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A Discourse Analysis of France's Far-Right Shift in Anti-Immigrant Discourse within the Context of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

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Citation

Beining, Y. (2023). *A Discourse Analysis of France's Far-Right Shift in Anti-Immigrant Discourse within the Context of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

**A Discourse Analysis of France's Far-Right Shift in Anti-Immigrant Discourse within
the Context of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis**

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January 24th, 2022

Word Count: 10,240

Abstract

The study explores the shift in anti-immigrant discourse of the French far-right party leadership with regard to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. A discourse analysis of the tweets and their accompanying media for Marine Le Pen (RN) and Éric Zemmour (R!) was conducted for the presidential campaign and election period of February to April 2022. The material selected was coded through ATLAS.ti into themes informed by the literature review and the theoretical framework. The findings indeed confirm a shift in emerging discourse, whereby solidarity towards and welcoming of Ukrainian refugees is grounded on the pretense of the traditional Christian spirit of providing asylum as well as their cultural and geographic proximity. Simultaneously, the limits of the Christian spirit towards non-European asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants was justified through discourse relying on neo-racist rhetoric based on 'cultural differentialism'. These arguments often encompass non-European refugees fleeing from Ukraine.

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Introduction

In light of recent events, European countries were quick to welcome and come to the aid of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war (European Commission, n.d.). The sudden and almost overnight shift to welcoming rhetoric, however, extended ultimately only to Ukrainian refugees. The stark contrast between the treatment of Syrian refugees in 2014-2015 in comparison to the treatment of Ukrainian refugees presently did not go unnoticed (Desai, 2022). And if it did go unnoticed, not for very long given the historically unprecedented shift in anti-immigrant stance, and specifically discourse, of right-wing parties across Europe (Bauvois, 2022). Noteworthy is the case of French far-right parties who in the midst of their presidential election campaigns could not afford to remain silent on the matter.

The French far-right politician and presidential candidate for Reconquête! (Reconquest, R!), Éric Zemmour was asked in an interview whether he accepts immigrants that are white and Christian and rejects immigrants that are Arab and Muslim, to which he replied without hesitation “absolutely!” (Bourgeois, 2022, min 3:40). Zemmour who is known best for his lack of nuance, has perhaps expressed the very sentiment behind the shift in the European far-rights response to incoming Ukrainian refugees. A far-right that was previously not particularly welcoming of Eastern European citizens, as seen through the National Front’s (now National Rally) 2014 petition against the opening of borders to Romanian and Bulgarian citizens to enable easier access to the labor market (Cincu, 2017, p. 40).

In a similar fashion, the more subtle far-right their leadership have had difficulty to justify both their sudden change in position regarding the incoming Ukrainian refugees as well as their lobby for further restrictive immigration policies. As seen in Marine Le Pen the presidential candidate for the Rassemblement National (National Rally, RN), who tweeted “Firmness does not prevent humanity. I want to make extremely firm decisions on immigration,

but you can be firm and still human” (Marine Le Pen, 2022a). The tweet is, perhaps, the exact sentiment that demands further investigation.

Thereby, in the broadest sense what is trying to be understood is why human rights despite being universal, seem to count more— as in preserved and defended through discourse—for some people than for others. Given the shift in discourse among right-wing parties and their representatives, it therefore begs the question: why have right-wing parties with historically anti-immigrant positions shifted their stance on immigration within the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis? By answering the question, I hope to arrive at a closer understanding of why the human rights of one group are justified and preserved over another; specifically in the discourse of far-right politicians. The presidential election period in France serves as a unique case study to investigate the phenomenon.

Given the recency of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, there are limited academic studies published that explore the influence of the crisis on the discourse of far-right parties and their leadership, and even less examining the rhetorical shift among the French far-right during the presidential campaigns. As such, the existing literature studying the discursive practices of far-right parties, specifically on the themes of immigration, are limited to the ways in which they manufacture an Other based on (neo)racist arguments (Froio, 2018; Mondon, 2015). These arguments often appealing to the loss of identity and tradition, be that language or the wearing of head coverings in public spaces, by way of immigration or granting of asylum (Cincu, 2017, pp. 37-38; Mondon, 2015, p. 410). As a result, a gap in the literature has appeared due to the sudden shift towards solidaric discourse. Therefore, it is vital to address this gap and to further contribute to the understanding of the ever-changing discursive toolkit of far-right parties in the ongoing academic debate.

The upcoming section will provide an overview of the literature regarding the composites found within the discursive toolbox of the far-right. The following section is the

theoretical framework that will discuss the origins of the far-rights anti-immigrant position, the manufacturing of the ‘in-group’ boundaries, and the expansion of said boundaries. The section provides the basis for formulating the hypotheses. The method section will follow, specifying how the hypotheses have been tested using a discourse analysis. Subsequently, the results are analyzed and presented. Lastly, the conclusion will provide a summary of the key findings and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Ruth Wodak’s (2020) book *Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*, provides an extensive analysis on the discursive practices instrumentalized by far-right parties in manufacturing and maintaining divisionary boundaries. Wodak conducts a Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA) that encompasses an array of material, from campaign posters to media practices, with the aim of understanding how far right parties construct and reproduce discourse that has garnered increasing popularity (“Analyzing the Micro-Politics”, para. 3).

Given the word count limitations, only the most relevant conclusions to the aim of the study will be presented from her detailed analysis. Notably, Wodak finds that far-right parties use legitimation in their discourse as a means to “explain” and “justify” the reality they wish to disseminate, in effect evoking legitimacy (Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 3-4). Legitimation can be induced through four different mechanisms: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis (Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 3-4).

The first mechanism discussed is authorization which is legitimacy acquired “by referring to authority, be that a person, tradition, custom or law” (Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 3-4). Within the framework of the study, and this will be further discussed in the theoretical framework, references to authorization among the French far-right rely

predominantly on principals of the Republic and *laïcité* (Froio, 2018, p. 705; Mondon, 2015, pp. 403-404). Moreover, Cincu's (2017) article on the discursive practices of the Alternative for Germany and France's FN confirm these findings. She notes that in the case of the FN, the frequent reference to the "nation" in its discourse is best understood as the "nation always takes precedence over individuals, the nation being essential for their life and development" (Cincu, 2017, p. 36). Thereby, those who do not fit within the imagined box of the 'nation' become automatically its enemies (Cincu, 2017, p. 36). The result, is an 'imaginary foreigner' (an Other) with malicious intent aimed at seeing through the end of the nation as it is (Mondon, 2015, pp. 401-403).

The second mechanism of legitimation is through moral evaluation that "makes reference to value systems" (Wodak, 2020, "Creating Fear", para. 3-4). Generally, the identity formation of the far-right falls along Manichean lines, "dividing the world into "good" and "bad" in which the Other is essentialized, opposed and demonized" (Froio, 2018, p. 698). The value systems referred to are likely to follow within these lines, serving both as a justification for alienating the Other as well as solidifying the 'in-group' identity by appealing to the need for "positive distinctiveness" (Turner, 1975 as cited in Brewer, 1999, p. 437; Brewer, 1999, p. 435; Froio, 2018, p. 698).

The third mechanism of legitimation is through rationalization where "knowledge claims or arguments" are made reference to (Wodak, 2020, "Creating Fear", para. 3-4). These are best understood, at least in the French context, as the result of the far-rights' struggle for "cultural hegemony" by which seemingly 'objective' reality is manipulated on normative grounds (Mondon, 2015, pp. 393, 396; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, pp. 105-106). In practice, it would function similar to this tweet by Valerie Pécresse (conservative right presidential candidate) regarding Zemmour:

Eric Zemmour confuses Islam and Islamism. Not me. I fight against Islamism. As early as 2010, I took a stand for the ban on the burqa in public spaces. In Ile-de-France, I passed a charter of secularism. (Pécresse, 2022)

While, at first glance the distinction Pécresse makes seems to come from a place of knowledge, the example that follows conflates Muslim women who wear the burqa as being under the influence of Islamists or Islamists themselves. In effect, the result is of a normative nature, directly linking head coverings (whether hijab or burqa) with religious fundamentalism.

Furthermore, what is perhaps closely related to the abovementioned mechanism and that Cincu finds significant evidence for is the use of “emotional impact statistics” (Cincu, 2017, pp. 32). Although it is commonly stated that ‘numbers don’t lie’, statistics can paint an extremely deceiving picture of reality. In Cincu’s analysis of the FN’s speeches, she found evidence for the use of misleading statistics to illustrate, or more specifically correlate, an increase in crime to an influx of immigration (2017, p. 40). As a result, by drawing on superficially neutral percentages and data, on a normative level these are used to disseminate negative evaluations of an ‘out-group’ (Bleich, 2011, p. 1586; Brewer, 1999, p. 435).

The last mechanism of legitimation is mythopoesis which is “achieved by narratives; these are often small stories or fragments of narrative structures about the past or future” (Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 3-4). Among the far-right these are often “exemplary reformulated historical narratives” (Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 5). Moreover, Wodak finds that legitimation through mythopoesis and moral evaluation are utilized most often to essentialize the Other and justify their anti-immigrant stance and policy (Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 5). It is expected that these four forms of legitimation will be employed by far-right parties to account for their shift in anti-immigrant stance and justify the expansion of the in-group to Ukrainian refugees.

Furthermore, Wodak finds that far-right parties use “deliberate impoliteness, lies, insults, destructive (eristic) argumentation and intentional breaches of taboos” as a form of resistance towards the established elites and, furthermore, to signal authenticity (Wodak, 2020, “Towards a Concise Definition”, para. 6). In addition, she gives the example of Le Pen who part-takes in “the continuous breaking of taboos and flouting of rules of politeness as well as of conventional norms of political correctness” (Wodak, 2020, “Old Wine in New Bottle”, para. 3). In the context of this research, and in the case of Le Pen, it may be that she strays away from these tactics further illustrating the unprecedented shift in discourse. Whereas, in the case of Zemmour, these tactics may be utilized to distinguish further who is or is not deserving of hospitality and assistantship. Furthermore, if this is indeed the case it would also act as an opportunity for Le Pen to distinguish herself from Zemmour.

Another key finding Wodak presents is evidence for the use of what she calls ‘calculated ambivalence’:

Whereby one utterance carries at least two more-or-less contradictory meanings, oriented towards at least two different audiences. This not only increases the scope of the audience, but also enables the speaker or writer to deny any responsibility: After all, ‘it wasn't meant that way’. (Wodak, 2020, “Towards a Concise Definition”, para. 6)

It remains to be investigated whether calculated ambivalence was utilized given the heightened climate of the presidential campaign, however, it is nonetheless noteworthy in understanding how they may have tried to justify the sudden shift in stance while still pushing for restrictive immigration policy. While the examples given by Wodak are extremely provocative in nature, for the purpose of this research and given the preliminary findings, the use of calculated ambivalence seems to be more subtle.

An example of this would be Zemmour retweeting a video of several men running away speaking loudly in a foreign language and a car speeding past them with the original caption (translated through Twitter) stating “Drancy (93): clash between Turks and Kurds, several individuals would be injured” (FDesouche, 2022). He shares this tweet with the caption “Drancy, the city where I grew up, became a battlefield for gangs of barbarians” (Zemmour, 2022a). It is clear from his ongoing discourse that the tweet is intended to incite fear by associating an increase in crime with immigrants. The use of barbarians in this case would be to directly suggest that immigrants are backwards and therefore unable to assimilate. However, the secondary meaning and although slightly far-fetched given what is known about Zemmour’s discursive practices, it would be to criticize the increase of criminality in general a fundamental part of his campaign. The use of barbarian in this case would be limited to criminals, allowing him to get away with employing neo-racist arguments and thereby appealing to two different audiences.

In line with Wodak, Cincu finds evidence for the use of us versus them rhetoric, provocative statements embedded in historical events, and ‘guardianship’ of national identity (Cincu, 2017, pp. 41-43). In the early stages of the research portrayals of saviorism or guardianship were utilized often by the two candidates. An early example of this is found in Mondon’s (2015) article on the rise of the Nouvelle Droite, where he analyzes a quote by Le Pen in which she declares happily that she is populist (pp. 399-400). He notes that “The strength of this message lays in the word people, whose singular form reinforced Le Pen’s assertion that she was the defender of the one people against division, the defender of France itself” (Mondon, 2015, pp. 399-400).

In addition, Cincu examines petitions launched by the FN in her analysis. As noted in the introduction, in 2014 the FN introduced a petition aimed at hindering the opening of borders for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens intended to make the labor market more accessible

(Cincu, 2017, p. 40). The petition is noteworthy in the context of understanding not only the shift in anti-immigrant position regarding the Ukrainian refugee crisis but also the expansion of an “in-group” that may have formerly not been included. Especially when considering the emergency plan, written as a response to the Balkan wars, that now grants Ukrainian refugees the right to live and work in the EU for three years, in addition to the provision of health care, housing and education for one year (Rankin, 2022). Assistantships which, for Zemmour at least, is one of the more frequently employed arguments to justify the expulsion of those benefitting from it and an end to immigration (specifically in this case – granting asylum), as will be shown in the analysis section.

Moreover, the incoming wave of Ukrainian refugees poses a challenge to the discursive reality they have constructed and the legitimacy they have attained through it (Mondon, 2015, p. 400). While, narratives of solidarity are not unusual for right-wing parties, they have been limited to and based upon features (such as language and tradition) that the Ukrainian refugees do not necessarily share. Paired with the EU-skepticism of parties, it would seem like a difficult task to match the current circumstances with the discursive practices of previous years (Wodak, 2020; Cincu, 2017). Even more so, given the proximity of parties such as Le Pen’s National Rally to Russia and Putin (Kramer, 2022). Thereby, appealing to the unity of European countries requires some narrative gymnastics to fit with the nationalistic reality they have constructed.

It is, therefore, vital to study the new and juxtaposed discursive practices that will emerge from the increasing number of Ukrainian refugees entering the country. And additionally, how these will be justified in contrast to previous years of discursive practices that may have predicted an entirely different reaction to the context at hand. Moreover, and through the method of discourse analysis, a systematic approach can be conducted in tracing these new discursive practices and the power they have in shaping the world to their advantage

and fashioning the realities of individuals (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 340-341). From there the research question can be answered.

Theoretical Framework

The purposeful creation and maintenance of the nation state project, rests on mechanisms of “Othering” utilized to uphold imagined borders and artificial differences (Kristeva, 1991). To do so identities are formed along racial, religious, geographic, among other lines that dictate who is seen as the “Other” (Kristeva, 1991). The far-right is both the product of these created identities as well as a tool in maintaining them. By co-opting the mechanisms used to create the nation state and instrumentalizing them in their discourse, they take advantage of the real grievances of their (potential) supporters and create arbitrary divisions between people (Cincu, 2017; Kristeva, 1991). As such, they have used these historically manufactured identities to decide an ‘ingroup’ versus and ‘outgroup’. The creation, maintenance and expansion of these boundaries in the case of the French far-right will be discussed in further detail in this section.

To begin with a better understanding of the psychological and social conditions of ingroup and outgroup formation will be given, followed by a historical perspective delineating the process by which Muslims and those lumped into the category have become the outgroup in the French case. According to Brewer (1999) ingroups are “bounded communities of mutual trust and obligation that delimit mutual interdependence and cooperation”, where mutual trust “is depersonalized, extended to any member of the ingroup whether personally related or not” (p. 433). The boundaries of the ingroup may “shift”, widening or narrowing, according to the needs of the individual, group or context (Brewer, 1999, p. 432).

Brewer discusses five conditions from which ingroup “loyalty” may result in and correlate to outgroup disdain. Foremost, it is important to note that “‘subtle racism’ is not the presence of strong negative attitudes toward minority outgroups but the *absence* of positive

sentiments towards those groups” (Brewer, 1999, p. 438). Far-right parties and their leadership draw from and feed on these conditions to sprout negative attitudes in the absence of positive sentiments. Their hope being to solidify ingroup loyalties, and subsequently party support. Understanding these conditions and their implications, will allow for a better comprehension of the ways in which they justify preserving the rights of Ukrainian refugees versus an Other.

The first condition that may intensify the distance between the ingroup and outgroup is ‘moral superiority’ (Brewer, 1999, p. 435). Brewer notes that “a general preference for the familiar over the unfamiliar” leads to groups that “discriminate between intragroup social behavior and intergroup behavior” (Brewer, 1999, p. 435). The result being that positive traits or characteristics are attributed or deemed to be more prevalent within the ingroup over the outgroup (Brewer, 1999, p. 435). This becomes dangerous, however, when:

Ingroups become larger and more depersonalized, the institutions, rules, and customs that maintain ingroup loyalty and cooperation take on the character of moral authority. When the moral order is seen as absolute rather than relative moral superiority is incompatible with tolerance for difference. To the extent that outgroups do not subscribe to the to the same moral rules, indifference is replaced by denigration and contempt. (Brewer, 1999, p. 435).

These negative evaluations intensify as a result of increasing social proximity or integration and thereby result in further hate (Brewer, 1999, p. 435). Brewer notes, and this can be similarly found in Wodak’s findings, moral superiority – or nuanced evaluation can act as source of *legitimation* to justify “domination or active subjugation of outgroups” (Brewer, 1999, p. 435; Wodak, 2020, “Creating Fear”, para. 3-4).

The second condition that may result in further loyalty for the ingroup and hate toward an outgroup is the role of ‘perceived threat’ (Brewer, 1999, p. 435). Brewer finds that

The reciprocal relationship between ingroup cohesion and outgroup hostility may be limited to conditions in which groups are in competition over physical resources or political power. Whether actual or imagined, the perception that an outgroup constitutes a threat to ingroup interests or survival creates a circumstance in which identification and interdependence with the ingroup is directly associated with fear and hostility toward the threatening outgroup and vice versa. (Brewer, 1999, pp. 435-436).

In the case of the far-right, its leaders often capitalize on the real fears of individuals through the use of frames that re-narrativize complex issues in line with its discourse (Froio, 2018, p. 699; Mondon, 2015). These frames result in outgroups – and the case will be made later on that it is Muslims in France – that are perceived as threat to the physical and political resources of the ingroup (Brewer, 1999, pp. 435-436; Froio, 2018). Physical resources can be understood as assistantship (Froio, 2018, p. 698).

The third condition Brewer identifies is ‘common goals’ (Brewer, 1999, p. 436). The findings in this section are split into perceived interdependence and perceived positive interdependence. On the one hand, “perceived interdependence and the need for cooperative interaction make salient the absence of mutual trust”, in addition “when negative evaluations of the outgroup such as contempt or fear are also already present, common threat in particular may promote scapegoating and blame rather than mutual cooperation” (Brewer, 1999, p. 436). On the other hand, when there is a perceived positive interdependence “for individuals exclusively vested in a single group identity” the fear of losing “distinctiveness” in the face of cooperation outweigh the possible benefits to the ingroup (Brewer, 1999, p. 437).

When one looks at the very real grievances of far-rights base, the simultaneous need for inclusion (a form of “favoritism”) and the need for differentiation –both being a product of psychological needs as well as a symptom of the present economic system—become windows of opportunity for far-right leaders to strengthen identification with the party and in a mutual

process scapegoat the outgroup (Brewer, 1999, pp. 436-437). These two needs, inclusion and differentiation, are instrumentalized in the discourse of these leader.

The fourth condition is regarding ‘common values and social comparison’ (Brewer, 1999, p. 437). Brewer finds that “ingroups strive not only for differentiation from outgroups but for positive distinctiveness”, thereby the ingroup “value those characteristics or achievements with respect to which they see themselves as better than the outgroup and also strive to achieve or maintain positive comparisons on dimensions that they value” (Brewer, 1999, p. 437). As mentioned in the literature review, Froio notes that in the case of the far-right and its supporters these characteristics and achievements will most likely fall along Manichean lines of universally “good” or “bad” (Froio, 2018, p. 698).

The last condition Brewer discusses, and which is of particular relevance in the French far-right case, is ‘power politics’ (Brewer, 1999, p. 437). She finds that:

When groups are political entities, [...], these processes may be exacerbated through deliberate manipulation by group leaders in the interests of mobilizing collective action to secure or maintain political power. Social differentiation provides the fault lines in any social system that can be exploited for political interests. When trust is ingroup based, it is easy to fear control by outsiders; perceived common threat from outgroups increases ingroup cohesion and loyalty; appeals to ingroup interests have greater legitimacy than appeals to personal self-interest. Thus politicization, an important mechanism of social change, can be added to the factors that may contribute to a positive correlation between ingroup love and outgroup hate. (Brewer, 1999, pp. 437-438)

When these conditions are present the culminating result can lead to a greater intensification of loyalty toward the ingroup and disdain towards the outgroup. Naturally, the leaders of far-right parties, and especially in the French context, take advantage of these conditions to

strengthen the identification to the party and make salient narratives in which a minority outgroup is a threat (Brewer, 1999, p. 438). Who composes the outgroup and how these boundaries have been manufactured in France will be discussed next.

Mondon's (2015) provides an overview of the transformation of the Right in France and specifically the Front National (National Front, FN) throughout history. He finds that:

In the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Europe, the Jews were the perfect target for exclusivist sentiment during times of crisis: they were denounced as stateless and cosmopolitan people, opposed to the Nation, to the Fatherland: they were 'imaginary foreigners'. As with most types of exclusion, antisemitism, sometimes referred to as 'socialism of fools', was used to as cement to bind the nation together against an enemy, an Other, a Them. Antisemitism was a decoy; it served to erase social differences, diverting the attention of workers from class struggle. (Mondon, 2015, pp. 401-402)

After the Second World War, however, these narratives were no longer accepted and "mainstream political discourse steered clear of crude racist rhetoric" (Mondon, 2015, pp. 401-402). As a result, it was assumed that the right-wing and its ideology had met its end, however, this "ignored their potential for evolution and transformation, key to all ideas and ideologies" (Mondon, 2015, p. 402). The result was a new kind of ideology launched by the FN and in collaboration with the Nouvelle Droite (Mondon, 2015, p. 402). The new ideology that emerged was composed of populist and neo-racist rhetoric (Mondon, 2015, p. 401).

The fundamental characteristics of the new racism or neo-racism that emerged is that it no longer rests on the primordial or biological arguments:

but [on] the irreducibility of cultural differences': it is not the Other who is to blame but rather his/her effect on 'us' and 'our' society. While not racist in the traditional biological sense, neo racism rests on the same essentializing tenets while offering one

main advantage: ‘it allows for the transformation of traditional forms of racism into new forms of exclusion, less likely to lead to legal prosecution and/or to political discredit’. (Mondon, 2015, p. 402)

The result is an incredibly well-crafted narrative seeking “to reclaim ‘common sense’” (Mondon, 2015, p. 403). In addition, the arrival of 400,000 Algerians in the 1970s increased the popularity of the FN and the emergence of their anti-immigration discourse (Cincu, 017, p. 31; p. 36). And as such, they were able to feign tolerance under the guise of ‘cultural differentialism’ and “express anti-immigrant sentiment based on the same supposed innate generalizable elements central to traditional types of racism” (Mondon, 2015, pp. 403, 396).

Mondon notes that after the 2000s, populist and neo-racist rhetoric became a “powerful political tool” for the far-right (Mondon, 2015, p. 403). However, the 9/11 attacks and the 2015 and 2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice narrowed the focus on Islam specifically (2018, p. 699; Mondon, 2015, p. 403). As a result, this has “led to the return of a “‘racism without racial support’, based on culture and ‘culturalism’ [...] Those with a Muslim background became the new ‘imaginary foreigners’” (Mondon, 2015, p. 403).

Thereby, Mondon concludes that in order for the outgroup, the Other and in the case Muslims to be accepted in society they ironically have to “downplay and eventually lose their originality and origins” (Mondon, 2015, p. 403). And more specifically, in the case of France these “idealized image[s] of the Republic and its secularist foundation have served as pawns in the legitimization of neo-racism and the vilification of Islam” (Mondon, 2015, p. 403). As mentioned in the literature review, the Republic and secularism are the more frequently employed form of legitimation through authorization among far-right parties and their leadership. How the current far-right ideology has emerged has been discussed through Mondon’s article, next a more in-depth discussion of how the parameters of the ingroup is established and maintained through specifically discourse will be provided.

Froio's (2018) article discusses how these 'in-groups' are created in her aim to examine the discourse, specifically frames, of the French far-right groups (parties as well as grassroots organizations) in order to better understand how anti-Islam arguments have been woven in (p. 697). In her literature review, Froio builds on Mondon's findings by outlining how the boundaries of the 'in-group' have been constructed as a result of nativist rhetoric and frames (Froio, 2018, p. 697).

Froio uses Mudde's (2007) definition of nativism, as being an ideology prescribing that "states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native elements (persons and/or ideas) represent a threat to the homogeneity of the nation-state (p. 65). She goes on to say "as such, nativism informs the ways in which the far right envisions the characteristics of the national community, its members (ingroup), and alleged opponents (outgroups)" (Froio, 2018, p. 698). In her article she identifies Muslims in France as those in the outgroup (Froio, 2018). To do so she distinguishes between three different frames of neo-racism that result in anti-Islam narratives and thereby solidify the parameters of the outgroup, namely: the religious frame, the cultural frame, and the race frame (Froio, 2018, p. 699).

Foremost, frames are as operationalized by Froio, problem formulations whereby those engaging are "emphasizing certain aspects on which to fix the public's attention, while obscuring alternative ones" (2018, p. 699). These draw parallels to legitimation through rationalization, as seemingly object realities are 'obscured' on normative grounds. The specific frames she has chosen are analyzed further in order to better understand the phenomenon examined and to generate a working hypothesis.

As mentioned previously both Froio and Mondon note of 9/11 and the 2015 and 2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice to the narrowed focus on Islam and Muslims as an outgroup (2018, p. 699; Mondon, 2015, p. 403). As such, the religious frame in the context of the French

far-right's neo-racist discourse suggests that "it is used to emphasize differences between the alleged religious identity of (European) natives (i.e., secular or Christian) and Muslims, who are portrayed as those who want to replace it" (Froio, 2018, p. 699). The result is the French far-right's hostility towards Muslims, or those who are or whose ancestors are perceived to be Muslim (Bleich, 2011, p. 1587).

Furthermore, to better understand this frame and for the purpose of the research, Erik Bleich's (2011) definition and operationalization of Islamophobia will be used. According to Bleich, Islamophobia is the "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims" (2011, p. 1582). The definition can be broken down into three components relevant in understanding how it operates. The first component being the use of indiscriminate that aims to distinguish from warranted criticism and its accompanying emotions and attitudes and larger generalizations and prejudice (Bleich, 2011, p. 1585). For example, the criticism of Muslim communities that practice female genital mutilation or the differential treatment of women does not constitute Islamophobia (Bleich, 2011, p. 1585). However, if the person goes further to disapprove of all Muslims or Islam then this becomes Islamophobia (Bleich, 2011, p. 1585).

The next dimension refers to the "negative attitudes or emotions" which encompass both evaluations and affects (Bleich, 2011, p. 1586). Affects being "gut-level reactions such as disgust, fear or hostility" whereas evaluations are judgements on whether the group is "good or bad, worthy of respect or disdain, to be avoided or embraced" (Bleich, 2011, p. 1586). Which as noted in the literature review is likely to fall under Manichean lines and be instrumentalized through legitimation by way of moral evaluation (Brewer, 1999, p. 435; Froio, 2018, p. 698)

The last component is that it is directed towards Muslims or Islam. While this does not need to be further explained, it is important to note once again that it also encompasses those who are assumed or believed to be following the doctrine or those "whose ancestors have followed it or who are believed to follow it" (Bleich, 2011, p. 1587).

The second frame, cultural frame, buildings on Mondon's findings of neo-racism and its cultural differentialism foundations (Mondon, 2015, p. 396) It is understood as Islam being "primarily seen as a threat to the cultural homogeneity of the natives' country and Muslims are judged unable (or unwilling) to assimilate into the culture of the host country" (Froio, 2018, p. 699). As such the cultural frame emphasizes that Islam is juxtaposed and incompatible to the democratic ideals found in the West, yielding Muslims as unwelcome outgroup (Froio, 2018, p. 699). The third frame, the race frame, suggests that the perceived or assumed intersection of race and religion can lead to "Muslims as a racialized outgroup", though not directly linked to Islam (Froio, 2018, p. 699).

These three frames of neo-racist discourse inform the hypothesis of this research. The hypothesis being that the shift in anti-immigrant stance of far-right parties and their leadership within the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis is the result of neo-racist discourse relying on religious, cultural and racial frames constructed and maintained through the discursive tools identified in the literature review. Subsequently, the alternative hypothesis would be a shift in discourse justified and primarily making reference to geographic proximity and duration of stay of Ukrainian refugees.

Methodology

Case Selection

While the phenomenon pertains to and is observed in right-wing populist parties in Europe generally (Bauvois, 2022).; the case of French far-right parties is especially interesting for investigation given that the war in Ukraine as well as the subsequent arrival of Ukrainian refugees occurred in the midst of the presidential election campaigns, becoming a key issue and leaving little room for evasion. Selected are the two most popular and influential presidential candidates of the far-right.

Identified were, Marine Le Pen the presidential candidate of The National Rally (RN); and Éric Zemmour the presidential candidate for Reconquest (R!). Le Pen having been the runner-up in the last two election and with 23% of popular support (Politico, 2022) is, of course, a necessary case to analyze. Especially given her influence in the far-right and therefore her prominence in previous literature (Mondon, 2015). Zemmour, despite being his first candidacy and the recency of his political career, received 7.1% support in the polls and placing 4th (Politico, 2022). In addition, his extreme opinions within the far-right itself, have made him a relevant case to include.

Discourse Analysis

The analysis will be composed of the tweets and its accompanying media (linked speeches and debates) of the candidates for the period of February until April of 2022. The turning point being the beginning of the war, identified as February 24th, when the first attacks by Russian forces took place (European Commission, n.d.). As a result, the three-month period will investigate the shift in discourse from February to the months of March and April. Furthermore, given the first round of elections took place on the 10th of April, the whole month will still be analyzed given that Le Pen is in the second round and also to include discourse sponsoring or discrediting the candidates of the second round by Zemmour.

The Tweets were gathered and downloaded through Vicinitas and translated through Microsoft Word. Having worked with Word's translation tool (French to English) previously, I was confident in the accuracy of the translation. The accompanying media that was analyzed was specifically video (clips or snippets) material of debates, speeches and TV appearances. These were transcribed using Sonix and translated once more through Word. However, only the most relevant videos that either confirm or falsify the hypothesis were included to avoid repetition in only marginally related content. An example would be many snippets in which a

candidate lists priorities in their program and immigration being one of them. These clips while solidifying their stance do not offer much headway in understanding why the shift in discourse occurred and the justification for maintaining their lobby for restrictive immigration policies. In an effort to avoid bias, videos with no direct link to the frames or discursive tools outlined in the literature review were omitted.

The data was subsequently coded using ATLAS.ti into themes informed by the literature review and the theoretical framework. There are three code groups. The first being ‘Discursive Tools’ which are informed by the literature review. The first code group, ‘Discursive Tools’ includes the four major forms of Legitimation (Authorization, Moral Evaluation, Mythopoesis, and Rationalization), as well as Calculated Ambivalence, Emotional Impact Statistics, Guardianship/Portrayal of Savior, Metaphor, Personal Anecdote, Provocation, Urgency, and Word Choice. The last two codes are roughly taken from the literature review, but found extremely relevant while analyzing the content. Word choice is a broader code to include the more nuanced ways in which candidates distinguish who belongs to the ingroup as well as in references to specific events. It has similar properties to calculated ambivalence, however, without more overt forms of provocation. How the difference would be coded, for example, using “these people” vs. “barbarians” (Zemmour, 2022a; Zemmour, 2022b). Urgency, Word Choice are coded to be ‘a part of’ the Metaphors code to stay true to the literature review as well improve code.

The second code group is the ‘Hypothesis’ which is partly composed of: Assimilation (Cultural Frame), Islamophobia (Religious Frame), Racism (Race Frame), Great Replacement, Insecurity, and Welfare Frame. These are the codes attempting to highlight one side of the coin – those who are not welcome. Assimilation (Cultural Frame) is linked to the Great Replacement code. I opted to add a code for Great Replacement given the excessive references to it in Zemmour’s discourse, and link it as a ‘part of’ the Assimilation code. The Welfare Code

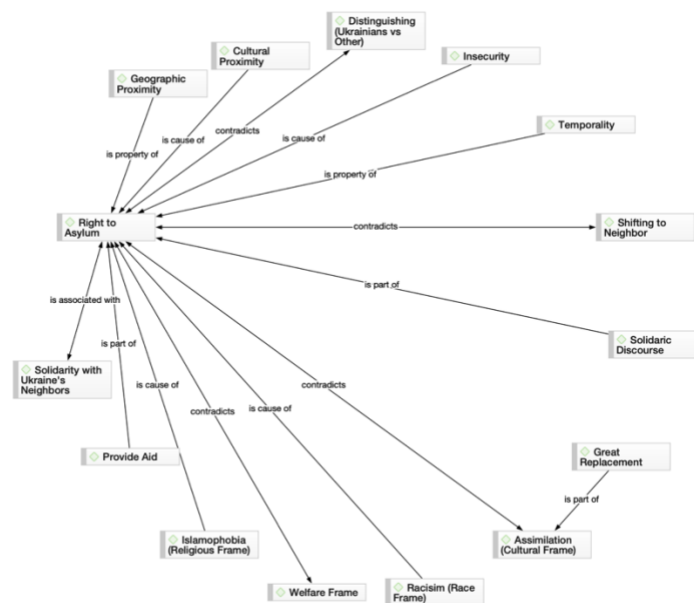
encompasses assistantship or physical recourses (Brewer, 1999, pp. 435-436; Froio, 2018, p. 698). Insecurity includes references to criminality, order, and security that was observed during the preliminary phases of the study.

The flip side of the code group are related to the shift to welcoming discourse towards incoming Ukrainian refugees, including: Right to Asylum, Cultural Proximity, Solidarity, and Providing Aid. Right to Asylum codes all instances where the candidates have welcomed Ukrainian refugees into France. Providing Aid codes for all calls to provide, increase or continue providing aid to Ukrainians both in Ukraine and those who have fled to France. Solidarity codes for solidaric discourse with the people of Ukraine and neighboring countries taking in Ukrainian refugees. Solidarity and Providing Aid have been linked as ‘a part of’ Right to Asylum, as these often go hand in hand and in the case of Solidarity these will most likely be used to justify the Right to Asylum.

The codes Insecurity, Islamophobia, and Racism are linked as ‘is cause of’ Right to Asylum. According to the hypothesis, these arguments would reflect the boundaries of the outgroup and therefore explain why the Right to Asylum was defended and justified for Ukrainian refugees over others. On the other hand, the Assimilation Frame, Welfare Frame and Firm on Immigration codes are linked as ‘contradicts’ Right to Asylum. Given that one of justifications cited by the candidates for their shift in stance is the temporality of stay, assimilation to ideals of the French Republic or *laïcité* – most commonly used argument for not allowing immigration (or asylum), would arguably not be expected of Ukrainian refugees and therefore acts as a contradiction. Similarly, the Welfare Frame arguments delineating the no longer feasible cost of immigration (and asylum) to France and in parallel the consequences for citizens, is contradictory with providing aid and asylum for Ukrainian refugees. Lastly, Firm on Immigration code often includes arguments where there is no room for exceptions, however, the shift contradicts these absolute narratives.

The third group is the ‘Alternative Hypothesis’ which includes: Geographic Proximity, Temporality, and Shifting to Neighbor. The first two codes, Geographic Proximity and Temporality, are linked as cause of Right to Asylum. The third code, Shifting to Neighbor, references arguments in which it is preferred for Ukrainians to stay in their neighboring countries and is therefore linked as ‘contradicts’ Right to Asylum. The Hypotheses code group and Alternative hypotheses code group will be compared both in frequency as well as in content to identify why the shift has occurred and how it is justified. Furthermore, these two code groups will be paired alongside the type of discursive tools (the first code group) used by the actors to better understand what is trying to be achieved as well as how they are able to embed the themes within their narratives.

Figure 2. Code Relations Network



Analysis

Foremost, it should be emphasized that given the nature of what is being studied—contradictions, the results can be at times confusing in itself, which are only taken as further confirmation of the existence of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the results illustrate a stark

difference, where 99 tweets fell under the Assimilation (Cultural Frame) code and 153 tweets under Insecurity, in comparison to the 32 tweets for the Right to Asylum code, all of which are related to Ukraine. While the phenomena are likely to be more present when one accounts for all interviews, debates, official statements and more, these findings are a preliminary attempt at better understanding the shift in discourse.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the codes are interconnected making it difficult to identify clearly the differences between them. It is likely that a tweet has multiple codes that coexist. For example, in a tweet there may be an argument against assistantship for foreigners (Welfare Frame) and a reference to criminality (Insecurity). These are not regarded as double counts. The exception to this is the Firm on Immigration code, while it serves to solidify the anti-immigration stance of the candidate(s), it will not be analyzed in this section and is included for illustrative purposes. Below the tweets for selected code groups will be presented and analyzed.

Given the use of metaphors and calculated ambivalence, a simple word search may have not sufficed to understand the discourse of the candidates and subsequently the shift. Therefore, all tweets were downloaded and reviewed. For each candidate, an overview of the ‘business as usual’ discourse will be given, wherein the arguments most frequently used to justify their anti-immigration stance will be presented. This will be followed by examples of the shift in discourse regarding Ukrainian refugees and the justification for it. Lastly, selected examples of contradictory discourse will be presented. The aim is to paint a complete image of the phenomenon, placing the discourse into context. On a practical level this will support in understanding how the data was coded. The codes can be found at the bottom of every tweet.

Marine Le Pen

In the case of Le Pen, for the period of February to April a total of 1,936 tweets and retweets were reviewed. Due to an unnoticed error in retrieval, only the tweets from the 5th of February were studied.

Figure 3. Frequency of Codes in Hypothesis Code Group

| | | Le Pen (Tweets and Transcripts) 23 247 | Totals |
|------------------------------------|-----|---|--------|
| ○ ◆ Assimilation (Cultural Frame) | 83 | 28 | 28 |
| ○ ◆ Firm on Immigration | 93 | 55 | 55 |
| ○ ◆ Great Replacement | 63 | 4 | 4 |
| ○ ◆ Insecurity | 125 | 72 | 72 |
| ○ ◆ Islamophobia (Religious Frame) | 29 | 8 | 8 |
| ○ ◆ Racisim (Race Frame) | 13 | 1 | 1 |
| ○ ◆ Welfare Frame | 91 | 61 | 61 |
| Totals | | 229 | 229 |

As seen in **Figure 3**, the most referenced argument in the case of Le Pen is Insecurity, with 72 tweets. In addition to themes of criminality and security, the code also includes tweets where a list is given referencing for example both security and immigration as topics. While the listing format suggests that these are not linked, the expectation is that the conjoined list evokes a connection between the two themes among the audience. The second most referenced argument is the Welfare Frame, where 61 tweets were coded. In her discourse, themes that fall under this code include: social assistantship (housing, employment, welfare benefits), purchasing power, national debt and spending. Below are two examples of how Le Pen employs these arguments paired with the discursive tools (if present) utilized. Furthermore, these will build towards the shift in discourse and aid in answering the research question.

- a. On April 5th Le Pen tweeted:

The first way to reduce the insecurity that is rotting the lives of our compatriots is to stop this anarchic and massive immigration. I want to make the French masters of their immigration policy again! (2022b)

○ Insecurity ● Calculated Ambivalence ● Metaphor

b. On February 16th Le Pen tweeted:

National solidarity can only survive if it is national. We must say things: we cannot assume "all the misery of the world". We have to make choices, because our social protection system is collapsing under the numbers. (2022c)

○ Welfare Frame ● Metaphor ● Urgency

The examples given are meant to illustrate the main arguments used against immigration and how it presents itself. In order to better understand the intended ‘imaginary foreigner’ depicted in the arguments examples from the frames drawn from Froio will be presented (2018). Foremost, there were no instances of the Race Frame. This does not indicate that there is no racism in her discourse, but as noted in Mondon’s finding, these are likely to be subtle given the unfavourability of traditional nativist arguments and discourse (2015, pp. 401-402).

However, what has been observed, were instances of sharing videos in which a group of men that look North African are seen physically assaulting an elderly man or a Black man abusing an animal (in reference to the French football player Kurt Zouma) and condemning violence (Le Pen, 2022d; Le Pen, 2022e). These are likely very subtle forms of calculated ambivalence, that taken alone would suggest someone expressing their contempt for violence or crime. However, in line with the ongoing discourse it is likely intended to disseminate a negative evaluation of a minority outgroup and appeal to a second audience that either already has intensely negative opinions on said group or is susceptible to these evaluations given the conditions outlined in the theory section (Brewer, 1999).

The Assimilation (Cultural Frame) code was the most coded among the two-left over codes with 28 references, and an additional 4 from the Great Replacement code, only 1 of which directly references the theory (a retweet that suggests there is an ‘Islamist fifth column’) (Bardella, 2022; Froio, 2018, p. 669). The other three are far more subtle. For the Islamophobia code there were 8 instances found. Two examples of the code frames are presented below.

a. On February 11th Le Pen tweeted:

Look, hospitals, schools, streets, transport, the energy it takes for our country to manage all the problems related to immigration on a daily basis, to respond to the inadequacy of populations who live in our country as at home! (2022f)

○ Assimilation (Cultural Frame) ○ Welfare Frame ● Legitimation: Moral Evaluation

b. On March 5th Le Pen tweeted:

In five years, I am committed to eradicating Islamism, removing the terrorist threat and reaffirming in the public space the republican principle of secularism. In five years, I am simply committed to returning the France to the France! (2022g)

○ Islamophobia (Religious Frame) ○ Insecurity ○ Great Replacement
● Legitimation: Authorization

As noted from the theoretical framework, themes of the Republic and Secularism the main source of legitimation through authorization, lending itself a tool to widen the space between the ingroup and outgroup. In line with the expectation, the outgroup in the case of Le Pen are Muslims. Next will follow the tweets regarding the incoming Ukrainian refugees.

a. On March 1st Le Pen tweeted:

We are at the heart of the right of asylum: Ukrainian war refugees are neighbours, Europeans, and they must be sheltered during this war. (2022h)

- Right to Asylum ● Cultural Proximity ● Geographic Proximity ● Solidaric Discourse

It is clear from these tweets, and the additional discourse reviewed, that the main arguments referenced for the right of asylum of Ukrainian refugees are cultural and geographic proximity. However, there are a few underlying subtleties that need to be emphasized. In a podcast appearance Le Pen insisted that Ukrainian refugees *really are* war refugees and you can *see* that they are. It follows from the discourse that there is a level of legitimation through moral evaluation, meaning that somehow Ukrainian refugees are good and deserving of asylum, and on the flip-side painting other asylum seekers as bad people who lie. It is this moral evaluation, that takes comfort in judging who is deserving and who is not. An example of this is shown below.

- a. March 11th in a podcast Le Pen says:

But it also allows people to realize that these refugees who arrive, as we can see, are really war refugees. And it is not the migratory flows that we have experienced in the past. (2022i, 00:08)

- Distinguishing (Ukrainians vs Other) ● Legitimation: Moral Evaluation

However, all things considered, there still remain contradictions in the discourse of Le Pen, as seen below.

- b. On March 16th in a TV appearance Le Pen noted:

Obviously, they have and are cared for by the country for the benefit of this protection, but there is no need to integrate them. Mrs. Schiappa, they do not want to stay in France, they want to go home, they want peace to come and they want to be able to go home. (2022j, 3:24)

- Temporality

Thereby, while there is a clear shift seen in the discourse of Le Pen from her usual anti-immigrant position to welcoming rhetoric towards Ukrainian refugees, it seems the shift is not entirely genuine. Emphasis on the temporality of stay seems to supersede the benevolence and suggest that the shift, rather, serves the intention of appeasing outside pressure, whilst maintaining the precedence of national identity. Nevertheless, the tweets illustrate how Le Pen attempts to justify the clear shift in discourse, despite lingering contradictions, citing cultural and geographic proximity with underlying moral evaluations.

Eric Zemmour

For the period of February to April a total of 2,048 tweets and retweets were reviewed. In total 63 tweets were coded under Great Replacement (which is part of Assimilation code) and of those, 59 are attributed to Zemmour. In a similar fashion, of the 83 tweets in the Assimilation code itself, 55 were from Zemmour. As seen in Figure 5, of the remaining tweets regarding his anti-immigration stance that were coded, there were 52 tweets under Insecurity, 30 under Welfare Frame, 21 under Islamophobia, and 12 under Racism.

Figure 4. Frequency of Codes in Hypothesis Code Group

| | | Zemmour (Tweets and Transcripts) 📄 16 🗨️ 259 | Totals |
|---|--------|---|--------|
| ○ ◇ Assimilation (Cultural Frame) | 🗨️ 83 | 55 | 55 |
| ○ ◇ Firm on Immigration | 🗨️ 93 | 38 | 38 |
| ○ ◇ Great Replacement | 🗨️ 63 | 59 | 59 |
| ○ ◇ Insecurity | 🗨️ 125 | 53 | 53 |
| ○ ◇ Islamophobia (Religious Frame) | 🗨️ 29 | 21 | 21 |
| ○ ◇ Racism (Race Frame) | 🗨️ 13 | 12 | 12 |
| ○ ◇ Welfare Frame | 🗨️ 91 | 30 | 30 |
| Totals | | 268 | 268 |

As has been done in the previous section, an example for the most frequently used arguments against immigration will be given. Unlike, Le Pen, the ‘imaginary foreigner’ as a justification in of and itself precedes the Welfare and Insecurity arguments. In fact, it becomes clear that they are used to supplement the negatively charged moral evaluations of the outgroup.

- a. On April 8th Zemmour shared a TV appearance in which he said (in reference to Mélenchon):

That is to say, when I say we must save the France against the great replacement and replacement of our Christian and Greco-Roman civilization by an Islamic civilization, he glorifies it, is happy with it. (2022c, 00:05)

○ Great Replacement ○ Islamophobia (Religious Frame) ○ Racism (Race Frame)

- b. On February 7th Zemmour tweeted:

Let's stop with this myth of immigrants who work and French people who do not work. Today, 55% of non-European foreigners are inactive. (2022d)

○ Great Replacement ○ Islamophobia (Religious Frame) ○ Racism (Race Frame)

As expected, Zemmour is the least subtle of the candidates. Often referring directly to the Great Replacement, and thus falling back to nativist and neo-racist arguments. This is further emphasized by his ‘acceptance’ for those that attempt to fully assimilate to France, as shown below.

- a. On March 2nd he tweeted:

If it is a question of appropriating French culture and customs, the history of France and the soul of France, anyone can be French, wherever they come from. (2022e)

- Assimilation (Cultural Frame)

However, contradictory to his emphasis of national identity over the European identity, but in line with the overarching neo-racist arguments (against Muslims and non-Europeans), his welcoming of Ukrainian refugees seems to be the more in line with his discourse in comparison to Le Pen. It is noteworthy that similar to Le Pen, the emphasis on legitimization through moral evaluation, suggests Ukrainian refugees are good (following the Manichean lines) and therefore deserving of the right of asylum.

- a. On March 17th Zemmour tweeted:

I want to temporarily welcome the Ukrainian refugees who are our European and Christian brothers. I don't want African immigrants to take advantage of this, as they already do. (2022f)

- Cultural Proximity ● Distinguishing (Ukrainians vs Other) ○ Racism (Race Frame) ● Right to Asylum ● Solidaric Discourse ● Temporality
- Legitimation: Moral Evaluation

Despite the above, considering his previous discourse wherein he discusses the cost of asylum-seekers to the French people, contradictions remain present as seen below. On the other hand, they also contribute further in illustrating the exception of the Ukrainian refugees.

- a. On February 5th Zemmour tweeted:

I will put an end to asylum applications filed on our soil and I will reserve asylum for a few dozen individuals and not tens of thousands as today! It will be 1.3 billion euros that the state will stop taking from you every year. (2022g)

- Right to Asylum ○ Welfare Frame ● Emotional Impact Statistics
- Legitimation: Moral Evaluation

Although, they maybe and exception, the temporality of their stay is emphasized in the same way as Le Pen.

- a. March 2nd he tweeted:

We cannot remain insensitive to the pain of refugees. Ukrainians want to go to Poland, stay close to their fighting relatives and be able to return to Ukraine. (2022h)

- Shifting to Neighbor

Therefore, despite the differences in Le Pen and Zemmour in the overall justification for the anti-immigration stance (Zemmour leading with the ‘imaginary foreigner’), the findings are similar. Whereby, both Zemmour and Le Pen under a thin veneer of cultural and geographic proximity are able to disseminate moral evaluations that justify the welcoming of Ukrainian refugees as opposed to an Other. These moral evaluations rest on neo-racist discourse, that have expanded to include Ukrainian refugees as part of the ingroup.

Conclusion

To conclude, from the tweets and the accompanying media, it is clear that a shift in discourse did occur. The shift was justified through cultural and geographic proximity, that conceal the strong use of moral evaluation to expand the ingroup to include Ukrainian refugees whilst maintaining outgroup boundaries. The moral evaluations that are informed through neo-racist

narratives enable Le Pen and Zemmour to maintain the disdain of the outgroup in face of enduring contradictions. Unexpectedly, temporality was used both a justification for welcoming Ukrainian refugees, as well as a mechanism in keeping them arm length away. To do so is an attempt to maintain the nationalist discourse that is suggested to heavily outweigh the European identity. The findings have mostly confirmed the hypotheses, however, the resonance of legitimation through moral evaluation, while unexpected, is a vital conclusion to be further examined.

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