

Ernst Hillebrand (ed.)

Right-wing populism in europe

The influence
of right-wing parties from
Lisbon to Bucharest



Bibliographical information of the German National Library
The German National Library catalogues this publication in the
German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic information
can be found on the internet at: <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-8012-0724-3

The original German edition "Rechtspopulismus in Europa.
Der Einfluss rechter Parteien von Lissabon bis Bukarest" was
published in 2025 by Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH
[ISBN 978-3-8012-0703-8].

Copyright © 2026 by

Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH
Dreizehnmorgenweg 24, D-53175 Bonn
Tel. + 49 (0) 228/18 48 770 / info@dietz-verlag.de

Editing: James Patterson

Cover design: Jens Vogelsang, Aachen
Typesetting: Kempken DTP-Service, Marburg
Printing and processing: Bookpress, Olsztyn

All rights reserved
Printed in Poland 2026

Find us on the internet: www.dietz-verlag.de

Contents

Foreword to the English Edition <i>Ernst Hillebrand</i>	9
Right-wing populism: an introduction <i>Ernst Hillebrand</i>	11
Part I Profiles of the political parties	25
Ethnonationalism in Flemish: Vlaams Belang in Belgium <i>Judith Sijstermans</i>	27
Right-wing populism in Denmark <i>Susi Meret</i>	32
Radicalised and established: the rise of the AfD in the German party system <i>Wolfgang Schroeder</i>	38
<i>Perussuomalaiset</i> , The Finns Party – an overview 2025 <i>Yannick Lahti</i>	47
The Rassemblement national: A powerful disruptive force in French politics <i>Jean-Yves Camus</i>	53
Fratelli d'Italia and Lega: two aspects of Italian right-wing populism <i>Michael Braun</i>	59

Political Party “The Dawn of Nemunas” <i>Liutauras Gudžinskas</i>	66
From the margins to power – the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands <i>Koen Vossen</i>	74
Strongest in opposition: the FPÖ in Austria <i>Barbara Tóth</i>	83
“Law and Justice” (PiS): Poland’s alternative power in opposition <i>Bastian Sendhardt</i>	90
Chega – Portugal <i>Tiago Fernandes · Sara Pina</i>	96
AUR the Romanian rage party <i>Andrei Țăranu</i>	102
The Sweden Democrats: Evolution, Electoral Success, and Political Influence <i>Jens Rydgren</i>	109
The Swiss People’s Party (SVP) – the right-wing populist party with the strongest voter base in Western Europe <i>Lukas Lauener · Oscar Mazzoleni · Line Rennwald</i>	115
Vox – continuing Spain’s reactionary traditions <i>Steven Forti</i>	121
Fidesz in Hungary: A laboratory of right-wing populism <i>András Bíró-Nagy</i>	127

Part II Political analysis and options for action	135
Right-wing populism and trust in political institutions <i>Frank Decker</i>	137
The role of participation opportunities and democracy in the workplace – findings from a survey in ten European countries <i>Andreas Hövermann · Bettina Kohlrausch</i>	144
Right-wing populism in Europe <i>Philip Manow</i>	150
“Defensive democracy” and “firewalls” – a German <i>Sonderweg</i> ? <i>Wolfgang Schroeder</i>	159
The malaise of democracy – On some conditions enabling the rise of right-wing populism <i>Veith Selk</i>	166
The road to recovery <i>Claire Ainsley</i>	172
How mainstream parties lost the people – Why we should heed the alarm bells of populism <i>René Cuperus</i>	179
Populism 10 Years on <i>David Goodhart</i>	187
Make Europe Great Again – On the European ideas of right-wing populism <i>Ernst Hillebrand</i>	194

Reasons for self-criticism, not self-assurance: the challenges of right-wing populism from a feminist perspective <i>Eszter Kováts</i>	201
National populism: right-wing populism in central and eastern Europe and experiences of transformation <i>Kai-Olaf Lang</i>	208
You Didn't Leave Us. We Left You. <i>Sylo Taraku</i>	215
About the authors	221

Foreword to the English Edition

Ernst Hillebrand

This book is devoted to a political phenomenon that increasingly dominates discourse across a growing number of European countries: the rise of right-wing populism. Right-wing populist parties have emerged as formidable forces throughout Europe and, in several countries, now constitute the single strongest political entity.

The volume is structured in two parts. The first offers concise profiles of the most prominent right-wing populist parties in EU member states, providing readers with a succinct overview of each party and its place within the national political landscape.

The second part examines the underlying dynamics of this movement and explores how established political actors might respond. Particular attention is paid to the political left, its allied civil society, and the trade union movement, given that – as the party profiles demonstrate – right-wing populist parties enjoy strong support especially among the economically disadvantaged and the working class.

The selection of contributors was guided neither by a narrow ideological stance nor by a uniform theoretical framework. The assessment of right-wing populism in the Western world remains one of the most contentious issues in contemporary political debate, with no overarching consensus in sight. Accordingly, this book seeks to present a broad spectrum of explanatory models and proposed strategies, leaving readers to judge which arguments prove most persuasive.

The project was initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Germany. Through it, FES aims to foster a reasoned, solution-oriented discussion on right-wing populism in Europe. National

experiences differ markedly, yet certain success stories offer valuable lessons for devising strategies capable of reversing present trends. This book aspires to contribute to that endeavour.

Right-wing populism: an introduction

Ernst Hillebrand

“Populism” is the label that political elites attach to policies supported by ordinary citizens that they don’t like.¹

Right-wing populist movements and parties are on the rise world-wide. Whether it be in Washington, Buenos Aires, Rome or The Hague, right-wing populism is no longer confined to the fringes but has arrived in the centres of power in the Western world.

But Europe remains the epicentre, home of the type of country that appears particularly susceptible to this type of movement: characterised by democratic systems and a high quality of life, developed welfare states, but also strong immigration pressure from less privileged parts of the world. In this context, it is worth noting that the spectrum of parties commonly referred to as “right-wing populist” is very broad. “Right-wing populism” is not monolithic. In fact, the spectrum ranges from more traditional national-conservative parties to genuinely populist movements and formations that are better described as one-man shows or “political entrepreneurship”. Some parties are very old, including the FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) founded in 1955 and the SVP (Swiss People’s Party), founded in 1971, while others are very young and have hardly consolidated themselves as political parties, such as Portugal’s “Chega”. In some cases, individual leaders play a very prominent role while in others their role is less decisive, as the parties have become more institutionalised in the course of their development.

¹ Fukuyama (2016), p. 58.

These parties are no longer purely protest parties, whether in terms of their own aspirations or those of their voters. Increasingly, their aim is to wield government power. In a large number of countries over recent decades they have shaped policy, either as dominant governing parties, as in Hungary or Poland; in structures of consociational democracy, as in Switzerland; or as junior partners in coalitions with established parties, as in the Scandinavian countries. It should perhaps be noted that these countries have emerged relatively unscathed by these experiences.

This very diversity makes any attempt to introduce or summarise the topic extremely difficult. There is always a case where things look very different. Even the term “populism” is difficult to define, as the transition from desirable democratic proximity to citizens to populism is fluid.² And it is telling that parties on the right and right-wing populist spectrum have not yet managed to unite under one roof in European politics.

What follows is a necessarily inadequate attempt to summarise some of the key features of these parties. The principal aim is to explain their dynamics, identify common elements, explain what motivates their voters’ behaviour and assess how this behaviour is interpreted in the dominant social and political discourse. Finally, an attempt will be made to predict whether these parties are here to stay.

2 Priestler (2007), pp. 12–45.