the establishment of the [BBC Monitoring Service](#) in 1939 marked a major application of OSINT centralization to gather information about World War II. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. created the [Research and Analysis Branch](#) to serve a similar purpose, and as the information age has rapidly progressed since then, OSINT has evolved into a crucial element of modern conflicts.

While [Publicly Available Information \(PAI\)](#) makes up part of OSINT, it also [includes](#) commercial data that can be bought or obtained, data about network

functions, and algorithms to organize information. Additionally, [effective OSINT usage](#) depends on access to data sources, the effectiveness of storing and organizing the data, and reliable and constructive communication to share and debate the findings. Today, individuals thousands of miles away from the front lines play major roles in the fighting, planning, and perception of conflicts, with governments and private actors similarly seeking to exploit OSINT in their own ways.

The Russia-Ukraine War continues to show the critical role of OSINT in modern conflict, building on its application in Ukraine over the past decade. Investigative journalism group Bellingcat used OSINT [to expose Russia's involvement](#) in the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine and [released another report](#) in 2016 documenting Russian artillery attacks against Ukraine. Additionally, OSINT researchers were able to [unmask the identities](#) of numerous Russians working for private military and security companies operating in Ukraine from 2014 onward.

In the weeks leading up to the 2022 Russian invasion, organizations like Conflict Observatory [amassed large amounts of public and commercially available data](#) to help identify potential targets and attack points by Russian forces. Hours before Russian forces rolled across the border, Jeffrey Lewis of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies used [traffic reports on Google Maps in Russia to indicate](#) Russian action was imminent. Some of the first images of the invasion then came from [civilians livestreaming](#) Russian tanks crossing the border.

Since the start of the invasion, OSINT has increasingly favored Ukraine. Social media posts featuring vehicle license plates [helped researchers](#) determine what types of military vehicles Russia had deployed and where. Viral images and videos of large numbers of destroyed Russian vehicles [helped convince Western countries](#) to support more aid to Ukraine, together with other OSINT that has helped [expose potential war crimes](#), [debunk Russian claims](#), and [identify war criminals](#). Meanwhile, Russia banned U.S. social media platforms shortly after the war began, limiting the ability of Russian internet users to coordinate, disrupt, and influence discussions on major global platforms.

Cross-referencing Google Street View photos, viral images and videos, and [public satellite data](#), online researchers have tracked Russian missile launchers. [Commercial satellites have helped provide damage assessments of Ukrainian](#)

[attacks on](#) Russian air bases. Russian soldiers have been targeted through their phones and fitness trackers after connecting to [Ukraine's telecoms network](#), [dating apps](#), [geotagged social media posts](#), and other smartphone features, [resulting in fatalities](#).

A web scraping website, [Call Russia](#), meanwhile collects publicly available data on Russian citizens and allows Russian speakers from around the world to call and talk to them about the war. OSINT relating to the war has also spread to Europe. Bellingcat used OSINT to identify a Russian spy with a fake identity [working in Italy](#) in 2022, and Ukrainian OSINT group Molnar subsequently unmasked 167 Russian spies working across Europe [in 2023](#).

Governments were quick to recognize the utility of OSINT in the war and organize it effectively. The U.S. State Department gave immediate [support to the Conflict Observatory](#), and Europol [launched an OSINT](#) task force to assist in investigating Russian war crimes. The Ukrainian government [created an app](#) for citizens to provide information on military movements and illegal activities, and Ukrainian citizens [have been able to direct Ukrainian attacks](#) on Russian positions through their phones.

Nonetheless, Russia has enjoyed some balance in OSINT's application throughout the war. Various [sources](#) use OSINT to document Russian and Ukrainian military equipment losses, as well as [update daily maps](#) that [document troop movements and changes](#) to the frontline. Chatbots continuously scour the internet for data and update receivers with real-time OSINT analysis to identify and alert [soldiers to potentially valuable information](#). U.S. satellite companies are also suspected of [providing images to Russian forces](#), resulting in damaging and deadly attacks that show the vulnerabilities of the West's more open business and internet standards.

Other recent conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, have seen extensive use of OSINT. Throughout the Syrian Civil War, the [Live Universal Awareness Map](#) has primarily used social media posts to map current military movements, unrest, destruction, and violence. [In 2016](#), social media users combed through satellite data and located a terrorist camp in the Syrian desert, which was bombed by Russian forces [hours later](#).

OSINT serves as a force equalizer for militant groups with limited access to advanced technologies, and they have [drastically increased](#) their use of OSINT in

the 21st century. Since the start of the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen's civil war in 2015, Houthi militants have used [social media](#) and [satellite images](#) to monitor and target the movements of the Saudi-led coalition, though the Saudi coalition has also relied on social media information to [target Houthi forces](#) as well. Following the onset of the Red Sea Crisis in late 2023, the Houthis, in coordination with Iran, have used [commercially available](#) maritime intelligence services, such as [Marine Traffic](#) and [ShipXplorer](#), to track and attack ships through the narrow body of water.

Hamas has employed OSINT against Israel [for decades](#), capitalizing on Israel's open media environment to monitor Israeli policy changes, troop movements, and public sentiment. Since Israel's military bombardment of Gaza began in 2023, the Washington Post's Visual Forensics has [mapped Israeli advances](#) using videos, photos, and satellite imagery. Al Jazeera's fact-checking unit Sanad [disproved Israel's claim](#) of a Hamas tunnel under al-Shifa Hospital, and additional OSINT [proved that Palestinian civilians](#) had been killed by Israeli forces along the safe routes advised by Israel.

Contrastingly, OSINT [was used by Israel to challenge](#) reports by Hamas, and repeated by global media outlets, about an Israeli strike that destroyed a hospital. Bellingcat investigators [analyzed](#) footage from the sites of two Hamas attacks in Israel on October 7 [to piece together the assault](#). Additionally, Israeli intelligence actively monitors Hamas [on social media](#), as well as using OSINT in other ways to track Hamas activities.

Outside of active conflict zones, OSINT is also increasingly used as a geopolitical tool. [In 1992](#), the deputy director of the CIA stated that over 80 percent of the agency's analysis was based on OSINT, and the U.S. actively uses OSINT against adversaries and allies. However, the availability and commercialization of data in the West has undermined U.S. global military power. In 2018, for example, the [Strava fitness app's](#) user map exposed the positions and movements of U.S. military personnel in Iraq and Syria.

Algorithms can now [instantly detect](#) the presence of a ship using global port webcams, while U.S. military aircraft can be tracked on programs like [Flightradar24](#), helping map the U.S. global military presence in real-time. Additionally, [WarshipCam](#) and [ShipSpotting](#) contain extensive image databases of almost all warships and onboard system configurations. A 2023 report by the

University of California's Berkeley Risk and Security Lab stated that China is using various OSINT images of U.S. warships [for AI training datasets](#) to build highly detailed computerized images of U.S. and allied vessels.

Additionally, machine learning has made it easy to [analyze social media](#). [Lexical analysis](#), web scraping, and sentiment analysis provide information on language usage and demographics of social media posters. Russia's history of [using social media](#) to inflame the U.S. public over divisive issues is well documented, and other states are employing similar tactics to influence the U.S. and Europe. OSINT is also being [increasingly used in DNA analysis](#). China's [Beijing Genomics Institute](#), which works on the Human Genome Project, has amassed millions of people's genomic data for use in studies of populations.

Just as governments and groups use OSINT abroad, they are adapting to its deployment domestically. [During the Arab Spring](#) protests in 2010 and 2011, regional governments faced vulnerabilities from protests organized online, with live maps, government atrocities depicted on social media, and other forms of OSINT used. In recognition of this, Beijing acted quickly to pressure foreign companies to remove the HKMap.live app tracking police forces from their platforms and put restrictions on communications during the [2019 and 2020 Hong Kong protests](#). Western governments may find it challenging to employ such measures amid widespread unrest, [resorting instead](#) to tactics such as event barraging by overwhelming the information space with a flood of content to distract and obscure valuable information, misinformation campaigns, trend hijacking, and other methods to undermine OSINT and prevent effective data analysis.

There is also a natural incentive for governments to use OSINT against their populations. By aggregating and analyzing publicly available information and other data, governments can gain valuable insight into citizens' lives, behaviors, and opinions. However, this comes at a significant cost to personal privacy and can make individuals and groups vulnerable to unwarranted surveillance. Law enforcement agencies are increasingly using OSINT [in criminal investigations](#). Moreover, OSINT can be manipulated to shape public opinion, as demonstrated by the "Ghost of Kyiv" during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which highlighted the potential for OSINT to be [hijacked for propaganda purposes](#).

OSINT is increasingly a major component of the surveillance economy, with

companies selling personal and public data for profit. [Major names](#) in the OSINT industry include Palantir Technologies, Recorded Future, and Babel Street, among others. These companies, along with numerous smaller firms, continue to drive market growth and innovation. These applications of OSINT extend beyond traditional intelligence gathering, with the increasing sophistication of [targeted marketing](#) being one result.

Instances of public misuse of OSINT are widespread, ranging from researchers [falsely identifying war criminals](#) to hackers exploiting OSINT for profit. But OSINT has significant positive impacts, including coordinating evacuations and humanitarian aid, alerting civilians to threats, and allowing them to document their experiences that can counter or complement traditional media.

However, much of OSINT continues to be focused on conflict and domestic surveillance, and its capabilities are [rapidly expanding](#) as it integrates with [machine learning technologies](#). As OSINT becomes increasingly weaponized and commercialized, the evolving landscape will require increased attention to the ethics of large-scale data accumulation and the threat to personal privacy.

By John P. Ruehl

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Far-Right Surge Or Status Quo?

Understanding The 2024 European Elections



07-04-2024 ~ *Last month's European Parliament elections did not bring about the ultimate breakthrough of the far right*

as some had feared. They are gaining influence though, especially because the lines between them and forces in the political center are blurring. Consequently, we will have to look to the left to stop their surge.

Between June 6 and 9, residents of the European Union (EU) [went to the polls](#) to elect a new European Parliament. There were fears in advance of a breakthrough by the far right, which was not surprising given the recent electoral successes of extreme nationalist, conservative, and elitist parties, often with xenophobic tendencies and fascist roots or inspiration.

Six of the 27 EU countries—Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, and the Czech Republic—have far-right parties in government. Sweden's minority government relies on the support of the nationalist Sweden Democrats, the second-largest force in Parliament.

In the Netherlands, the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) of Geert Wilders won 37 seats in the 150-seat Parliament after a campaign filled with xenophobia and anti-Islam sentiment. His parliamentary group is much larger than those of the red/green alliance of European Commissioner Frans Timmermans and the liberals of former Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who won 24 and 25 seats respectively. At the time of the European elections, Wilders was busy forming the most right-wing government in his country's recent history.

The Netherlands is a relatively small country, but the surge of the extreme right caused concern in the large countries of Europe as well. In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia, a party that traces its roots back to the fascist movement of Benito Mussolini, has been in power since October 2022. In France, the Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen [topped the pre-election polls](#), while the AfD, Alternative für Deutschland, the extreme right force in Germany consistently [scored better in opinion polls](#) than any of the three governing parties.

This Europe-wide success of far-right parties was indeed confirmed by the [European election results](#). The party of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni won more than 28 percent of the national vote. In France, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National was the party of preference for almost one in three voters, humiliating President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party, which garnered only half as many votes. In Germany, the AfD won almost 16 percent. This might be less spectacular than the Italian and French extreme right, but it's still better than each of the three members of the current traffic light coalition: the Social Democrats, the Greens, and the Liberal Party.

But has the European Parliament indeed been taken over by the extreme right? Not really.

Their electoral successes in a number of countries is undeniable, as the examples of Italy, France, and Germany have already illustrated. The surge of the far right has been [at the expense of traditional centrist parties](#). In the European Parliament, the Greens and Liberals lost about one-fourth of their seats each. The Social Democrats seem to remain stable, though, losing only four seats.

But the center-right [European People's Party \(EPP\) Group](#) is even growing and remains by far the largest group in the European Parliament. Together, these four traditional political groups still have a majority in the European Parliament.

Besides, although the extreme right parties did make progress in the June 2024 elections, they are hopelessly divided among themselves on key issues such as economic policy, foreign relations, and EU integration. For example, while some advocate for complete withdrawal from the EU, others support renegotiating membership terms.

As a result of these divisions, there are two parliamentary groups that contain far-right parties. On the one hand, there is the right-nationalist [European Conservatives and Reformists](#), dominated by the Fratelli d'Italia and Poland's Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) Party. On the other hand, there's the far-right [Identity and Democracy Group](#), whose members include France's National Rally but also the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs and Geert Wilders's PVV. The AfD was a member of this group until it was expelled weeks before the European elections following a series of scandals.

And then, there are a number of far-right parties that do not belong to any of

those parliamentary groups because they are not deemed acceptable or have already been expelled. Hungary's Fidesz party became the largest among them when they quit the center-right European People's Party in 2021. There's also a whole range of smaller parties. The AfD joined their ranks just recently, as it is unaffiliated to any parliamentary group.

There are two reasons, therefore, why the extreme right is not able to dominate the European Parliament. On the one hand, the centrist parties, and especially the EPP Group, remain relatively strong. Besides, the far-right groups are too divided among themselves to become dominant.

The fear of a takeover of European mainstream politics by fringe, extreme right parties seems to be unfounded, at least for now. Nevertheless the influence of the extreme right is growing undeniably. The real danger might come from the blurring of the lines between mainstream parties and the far right.

We have seen recently how extreme right parties have started to emulate [center-right parties](#) in exchange for a seat at the table, especially if they can join the government. Interestingly, Giorgia Meloni's party is the only one of the three major Italian far-right parties that is unequivocally [in favor of NATO and support to Ukraine](#). Once in government, she became an outspoken supporter of military support. Geert Wilders, from his side, was ready to swallow much of his extreme party program in exchange for his ascension to government. The French Rassemblement National is also undergoing rebranding, and rallies with slick firebrand Jordan Bardella do not resemble the nostalgic National Front meetings of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party's founder.

This is not the only way the lines between the mainstream and the extreme right have become blurred. The center-right is also moving slowly but surely to the right. The shift of center-right parties towards the right can be seen in [the EU's new migration pact](#), defended by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, which includes measures originally championed by the far right such as tougher deterrence through border control and stricter asylum procedures. Likewise, it also reinforces the extreme right's framing of migration as a threat to European values. The real danger, therefore, might not be that of a takeover of European politics by extreme-right parties but of the alliance between the old center-right with the 'new', supposedly more moderate, extreme right.

The only remedy to the rise of the extreme right is therefore to be sought not in the center but to the left of the political spectrum. The left is positioned to counter the far right because of its commitment to inclusive and egalitarian policies, which directly oppose the exclusionary and nationalist rhetoric of the far right.

Unfortunately, the left is also divided and is missing a clear strategy. There is the new phenomenon of Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany, which is combining restrictive proposals on immigration with a more progressive economic program, although with 6.2 percent in the European Parliamentary elections they scored less than anticipated. La France Insoumise (France), the Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas (Greece), and Partij van de Arbeid van België / Parti du Travail de Belgique (Belgium) scored well, winning the support of some 10 percent of their countries' electorate. The left is showing resilience in other countries as well. Eventually, it's these parties and the social movements they are rooted in that will have to provide an answer to the rise of the far right in Europe.

By Wim De Ceukelaire

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Source: Globetrotter