# Radical Echoes through Antagonistic Symbiosis: How Far-Right Extremism and Political Islamists[1] Shape Global Polarization

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**Abstract** *This study explores the intricate and interdependent relationship between far-right extremism in Europe and political Islamist movements with anti-Western perspectives in the Islamic world, highlighting how both entities construct antagonistic narratives to sustain their exclusionary and anti-democratic agendas. A defining feature of far-right extremism in Europe is its alignment around anti-Muslim and anti-Islam rhetoric, which has significantly contributed to the rise of anti-migrant and Islamophobic sentiment across the continent – emerging as the primary hallmark of far-right ideology. Similarly, political Islamist movements are characterized by their anti-Western and anti-democratic perspectives, further entrenching this cycle of mutual antagonism. Using a rigorous methodological framework, this research employs semiotic and discourse analysis to examine key themes in 50 speeches delivered by leaders of European far-right parties and figures from political Islamist movements across the Islamic world, including prominent actors such as Hezbollah, Iran, and Turkey. Analytical tools, including NVivo and Atlas.ti for qualitative coding and LIWC for sentiment analysis, were employed to map interwoven narratives of identity, migration, and security. The findings reveal that European far-right leaders unite around framing Muslim migrants as existential threats to national identity, economic stability, and cultural cohesion, intensifying social divisions and securitizing migration. Conversely, political Islamist actors exploit Western Islamophobia and migration anxieties, attributing regional poverty, authoritarian rhetoric and*

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1    'Political Islamists' refers to individuals who view Islam not just as a religion, but as a comprehensive political ideology capable of shaping and governing political life and power. This includes both radical extremist groups and those who hold power in various parts of the Islamic world, where political systems are often influenced or governed by Islamic principles. These individuals or groups may advocate for political systems rooted in Islam and, in some cases, may incorporate Islamic perspectives into global politics. Additionally, in this paper, the term 'political Islamists' is used to refer to all individuals or groups who identify as 'Islamists,' including those in power and those within various Islamic movements, particularly those who espouse anti-Western perspectives.

*instability to Western interventions, sanctions, and perceived cultural aggression. Both move-
ments rely on reciprocal narratives of fear and victimization, amplifying their political legiti-
macy while systematically undermining democratic values. By exposing the mutual reinforce-
ment of these ideologies, the paper provides a nuanced understanding of how their interdepen-
dence exacerbates global democratic decline and destabilizes governance systems.*

## Introduction

The interplay between far-right extremism in Europe and political Islamist move-
ments in the Islamic world represents one of the most significant and understud-
ied drivers of global democratic decline and societal polarization. The term "move-
ment" is used to describe both far-right and political Islamist groups because they
transcend the boundaries of individual political parties or state actors, instead em-
bodying broader ideological forces that mobilize support, shape public discourse,
and influence social and political landscapes. Far-right parties in Europe, and po-
litical Islamist entities all operate within frameworks that extend beyond electoral
politics. They utilize mass mobilization, cultural narratives, and ideological rhetoric
to foster collective identities, influence national policies, and challenge established
political structures. This shared reliance on narrative-driven political engagement,
which is not confined to specific political offices or legislative efforts, positions them
as movements that shape both political action and public sentiment.

While these two entities position themselves as ideological adversaries, they
share a symbiotic reliance on fear-based narratives, particularly concerning mi-
gration, identity, and security (Abbas, 2020a). Far-right parties in Europe, such
as Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and France's NR, coalesce around
the discourse of defending national and cultural identity, with anti-Muslim and
anti-Islam rhetoric emerging as a core signifier of their political strategies (Bartlett
& Birdwell, 2013). Similarly, political Islamist movements, including Hezbollah,
Iranian leadership, and Turkey's government,[2] employ anti-Western and anti-
democratic narratives as foundational elements of their ideological frameworks
(Abbas, 2020b). These reciprocal antagonisms do not merely reflect cultural or
ideological conflicts but actively co-produce political environments of exclusion,
authoritarianism, and destabilization (Grzesiak-Feldman & Irzycka, 2009).

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[2]    While Turkey's government under President Erdogan may not be an Islamist movement in
the same sense as Hezbollah or Iran, it has increasingly adopted anti-Western, authoritarian,
and nationalist rhetoric. This shift has aligned Turkey's political discourse with anti-Western
sentiments, thus positioning it within the broader context of political Islamism, particularly
in relation to its strained relationship with Western liberal democracies.

The rise of far-right extremism in Europe is intrinsically linked to the politicization of migration. Migration, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, is not simply framed as a demographic or economic challenge but as an existential threat to the coherence of 'European identity.' This securitization of migration has been extensively documented in recent literature as a strategy that not only legitimizes exclusionary policies but also undermines democratic norms by promoting majoritarianism over pluralism (Akkerman, De Lange & Rooduijn, 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2024). At the same time, political Islamists leverage Western Islamophobia, exemplified by far-right hostility, to fortify their narratives of resistance and victimhood. This feedback loop creates a dynamic that can be viewed as 'antagonistic symbiosis,' where the actions and rhetoric of one movement intensify and amplify those of the other, perpetuating a cycle of mutual reinforcement (Kundnani, 2015).

Moreover, recent scholarship highlights the role of economic anxieties in shaping these narratives (Mazzoleni & Ivaldi, 2022). European far-right leaders blame migrants for rising unemployment, housing shortages, and the overburdening of welfare systems, turning economic grievances into potent political tools (Abbas, 2017; Muis & Immerzeel, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2020). Conversely, political Islamist movements point to Western-imposed economic sanctions, resource extraction, and globalization as sources of poverty and inequality in the Islamic world, thereby framing their anti-Western stance as a defense of sovereignty and justice (Browers, 2021; Wickham, 2013). This dual use of economic rhetoric underscores the deeply interwoven nature of these movements, as both utilize economic fears to justify exclusionary and authoritarian agendas.

This paper argues that far-right extremism and political Islamist movements, while seemingly at odds, are co-dependent forces that thrive on global crises of migration, identity, and governance. By employing semiotic and discourse analysis, the study explores how these actors construct mutually reinforcing narratives that deepen societal divisions and erode democratic values. This introduction not only situates the study within the broader academic discourses on authoritarianism and populism but also extends them by highlighting the mutual amplification of these ideologies in a globalized context.

## The Intersecting Forces of Far-Right Extremism and Political Islamism: A Critical Examination of Anti-Democratic Narratives

The growing prominence of far-right extremism in Europe and political Islamism across the Islamic world is not merely a clash of ideologies, but a convergence of anti-democratic forces that leverage fear, identity, and migration to advance exclusionary and authoritarian agendas (Ebner, 2017). Both movements share a deep suspicion of liberal democracy, but their antagonism towards democratic principles manifests in

unique ways. The far right in Europe, rooted in nationalist, anti-migrant rhetoric, frames Islam and Muslim migration as existential threats to the European identity and socio-political order (Kundnani, 2015). At the same time, political Islamists – viewing Islam as a political ideology – reject the Western democratic model, positioning it as inherently corrupt and imperialist (Barnett, Maher & Winter, 2021). This rejection extends to all forms of secularism, including the advancement of women's rights and other democratic freedoms, which they equate with Western moral decay (Beidollahkhani, 2024; Pertwee, 2020).

These Islamist groups, central to this research, maintain a predominantly anti-Western outlook, particularly in regions where they hold political power or influence. This includes states such as Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Pakistan, where Islamist movements significantly shape policymaking. Additionally, their ideological influence extends to Western countries, such as the United Kingdom and Germany, and to North Africa, particularly Egypt. Radical fundamentalist organizations like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda further exemplify this ideological reach, reinforcing anti-Western and anti-democratic narratives across multiple regions.

One of the most critical yet under-explored aspects of this dynamic is how Islamist movements, particularly those rooted in authoritarian ideologies, suppress domestic democratic movements by branding them as 'Western-influenced.' In doing so, they not only marginalize reformist voices but also justify their own repressive policies as necessary to protect Islamic identity from 'Western' encroachment (Marinov & Stockemer,2020). The suppression of women's rights, the rejection of democratic pluralism, and the curtailment of civil liberties are framed as part of a broader resistance to the Western liberal order, presenting authoritarianism as a necessary shield against external and internal threats.

In parallel, far-right movements in Europe exploit Islamophobia to perpetuate exclusionary policies, positioning Islam and its followers as incompatible with 'European values' (Oztig, 2023). The shared focus on immigration, identity, and security, however, creates a dangerous overlap in their rhetoric, as both sides demonize 'the other' to reinforce a false dichotomy of 'civilization' versus 'barbarism.' This creates an environment in which democratic principles are systematically undermined, as both movements capitalize on global crises – migration, cultural clashes, and the perceived failure of liberal democracy – to fuel their political objectives.

The consequences of this antagonistic relationship are far-reaching. As these ideologies gain traction, they disrupt political stability, challenge democratic norms, and exacerbate social fragmentation. This study seeks to unpack these intertwined forces, exploring how the far right in Europe and political Islamists in the Islamic world co-create narratives that not only justify their authoritarian actions but also undermine the very fabric of democratic governance.

## Theorizing the Framework of Antagonistic Symbiosis

The interaction between European far-right extremism and political Islamist anti-Western movements can be conceptualized through a framework of 'antagonistic symbiosis,' a term that encapsulates the reciprocal yet oppositional dynamics between these ideologies. Drawing on theories of 'reciprocal radicalization' and 'narrative construction,' this framework posits that these movements, while ideologically adversarial, rely on each other to sustain their narratives, political legitimacy, and mobilization strategies.

Reciprocal radicalization, as outlined by Eatwell (2006) and further developed in counterterrorism studies, demonstrates how opposing ideological groups escalate their rhetoric in response to perceived threats from one another. This mutual reinforcement results in a feedback loop, where the radicalization of one group provokes a corresponding intensification in the other (Eatwell, 2006; Hansen, 2000). Both, far-right extremists and political Islamists, leverage this dynamic, using fear and victimhood to justify exclusionary policies and authoritarian governance. Far-right actors frame Muslim migrants as existential threats to cultural and national identity, while political Islamists portray Western influence as a neocolonial force undermining Islamic values and sovereignty (Bonnett, 2004). This interplay sustains a continuous cycle of radicalization, with each side amplifying the other's narratives of existential danger.

Narrative construction theory (Bruner,1991), particularly through the lens of securitization, further elucidates how these movements transform societal issues into security threats, legitimizing extraordinary measures. According to Wæver (1993), securitization occurs when political actors successfully frame an issue as an existential threat requiring emergency responses, often bypassing democratic norms. Both, far-right and Islamist groups, engage in this process by constructing migration and cultural identity as security concerns, framing their respective 'others' as dangers to societal stability. The far right employs this strategy by characterizing Muslim migrants as a 'cultural invasion,' threatening the coherence of 'European identity' and justifying restrictive immigration policies (Shehaj, Shin & Inglehart, 2021). Conversely, political Islamists use Western interventions and perceived cultural aggression as narratives of resistance, portraying their authoritarian measures as necessary to safeguard Islamic identity and sovereignty.

The concept of antagonistic symbiosis emerges from this dynamic interdependence (Eves, 2024). These movements, though ideologically opposed, are co-dependent forces in the political ecosystem, each thriving on the narratives constructed by the other. Their mutual reinforcement not only perpetuates cycles of radicalization but also systematically undermines democratic values by normalizing exclusionary and authoritarian discourses. This relationship transcends simple opposition, evolving into a complex interdependence where each side's rhetoric and actions validate

and intensify the other's stance, fostering polarization and eroding pluralistic governance.

The paper conceptualizes the interaction through antagonistic symbiosis, providing an innovative theoretical perspective that bridges political sociology, security studies, and discourse analysis. This framework moves beyond traditional dichotomies of ideological conflict, revealing a deeper, structural interrelation that sustains and amplifies both far-right and Islamist extremism. Understanding this symbiosis is crucial for developing effective counter-narratives and policy strategies aimed at mitigating radicalization and preserving democratic institutions in an increasingly polarized global landscape.

## Methodology

This research adopts a semiotic and discourse analysis framework to investigate the mutual reinforcement between far-right extremism in Europe and political Islamism in the Islamic world. The goal is to examine how each movement constructs its narratives of fear and exclusion, specifically focusing on the themes of migration, identity, and security. The analysis focuses on key themes identified within a corpus of 100 speeches (50 from each group), delivered by political leaders and prominent figures, spanning the period from 2010 to 2024.

These speeches were selected for their ideological significance and the political weight of the statements made, focusing on movements that have gained prominence in shaping national and international narratives. For far-right groups, this includes parties such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the Rassemblement National (France), Vox (Spain), and Lega (Italy). Their public statements were scrutinized for recurrent themes of nationalism, anti-democratic rhetoric, and Islamophobia, with particular attention given to how these groups use migration, cultural identity, and security concerns to fuel their political agendas. For political Islamists, the research also analyzes 50 speeches from figures recognized for their anti-Western stances, particularly leaders from Islamist movements and governments that openly reject Western liberalism and democratic principles. These include political figures from Iran (e.g. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), Turkey (e.g. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan), Pakistan (e.g. Imran Khan), and Afghanistan (e.g. Taliban leadership), along with groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and ISIS.

As indicated in table 1, leadership and groups within far-right and Islamist movements were selected based on their ideological perspectives and key themes, which primarily focus on antagonistic discourses toward each other. The table organizes these leaders and movements according to their rhetorical positions and thematic emphases, highlighting the critical issues presented in their public

speeches, including their views on identity, migration, nationalism, and their critiques of Western political and cultural frameworks.

These leaders and organizations are noted for their aggressive anti-Western rhetoric, which positions 'the West' as a destabilizing force and frames Islam as a political ideology that offers resistance to 'Western imperialism' and 'secularism.' This collection of speeches reflects the ideologies of these groups, focusing on themes of cultural preservation, political sovereignty, and religious governance – rejection of secularism, gender equality, and liberal democracy. Through the examination of these speeches, the study highlights the shared use of fear-driven narratives by both far-right parties and Islamist groups.

For translation of speeches from various languages I utilized advanced AI translation tools to ensure accuracy and consistency across a wide range of languages, including English, German, French, Danish, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. The primary AI tools used for both text and voice translation were Google Translate, DeepL, Microsoft Translator, Amazon Translate, and iTranslate. These tools were selected for their high-quality output, reliability, and ability to handle complex linguistic nuances, ensuring the content was accurately represented across multiple languages.

*Table 1: Mapping Key Ideological Themes and Leadership in Far-Right and Islamist Movements*

| Source Groups | Countries/Organizations | Examples of Leaders/Speakers | Key Focus Areas/Themes in Speeches |
|---|---|---|---|
| Far-Right Parties | Germany (AfD), France (RN), Spain (Vox), Sweden (Sverigedemokraterna), Denmark (Dansk Folkeparti), UK (British National Party – BNP), Netherlands (Partij voor de Vrijheid), Italy (Lega), Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), Hungary (Fidesz), Poland (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), Finland (Perussuomalaiset) | Alice Weidel (AfD), Marine Le Pen (RN), Santiago Abascal (Vox), Jimmie Åkesson (Sweden Democrats), Viktor Orbán (Fidesz), Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS), Riikka Purra (Perussuomalaiset) | Migration as a threat, cultural identity preservation, anti-Islam rhetoric, nationalist sentiment, Anti-EU sentiment (Euroscepticism) |

| Source Groups | Countries/Organizations | Examples of Leaders/Speakers | Key Focus Areas/Themes in Speeches |
|---|---|---|---|
| Political Islamist Groups | Iran, Turkey, ISIS, Hezbollah, Hamas, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Algeria and Sudan, Saudi clerics, Muslim Brotherhood and Alazahr figures and famous scholars in Egypt, Pakistanis and Indian Muslims groups leaders and their politics leaders | Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Iran), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (ISIS), Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah), Ismail Haniyeh (Hamas), Hibatullah Akhundzada (Taliban), Ayman al-Zawahiri (Al-Qaeda), Yusuf al-Qaradawi, (Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar, Egypt), Omar al-Bashir (Sudan), Saudi clerics (e.g., Abdulaziz al-Sheikh, Salman al-Ouda) Abu Hamza al-Masri, Pakistani and Indian Islamists figures. Al Azhar clerics | Western hostility to Islam, resistance narratives, anti-democracy rhetoric, safeguarding of Islamic identity |

## Qualitative Coding and Thematic Analysis

The core of the study's analytical approach involved qualitative coding using NVivo and Atlas.ti to systematically identify recurring themes, keywords, and rhetorical structures. This process categorized the data into the study's primary focus areas: migration, identity, nationalism, religion, democracy, security, and economics. Once these themes were coded, a thematic analysis was conducted to uncover the deeper connections between them, emphasizing how both movements utilize these narratives to legitimize exclusionary policies and authoritarian governance. These themes were drawn from a wide range of speeches, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how far-right and political Islamist groups construct narratives surrounding these issues. Each theme highlights the underlying ideologies that drive both movements and their use of these issues to justify exclusionary and anti-democratic rhetoric.

To complement the qualitative analysis, keyword frequency analysis was used to quantify the repetition of significant terms across the speeches. Keywords such as "threat," "freedom," "resistance," and "invasion" were analyzed to measure their prominence and explore the strategic focus of each movement. This method revealed how far-right and Islamist groups emphasize different aspects of the same issues, such as migration being framed as a security risk by far-right actors and as a consequence of imperialism by Islamist figures. Moreover, LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) software was employed to analyze the emotional tone of the narra-

tives. Sentiment analysis captured the prevalence of emotions such as fear, anger, pride, and victimhood in the speeches. For example, fear and anger were dominant in far-right discussions on migration and security, while pride and victimhood were prevalent in Islamist speeches addressing identity and anti-Western rhetoric.

The study also employed intertextual analysis to compare how far-right and Islamist groups construct overlapping or opposing narratives within each thematic area. This approach uncovered shared strategies, such as the use of fear-driven rhetoric to mobilize support and justify authoritarian measures. Comparative analysis was also critical for exploring the ideological differences in framing, such as how far-right actors focus on preserving "cultural heritage," while Islamists frame their narratives around resisting "Western aggression."

All methods were applied holistically to ensure that the findings were both nuanced and comprehensive. Qualitative coding provided the foundation for identifying patterns, while keyword frequency and sentiment analyses added depth to the understanding of rhetorical strategies. Thematic and intertextual analyses further connected these insights, revealing the interplay between far-right and Islamist narratives. Table 2 illustrates how the ideological narratives of far-right and Islamist movements, despite their differing historical and political contexts, share strikingly similar antagonistic perspectives. These movements converge around themes such as identity, migration, and anti-democratic rhetoric. Both employ these narratives to challenge and subvert democratic values, thus undermining the foundations of democratic governance. The table provides a clear illustration of how these ideological forces, though divergent in origin, align in their pursuit of exclusionary and anti-liberal agendas.

*Table 2: Comparative Thematic Analysis of Far-Right and Political Islamist Rhetoric*

| Themes | Far-Right Narratives (Europe) | Political Islamist Narratives | Methodology applied |
|---|---|---|---|
| Migration | Portrayed Muslim migrants as threats to cultural homogeneity and national security. Narratives of "invasion" and "burden." | Depicted Western nations as aggressors fostering instability and forced migration in the region. | Identified keywords like "threat," "crisis," and "displacement." Sentiment Analysis: Fear in far-right; victimhood in Islamist rhetoric |

| Themes | Far-Right Narratives (Europe) | Political Islamist Narratives | Methodology applied |
|---|---|---|---|
| Identity | Emphasis on "European heritage" and 'cultural preservation' against 'Islamic influence.' | Highlighting resistance to "Western cultural imperialism" to preserve 'Islamic identity.' | Terms like "heritage," "authenticity," and "resistance" dominate both narratives. Sentiment Analysis: Pride observed across identity-related rhetoric. |
| Nationalism and Sovereignty | Advocacy for sovereignty and rejection of globalization. Islam portrayed as incompatible with 'Western unity.' | Promoted pan-Islamic unity or anti-Western nationalism against 'neo-colonialism.' | Explored nationalism or pa- Islamism as resistance (anti-migration vs. anti-West). Frequency Analysis: Key terms include "sovereignty," "unity," and "colonialism." |
| Religion | Cast Islam as a monolithic, oppressive religion threatening secular Europe. | Painted Western secularism as inherently hostile to Islamic values and traditions. | Religion used as a justification for governance. LIWC Analysis: Emotional tones vary — fear (far-right) and pride (Islamists). |
| Democracy | Undermined pluralism by framing democratic processes as compromised by 'migrant-friendly' policies. | Justified authoritarianism by portraying democracy as a Western imposition undermining Islamic governance. | Analyzed rejection of pluralism and secularism. Keyword Analysis focused on terms like "failure," "compromise," and "undermine." |
| Security | Migration linked to terrorism and societal instability; exclusion justified for "stability." | Portrays 'the West' as the root of instability. Islamists framed as defenders of community security. | Security concerns intersect in themes of terrorism and protection. Sentiment Analysis: Fear dominates security rhetoric. |

| Themes | Far-Right Narratives (Europe) | Political Islamist Narratives | Methodology applied |
|---|---|---|---|
| Economics | Migrants, mostly Muslims, are blamed for unemployment, inflation, housing costs, and straining welfare systems, causing financial struggles for locals. | Western economic sanctions and resource misuse are portrayed as deliberate actions to weaken Islamic economies, creating poverty that is instead blamed on 'the West' and its corporations, thereby justifying authoritarian control as necessary. | Economic terms like "poverty," "burden," and "exploitation" are frequent. Thematic Analysis explored economic grievances as narrative drivers. |

# Findings and Discussion

## 1. Migration

Migration narratives are central to both far-right and Islamist rhetoric, albeit with starkly contrasting frames. Far-right leaders in Europe portray migration, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, as a significant threat to national security and cultural identity. For instance, speeches from political figures like Marine Le Pen emphasize how migration is eroding "French civilization" and creating "no-go zones" in urban areas (Rueda, 2022). Similarly, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has claimed that migration is part of a "left-wing conspiracy to erase European identity" (Gray Meral & Kumar, 2025).

On the other hand, political Islamist narratives frame migration as a direct consequence of Western wars and interference in the Islamic world. Leaders such as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei often point to the displacement of Muslims as a symptom of "Western imperialism and aggression," (Kayhan, 2024) portraying migrants as victims of systemic injustice.

This dual framing – where migration is weaponized by both sides – enables these movements to rally support and justify exclusionary and authoritarian policies, whether through stricter immigration controls in Europe or anti-Western mobilization in the Islamic world.

## 2. Identity

The theme of identity forms the backbone of the antagonistic relationship between far-right and Islamist movements. Far-right rhetoric frequently depicts Islam as in-

compatible with 'European cultural values.' For example, Geert Wilders has openly stated that "Islam poses a threat to our freedom and identity as Europeans" (Bozta, 2023). Such statements position Muslims as 'outsiders,' framing their presence as an existential crisis for European societies.

Conversely, Islamist leaders, such as Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, frame Western societies as antagonistic forces seeking to destroy Islamic identity. Erdoğan has warned against the "cultural imperialism of the West," portraying secular and liberal values as corrosive to Islamic morals and community cohesion (Associated Press, 2024).

This mutual 'othering' reinforces exclusionary worldviews, with far-right movements positioning themselves as defenders of Western identity, while Islamists act as guardians of religious and cultural authenticity in the face of Western intrusion (Gunning & Jackson, 2011).

## 3. Nationalism and Sovereignty

Nationalism is a shared tool for mobilization across both far-right and Islamist movements, albeit with differing targets. European far-right groups, such as the Alternative für Deutschland, frequently frame 'Islam' as a foreign force that is incompatible with national values, invoking themes of sovereignty to resist globalization. The AfD, for instance, has called for "restoring German sovereignty by halting Islamic immigration and rejecting multiculturalism" (Alternative für Deutschland, 2017).

In contrast, Islamist leaders, particularly those aligned with political movements such as Hezbollah, employ the language of resistance against Western hegemony. Hassan Nasrallah, for example, has stated that "defending Islamic sovereignty against Western aggression is a religious and national duty" (Mosalman TV, 2024).

Both movements reject external influences and use nationalism to legitimize their anti-globalization agendas, although their targets and justifications diverge.

## 4. Religion

Religion plays a crucial role in the rhetoric of both far-right and Islamist movements, framing religious identity as a fundamental marker of difference. These movements, while oppositional, use religion to reinforce their exclusionary and authoritarian agendas. The far right often depicts Islam as a threat to Western religious and cultural values, while Islamist movements reject Western secularism and Christianity as corrupting forces. These opposing religious discourses fuel mutual exclusion, justifying exclusionary policies and ideologies on both sides.

Far-right movements in Europe often frame Islam as incompatible with Western, particularly Christian, values. For instance, leaders like Marine Le Pen in France and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands have linked Islam to violence and extremism, portraying it as a 'totalitarian ideology' that undermines democratic principles and European cultural identity. In the United Kingdom, Nigel Farage and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) have frequently associated Islam with terrorism and extremism, framing it as a threat to 'British values and traditions.' Farage has argued that 'radical Islam' must be rejected to preserve British culture, positioning Christianity as central to national identity (Ahmed & Lynch, 2024). Similarly, in Spain, Santiago Abascal of Vox has warned that "Islam is a threat to our identity and European culture," using religion as justification for tighter immigration controls and emphasizing the defense of a "Christian Europe" (Corral, Fernández & Prieto-Andrés, 2023). Austria's Sebastian Kurz, a center-right political figure who has at times aligned with far-right rhetoric and policies, has voiced similar concerns – claiming that "Islam is not part of Austrian culture" and associating Muslim migration with increasing social and security challenges (Gerdziunas, 2018). His government has supported policies like banning the full-face veil and limiting mosque construction, reinforcing the far-right's narrative that Islam is a challenge to European, Christian-based values.

In contrast, Islamist movements, led by figures such as Ayatollah Khamenei of Iran and the Taliban, position Islam as a complete and divinely mandated system that governs all aspects of life, including politics and governance. Khamenei has condemned Western secularism as a form of "cultural imperialism," arguing that it leads to the decay of traditional values and weakens Islamic governance (Khamenei, 2011). The Taliban also reject Western-style democracy, framing secular democratic ideals as foreign impositions designed to undermine Islam. In their rule over Afghanistan, the Taliban enforce Sharia law as a defense against the 'corrupting influence of the West,' positioning their strict interpretation of Islam as a necessary safeguard for national sovereignty and Islamic values (Amu TV, 2022).

The religious rhetoric of both far-right and Islamist movements reinforce each other in a cycle of mutual antagonism. Far-right leaders, such as Salvini, Wilders, and Farage, depict Islam as an existential threat to European religious and cultural foundations, often framing Muslims as political adversaries that must be excluded. They argue that Islam's incompatibility with 'European Christian values' justifies exclusionary policies. In response, Islamist leaders, such as Khamenei and Taliban figures, frame the West's secularism and Christianity as corrupt systems that weaken Islamic governance and values. Both movements reject liberal democracy and secularism, strengthening their mutual exclusivity and positioning their respective religious frameworks as the solution to societal decay.

This antagonistic symbiosis perpetuates a feedback loop where the far-right's demonization of Islam justifies Islamist anti-Western rhetoric, and vice versa. Each

side's rhetoric feeds into the other's fears, reinforcing the idea that Islamic practices are a threat to European identity and that Western secularism undermines Islamic values. This cycle further entrenches societal polarization and undermines democratic values, as both movements use religion to justify exclusionary and authoritarian policies.

## 5. Democracy and Secularism

Both movements share a rejection of liberal democracy but for distinct ideological reasons. Far-right movements in Europe frequently criticize democracy and secularism, arguing that these frameworks erode national identity. Far-right leaders, such as Matteo Salvini, criticize democratic systems for enabling multiculturalism and immigration, arguing that they dilute traditional values. Similarly, Islamist ideologues reject secularism as a "Western imposition," with figures like Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2009), Abu Hamza al-Masri (as cited in Wiktorowicz, 2005), and Salman al-Ouda (2013) asserting that secularism "destroys the essence of Islamic governance" by undermining the integration of religion and state, which they view as central to an Islamic society.

The Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) has consistently framed democracy as inadequate for safeguarding 'Danish identity' against Islamic influences. Pia Kjærsgaard, a founding member, has asserted that "Danish democracy cannot co-exist with Islam's political ambitions," advocating for legislative restrictions on religious practices, including the construction of mosques and public displays of Islamic attire (Meret & Gregersen, 2019).

In a speech Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid declared, "Democracy is a system imposed by invaders to strip us of our values; it has no place in an Islamic state governed by Sharia law." (TOLOnews, 2022) The Taliban's authoritarian governance model reflects this ideology, dismantling democratic institutions in favor of an Islamic emirate (Khan & Khan, 2024). Similarly, groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir advocate for the establishment of a global caliphate, rejecting both democracy and secularism as alien frameworks that dilute Islamic identity (Rabbani, 2023). This shared discontent with democratic governance underscores their authoritarian tendencies. While far-right movements seek to preserve 'ethnonationalism,' Islamists aim to establish systems based on Sharia law. Both ideologies converge in their critique of liberal ideals, particularly regarding the rights of women and minorities, portraying such rights as threats to societal stability.

## 6. Security

The securitization of identity and migration underscores the narratives of both movements. Far-right rhetoric often links Islam to terrorism, fueling Islamophobia

across Europe or the United States. Far-right rhetoric often portrays 'the Islamic world' as inherently undemocratic and unethical, framing it as a societal threat that must be controlled. For example, Marine Le Pen have declared that "radical Islam is at war with us," framing entire Muslim communities as security threats (Solletty, 2021). These statements not only legitimize stricter border controls but also erode trust between Muslim minorities and host societies. Leaders in far-right movements, such as those from the Dansk Folkeparti or Germany's AfD, link Muslim communities to radicalism and depict them as incompatible with Western democratic values and cultural cohesion (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024).

Conversely, Islamist figures and political leaders in the Islamic world often characterize Western nations as destabilizing forces. They accuse 'the West' of exploiting the region, fueling crises through military interventions, economic sanctions, and cultural imperialism. For instance, the Taliban have repeatedly labeled Western powers as aggressors undermining Islamic governance, while Saudi clerics, such as Abdulaziz al-Sheikh, critique Western influence as corrosive to Islamic identity and societal stability (Aal ash-Shaykh, 2018).

They often blame 'the West' for perpetuating regional instability. For instance, figures like Nasrallah, Erdoğan, Khamenei, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi frequently accuse Europe and the United States of 'fomenting chaos' in the Middle East to justify military interventions. This reciprocal securitization sustains an antagonistic symbiosis between the two movements, with each side portraying the other as an existential threat that necessitates exceptional measures. These mutual portrayals reinforce antagonistic narratives, fueling polarization and justifying exclusionary and authoritarian policies on both sides.

Simultaneously with the escalation of the Gaza conflict and Israel's military actions in Gaza and Lebanon from 2023 onwards, there has been a notable increase in anti-Western sentiment across many Muslim-majority countries. This has emboldened their leaders, amplifying their rhetoric and political positions in response to perceived Western complicity or indifference.

## 7. Economics

Economic arguments are central to the rhetoric of both far-right and Islamist movements, though each group frames the issues differently to justify their exclusionary and authoritarian agendas. Far-right groups often blame migrants for economic hardship, including rising unemployment, strained welfare systems, and social services. They depict migrants, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, as economic burdens that drain national resources, further perpetuating anti-immigrant sentiment.

For example, in Poland, Finland, and Sweden, far-right parties frequently link migration to economic concerns, framing it as a threat to national stability. In

Poland, the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), led by Jarosław Kaczyński, argues that migrants strain the welfare system, leading to job losses and increased competition for public services (Voice of Sanity, 2015). Similarly, in Finland, the Perussuomalaiset, under Riikka Purra, contends that migrants "take jobs from Finns" and exploit the welfare system, promoting economic nationalism to protect local jobs and resources (Purra, 2024). In Sweden, the Sverigedemokraterna, led by Jimmie Åkesson, criticize "uncontrolled immigration" for increasing unemployment and 'overburdening' the welfare state, advocating for reduced immigration to redirect resources toward native citizens (Sverigedemokraterna, 20224). These parties use economic anxieties to justify exclusionary and anti-immigrant policies.

In contrast, political Islamists criticize Western economic policies, such as sanctions, exploitation of natural resources, and neoliberal economic interventions, as primary drivers of poverty and instability in the Islamic world. Leaders like Ayatollah Khamenei of Iran and Erdoğan in Turkey argue that these policies undermine regional economies and exacerbate inequalities. They frame Western economic dominance as a form of neo-imperialism that destabilizes the region, feeding into their resistance narratives (Khamenei, 2024).

## Conclusion

This study has explored the complex and interdependent relationship between far-right extremism in Europe and political Islamist movements, framing their mutual reinforcement through the concept of antagonistic symbiosis. While seemingly ideologically opposed, these movements share a reciprocal reliance on fear-based narratives and exclusionary ideologies that target the perceived threats posed by migration, cultural change, and governance models. This interdependence, underpinned by mutual antagonism, not only perpetuates their ideological positions but also undermines democratic values and political stability across the global landscape.

The ideological rift between far-right extremism in Europe and political Islamists within the Islamic world represents a complex yet symbiotic relationship, wherein both movements co-opt fear to further their exclusionary and anti-democratic agendas. Far-right extremists in Europe, largely defined by their opposition to Muslim migration, portray Islam as an existential threat to national identity and cultural cohesion. At the same time, political Islamists – who view Islam as a political and societal framework – frame their resistance as a defense against Western influence and imperialism. These Islamist movements believe that Islam serves as a safeguard, offering protection from the cultural, economic, and political encroachment of the West. The rhetoric of these movements often converges around anti-Western sentiment, with both sides amplifying the notion of an invasion: for far-right extremists, it is the migrant 'invasion' threatening European values; for

political Islamists, it is the Western 'invasion' destabilizing Islamic governance and cultural integrity. Both sides, despite their geographic and ideological differences, rely on a similar set of rhetorical strategies to bolster their political legitimacy and justify exclusionary policies.

Though divergent in their political systems and geographical locations, these movements share common ground in their rejection of liberal democracy and their use of fear-based narratives to legitimize authoritarian practices. This shared antagonism feeds into a feedback loop, whereby each movement strengthens the other's position, contributing to global instability and democratic backsliding. Both, far-right parties in Europe and political Islamists in the Islamic world, manipulate migration, identity, and security concerns to perpetuate their respective political goals.

Antagonistic symbiosis is reflected in the way both construct hostile discourses towards each other, using these narratives as tools to legitimize their own ideologies and delegitimize the opposing side. By framing the other as an existential threat, both movements seek to solidify their political power and identity, while simultaneously undermining democratic foundations. This reciprocal antagonism feeds into a cycle where each movement strengthens its own position through the demonization of the other, fostering polarization and weakening the core principles of democratic governance. In this dynamic, both sides use hostile rhetoric not only to gain power but also to diminish the legitimacy of democratic values, thus creating an environment that is conducive to the rise of authoritarianism.

The antagonistic symbiosis between these movements is evident in how their narratives feed into one another, creating a cyclical pattern of polarization that undermines democratic principles. Far-right groups in Europe, by portraying Islam as a political and religious threat, reinforce the Islamist narrative that 'the West' is an imperial aggressor, further validating the Islamist stance of rejecting Western influence. This dynamic not only strengthens the resolve of both movements but also deepens the divisions within societies, eroding the very democratic principles that should foster inclusion, pluralism, and peaceful coexistence.

The implications of this antagonistic relationship are far-reaching, particularly in the context of democratic backsliding. By framing their respective ideologies in mutually exclusive terms, both movements contribute to the erosion of democratic values, such as pluralism, freedom of expression, and the protection of minority rights. The far right's promotion of exclusionary nationalism, combined with Islamist calls for religious governance, creates an environment where democratic institutions are increasingly under threat. The framing of Muslims as 'others' or 'enemies' of both the state and society fuels xenophobia, discrimination, and authoritarian tendencies, while the Islamist rejection of liberal democracy and secularism promotes authoritarianism as the only viable alternative.

The mutually reinforcing narratives of the far right and political Islamism are not only ideologically destructive but also politically destabilizing. Their antagonis-

tic symbiosis perpetuates cycles of fear, exclusion, and radicalization that ultimately undermine democratic governance. To counter this, it is imperative to address the root causes of polarization and engage in efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, foster interfaith and intercultural dialogues, and promote inclusive policies that protect the rights and identities of all citizens, regardless of their religious or cultural background. Only by recognizing the interplay between these ideologies and intervening at both the ideological and institutional levels societies can hope to safeguard the democratic values that are increasingly at risk.

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