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# Burden-sharing among Far-Right Parties in the European Union



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## Abstract

This thesis employs Bacchi's WPR approach to examine the migration securitization strategies of far-right political parties, focusing on The Finns in Finland and Brothers of Italy in Italy. The findings illuminate how The Finns scrutinize the challenges posed by low-skilled migration, particularly its impact on the national economy. Conversely, Brothers of Italy prioritize addressing illegal migration, citing its implications for national security. Additionally, The Finns critique the EU for limiting national sovereignty and hindering burden-shifting efforts, while Brothers of Italy advocate for enhancing their country's influence within the EU to facilitate burden-sharing initiatives.

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# 1. Introduction

In recent years, especially following the 2015 refugee crisis, a surge of nationalism has swept across Europe (Postelnicescu, 2016-pp.2). Far-Right (FR) parties, encompassing a spectrum on the rightmost end, have capitalized on anti-immigration rhetoric to secure significant voter support (Xiong, 2023-pp-242). However, questions arise regarding their shared interests, particularly at the European Union (EU) level. For instance, while these parties share anti-migration rhetoric, they also share Euroscepticism, blaming the EU for migration policies that they perceive as detrimental to national interests (Vasilopoulou, 2018-pp-5). Moreover, the geographical realities of Member States (MSs) have always challenged European integration (Webber, 2019-pp-6). Northern MSs are generally well-buffered, while southern MSs face a disproportionate influx of migrants from the Global South. Additionally, the Dublin Regulation assigns the responsibility for processing asylum requests to the first country of arrival, placing significant infrastructure and financial burdens on Southern MSs (Webber, 2019-pp-13).

By 2023, data indicates that there were over twenty-seven million non-EU citizens, with more than three million classified as refugees (EC, 2024), a number expected to rise due to ongoing global political instability and environmental factors (Apap, 2021-pp-3). Given the centrality of immigration in the agenda of FR parties, understanding their proposed solutions to the increasing influx becomes imperative to understand the chances of cooperation if these parties come in government. Therefore, this research aims to explore how variations in migration influx and responsibilities under the EU regime shape threat perceptions of migration in different MSs and influence the solutions proposed by FR parties. Specifically, this study will compare the solutions of Italy's Brothers of Italy (FDI) and Finland's The Finns (PS) in regard

of migration. While both are FR parties, the operating environments of the two are notably distinct due to Italy's proximity to the Mediterranean Sea and Finland's more insulated location. By employing securitization theory, we wish to establish whether the solutions proposed by the two parties seem to lead towards burden-sharing, meant as equitable distribution of responsibilities, among MSs or not.

The question this research aims to answer is:

How does the securitization of migration differ between FR parties in Italy and Finland? And to what extent are the solutions proposed by the parties leaning towards deeper burden-sharing among MSs?

The term migration has been chosen as the study contends that applying a security framework to the entire spectrum of migration is more apt. For instance, the concepts of migration are inherently flexible and politically exploitable by political parties, who could use the term “migrant” to refer to other specific categories such as “refugees” and “asylum-seekers”, blurring distinctions and potentially shaping public perceptions and policy responses.

First, the theoretical framework with the theory behind FR parties, burden-sharing, and securitization theory will be given in order to better understand the concepts we are working with and the context for certain processes to happen. Thereafter, the methodology will be given through which the reader will get to understand how the analysis will be conducted. Finally, the national programs from the year the two parties were elected, along with their European programs for the 2024 elections, will be analysed and discussed

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Far-Right Parties

The popularity of FR parties has risen in the EU, especially after the 2015 Syrian Crisis, where mainstream parties across the EU faced difficulties in tackling the sudden great influx of refugees from the Middle East (Dennison & Geddes, 2018). As of 2023, Denmark's FR party DF held the smallest share of national parliamentary seats with 4%, while Hungary's FR party Fidesz held the largest with 59% (Armstrong, 2023).

FR is a term used to cover the umbrella of rightmost parties. The term cover populist, nationalist, radicalism extremist attitudes (Golder, 2016-pp.478). Populism capitalizes on the antagonistic relationship between 'us' (the pure people) and 'them' (the corrupt elites), asserting that decisions made by 'the people' are legitimate and morally superior (Mudde 2004, p. 543). Nationalism demands congruence between state and nation, dividing the in-group from the out-group (Mudde, 2007-pp-19). Finally, extremism and radicalism are terms used to identify a party's position within the democratic spectrum. For instance, while radical parties are illiberal but still democratic, extreme parties are anti-democratic (Pirro, 2022b-pp-106). Currently, the most common FR parties are radical, populist, and nationalist, a combination of traits referred to as a "master frame" (Pirro, 2022b-pp-481).

This master frame, due to its nationalist component, tends to portray outsiders, such as immigrants or minorities, as scapegoats for societal grievances (Cochrane & Nevitte, 2012b-pp-4). By framing immigration as the root cause, these parties provide a specific target for public frustration. It is to note that migrants targeted by FR parties tend to come from the Global South as they are perceived as more burdensome as they are mostly low-skilled workers (Edo & Giesing, 2020-pp-9)

There are three specific grievances that have been recognized: modernization grievances, economic grievances and cultural grievances (Golder, 2016-pp-478). Modernization grievances stem from the shift from industrial postwar economic models and values to more globalized and post-materialist ones (Golder, 2016-pp-482). These changes have led people more attached to traditional values to turn to FR parties, which often emphasize the importance of traditional roles to maintain order (Golder, 2016-pp-483).

Economic grievances encompass concerns related to financial hardship, such as unemployment, and stagnant wages (Golder, 2016-pp-483). These grievances are often rooted in individuals' perceptions of economic unfairness within society, where certain groups feel marginalized or disadvantaged compared to others (Golder, 2016-pp-484). FR parties capitalize on the failure of mainstream parties in government to address economic hardships, positioning themselves as the voice of the people against the regime (Golder, 2016-pp-484). Moreover, FR parties frequently use immigrants as scapegoats to highlight the perceived unfair competition for job opportunities between nationals and non-nationals (Cochrane and Nevitte, 2012-pp-2).

Finally, cultural grievances are closely tied to Social Identity Theory (Ivarsflaten 2008-pp-3). This theory suggests that individuals naturally tend to sympathize with others who share similarities, such as common characteristics, beliefs, or affiliations, viewing them as part of their "ingroup," which they consider superior to individuals belonging to "outgroups." FR parties often emphasize these similarities while amplifying differences, particularly targeting immigrants as part of the outgroup. The fear of losing one's group identity often drives voters who fear an erosion of national cultural values to support these parties (Ivarsflaten 2008-pp-3).

Moreover, FR parties, tend to oppose supranational institutions, such as the European Union (EU), viewing them as undermining national sovereignty. FR movements depict the EU as an



elitist institution that imposes regulations and standards without adequate consideration of the national context (Vasilopoulou, 2018-pp-8), further aggravating perceived grievances.

## 2.2. Burden-Sharing

The term “burden-sharing” is commonly used in the field of asylum and immigration, referring to shared efforts for the protection of refugees. There are three different kinds of “burden-sharing,” as described by Noll (1997-pp-412): share of policies, concerned with harmonization of policies among MSs; share of money, focused on a fair distribution of resources based on the number of asylum-seekers and refugees in one MS; and share of people, meaning commitments to share a fair distribution of asylum-seekers and/or refugees. The aim of burden-sharing is for the burdens of asylum applications and refugee integration to be fairly distributed among MSs. For the scope of this thesis, burden-sharing gains significance as far-right parties often target migrants from the Global South, who travel through the Mediterranean and become asylum-seekers upon reaching the EU.

Burden-sharing is often regarded as a public good, benefiting all states as it promotes stability and addresses humanitarian crises (Thielemann, 2006-pp-64). However, a significant challenge arises in the form of free riding. This occurs when countries with fewer refugees benefit from the efforts of others that host a larger number of refugees. As a result, there is an imbalance in the distribution of burdens among MSs, with those hosting the most refugees bearing a disproportionate share of the responsibility. Due to their geographical locations, MSs at the Schengen border, especially the ones on the mediterranean coasts, are often faced with high influxes of irregular migration (Thielemann, 2006-pp-66). Once irregular migrants arrive in the EU, they are entitled to seek asylum. If their applications are approved, they are granted refugee status and protected under the UN 1951 Refugee Convention; if not, they can be deported back to their country of origin. The Dublin Regulation puts and additional weight

onto bordering MSs as it establishes that only one state can be responsible for an asylum application and that MS is the one of arrival (EC, 2013). There are exceptions to this rule, such as cases where asylum-seekers have family ties in MSs different from the one of arrival (EC, 2013).

It is to note that as most EU bordering states do not have the capacity nor the incentives to implement the Dublin Regulations, they allow irregular migrants to pass through their borders and reach other MSs (Webber,2019-pp-18). Furthermore, non-EU countries along the routes of irregular migrants, aware that these migrants are typically in transit towards EU destinations with more favorable conditions, generally do not impede their movement. As a result, certain EU Member States find themselves obligated to accommodate asylum-seekers since they lack internal Schengen borders that would allow for better control over influxes (Webber, 2019-pp-18). Finally, other MSs more in the North, and well buffered, remain under-committed by free riding on other MSs generosity while asking for stricter restrictions on irregular immigration and more efforts to the southern states (Webber, 2019-pp-18).

### 2.3. Securitization theory

Securitization theory emerged in the late 1980s as a discourse analytical framework often associated with the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. The theory seeks to broaden the concept of security beyond military and economic notions (Guzzini, 2011-pp-331). Security is defined as a “successful speech through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, pp.451). For an issue to become securitized one needs a securitising actor, posing a threat to an audience (Buzan et al., 1998-pp-24). If the audience internalizes the threat posed by the securitising actor, extraordinary measures are accepted by the audience to fight

the threat (Buzan et al., 1998-pp-28). In the scope of this research, immigration are posed by FR parties as a threat. The whole society is the referent object against which this existential threat acts and the extraordinary measures are assumed to be entailed to reduce the number of migrants.

### 3. Hypotheses formulation

One common interest all FR parties among MSs are likely to share is to reduce the influx of illegal immigrants into the EU. Hence, we hypothesize:

H1: All FR parties in EU's MSs will advocate for strengthening Schengen border controls.

However, once immigrants will have entered the continent, parties in different geographical locations should have opposite interests. While MSs on the Mediterranean are unavoidably faced with direct influx of migration from the South, MSs in the North are well buffered.

Moreover, the Dublin Regulation, forces the first MS of entry to take responsibility for asylum processing while MSs at the North are unlikely to be burdened by such responsibility.

Therefore, we can hypothesize:

H2a: FR parties in MSs facing direct influxes of migration from the South, are expected to strive for policy reforms and stronger burden-sharing in response to illegal immigration.

H2b: FR parties in MSs with buffered impacts of migration from the South are expected to strive for maintaining the current policy regime and reducing burden-sharing efforts.

## 4. Methodology

To conduct this research, a qualitative research model will be utilized to analyse and compare national and European programs of two far-right parties, Italy's Brothers of Italy and Finland's The Finns.

There are different ways of studying programs and for this research, the researcher adopts Carol Bacchi's 'what's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach (2009). Bacchi's framework views political issues as socially constructed phenomena, suggesting that policies arise from problematizing activities, which require critical examination. By scrutinizing the programs of the two parties and the policies suggested within them, this study aims to reveal how FR parties portray migration as a societal issue. Unlike traditional discourse analysis, which primarily focuses on linguistic features, the WPR approach prioritizes the examination of social knowledge within texts, thus limiting mistakes due to incorrect translation. By analysing the securitization of FR parties elected in government, one aims to understand the intersubjective knowledge of migration in the respective national contexts shaped by the different influx of migration. In fact, the assumption is that if parties have obtained a large share of votes, their securitization of migration must have been successful within their electorate who, for securitization theory, must have internalized the perceived threat as such, thus aligning them with the solutions proposed.

The analytical tools from the WPR approach consist of six questions, which are formulated according to the theoretical framework and function as empirical indicators in the analysis. Depending on the purpose of a study, questions may be selected or removed (Bacchi, 2009, PP.2).

As the aim of this research is to investigate solutions proposed by two FR parties in relation to the securitization of migration in the two different national contexts, firstly the securitization of migration must be understood. Therefore 2 questions from Bacchi's framework were selected:

- *What is the problem represented to be and who is it threatening? (Q1)*
- *What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem? (Q2)*

These will be used to better understand the solutions proposed and hence, answer the third question:

- *What are the solutions proposed to the represented problem? (Q3)*

Q1 aims to identify the subject of the threat and the entity being threatened. It is important to note that with this question, the goal is not to pinpoint the real problem, as per securitization theory, problems are constructed. Instead, the focus lies on what the problem is represented to be. Therefore, since all policies are problematizing activities, they must contain problem representations (Bacchi, 2009-pp-3). In order to understand the problematization of migration, the researcher will employ a backward approach, starting with the analysis of solutions to migration and then tracing back to examine the underlying problem or issue these solutions aim to address.

Q2 aims at identifying the underlying justification for framing the situation as a threat.

Once the problem representation has been identified, one should ask what is assumed in the securitization of the problem (Bacchi, 2009,-pp-5). Therefore, we are looking for assumptions underlying a problem representation, which is essentially knowledge taken for granted. This

knowledge should not be based solely on parties' beliefs but on societal intersubjective knowledge within a specific context.

Bacchi's approach is open-ended, focusing on knowledge rather than language. This implies that discourse analysis within this framework does not adhere to precise coding methodologies, as it aims to uncover the underlying assumptions and societal knowledge embedded within political discourse. Nevertheless, Bacchi describes (2009, pp.-7-10) three patterns to look for to help the researcher with the task: binaries, key concepts, and categories. Binaries operate on an A/Not-A relationship, where what falls under one side of the binary is excluded from the other, often privileging one side (e.g. citizens vs migrants, MS vs EU) Furthermore, key concepts will be identified, serving as abstract labels that are frequently contested by competing political visions. Additionally, categories such as age, gender, ethnicity, and religion will be explored, particularly in relation to individuals, as they can give insights on which specific type of migration are the parties securitizing (e.g. particular emphasis on Muslim migrants).

Q3 will be then be used in relation to the results from Q1 and Q2. In particular, we are interested in assessing whether the two parties' solutions stemming from the two different securitizations of migration seem to suggest an increase or decrease in burden-sharing among MSs

#### 4.1. Case Selection

Two FR parties, FDI (FDI) in Italy and PS in Finland, were selected for analysis. This choice was driven by the varying influx of migrants within their borders, influenced by their geographical location in the EU. For instance, while Italy faced a substantial influx of migration from the Global South, with over three hundred thousand refugees and over one hundred thousand asylum-seekers in 2023, Finland experienced comparatively lower numbers, with

around eighty thousand refugees and six thousand asylum-seekers, reflecting differing migration dynamics and policy responses within the EU (EC, 2024). Additionally, both parties currently hold a significant share of seats in their respective governments (both more than 20%), implying both parties should reflect the societal context in which FR parties thrive. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that their securitization of migration has been successful and internalized by their electorate.

The analysis will primarily focus on the parties' latest election programs (2022 for Italy and 2023 for Finland) as key documents, providing insights into their agendas and proposed solutions communicated to the electorate. Furthermore, we will examine the parties' programs for the 2024 European elections. This is of particular interest due to the parties' membership in the same Parliamentary group “European Conservatives and Reformist” where PS have 2 representatives in contrast to FDI which have 10, holding the largest share after Polish party Law and Justice.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1. PS Migration Policy Program 2023

PS program on migration is organized into 16 sections (PS, 2023). The first section serves as an introduction, while the subsequent sections each address a specific issue related to migration. The headings of each section indicate the specific issue, and the paragraphs within provide detailed explanations of the problems identified by the party and the solutions they propose.

The two types of migration addressed by the party are labor migration and humanitarian migration. Labor migration refers to movement driven by economic reasons, wherein individuals relocate to improve their living conditions. Humanitarian migration is often used in

the text to refer to asylum-seekers and refugees. For instance, while the term 'asylum-seekers' is used, the term 'refugee' is used sparingly. While the term 'asylum-seeker' is imbued with negative connotations, often associated with illegal migrants awaiting the processing of their asylum requests, the term “refugees” clearly refers to a protected category of people under international law. This terminology choice appears deliberate to desensitize their electorate to the sufferings of refugees by not fully acknowledging their plight.

Moreover, many of the problems mentioned by PS are not caused by immigrants themselves but by the current government, media and other significant entities that see “immigration as a patent solution to Finland's economic and demographic problems”, hence, highlighting that the main problem lies in the fact that others are currently using migration as solution to Finland's national struggles. This aligns with populist rhetoric that emphasizes an 'us versus them' dichotomy.

In the introduction part of the program, the party states that “The only way to mitigate the negative side effects of immigration is to strongly reduce, through legislative and administrative measures, immigration from outside the EU to Finland. The longer these necessary corrective actions are delayed, the greater will rise the economic and human costs incurred by Finns” (PS, 2023-pp-3). This statement underscores the urgency of enacting such measures, as any delay will only exacerbate the economic and human costs incurred by Finns. By emphasizing the need for legislative and administrative action, PS implies dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of current governmental measures in reducing immigration. Furthermore, PS makes it clear that migrants from outside the continent are the primary concern. Implicit in this statement are several assumptions: firstly, the acknowledgment of both negative and positive effects of immigration, with PS favouring high-skilled migrants while portraying low-skilled migrants, often from developing countries (PS, 2023-pp-8), as problematic. Finally, they seem to highlight



the importance of acting quick, thus, inciting their electorate to vote for someone who can act rapidly. In summary, we understand that the main problem are low skilled migrants from developing countries that pose a burden on Finns, the solution is electing the party so that they can make quick reforms to the national migration regime. In discussing Finland's preferred regime, the PS criticizes Sweden's liberal policies for attracting a high influx of low-skilled migrants, which they argue hindered their economy (PS, 2023-pp-3). This critique extends beyond Sweden, as PS often depicts liberal policies implemented by states like Germany as appealing to migrants, thus posing a danger to MSs (PS, 2023-pp-13). This perspective aligns with the ideology of the radical far-right, providing insights into their opposition to the liberal system. By portraying liberal states as appealing destinations for migrants, PS reinforces its stance against the liberal system, advocating for stricter controls and a more conservative approach similar to Denmark's (PS, 2023-pp-3-7).

The party's stance on labor migration appears influenced by the absence of international safeguards, granting them more autonomy. In contrast, their attention to humanitarian migration seems geared towards restricting the rights of these migrants and potentially relegating them to the status of regular migrants. For example, the party states that “The True Finns' line is that individual right to seek asylum is limited according to the original Geneva Refugee Convention only to internal refugees in Europe” (PS, 2023-pp-5). This implies a preference for granting asylum exclusively to Europeans, who we have established to be considered high-skilled and thus not included in the securitization of migration by the Finns. The problem seems to lie in the fact that the Convention is limiting Finnish power to limit immigration from countries outside the EU. Moreover, in the text they state that “Asylum cannot in the future be a magic word anymore” (PS, 2023-pp-5). The problem here reflects concerns about the misuse of asylum claims by individuals seeking to exploit Finland's system for labor market benefits. For instance, many of the solutions proposed in the program aim to reduce the rights of

humanitarian migrants so that they can be treated just as labor ones. This strategy suggests that by aligning their treatment, Finland could assert sovereignty over their governance and address the economic burden associated with their residency, all while avoiding potential conflicts with international law.

The party adds that “an individual illegally coming to Finland from outside Europe has no right to seek international protection, but they are returned to a refugee camp outside the EU, which can be administered by Finland or, for example, jointly Nordically” (PS, 2023-pp-7). This part is interesting as it seeks to address the issue of unauthorized immigration by suggesting the establishment of camps outside the EU. While it is clear that keeping humanitarian migrants away from Finland limit issues related with integration, one must also note that costs of maintenance in countries outside of the EU, especially in the Global South are significantly lower than in Finland, further justifying the choice of keeping them there (PS, 2023-pp-4). Furthermore, this solution implies a belief in collaboration with Northern countries, often mentioned by PS in their European program. The underlying assumption here is that Northern countries understand the Northern European context better than others.

Furthermore, the program asserts that "granting work permits cannot be left solely to the will of companies"(PS, 2023-pp-8). It proposes prohibiting private companies from issuing work permits when residence permits have been denied. The perceived threat here is companies enabling the influx of low-skilled foreign labor into Finland by issuing work permits despite denied residence permits, thereby overlooking "the many negative externalities." This calls for state intervention to assess the appropriateness of granting permits, invoking populist sentiment by emphasizing that companies allegedly fail to understand or prioritize the needs of Finnish citizens, and anti-liberal policies by intervening and restricting the autonomy of private companies in the labor market.

While not explicitly mentioning the Dublin Regulation, the party problematizes several implications associated with it. Firstly, it underscores the importance of having people seeking international protection “restricted as much as possible only to the immediate vicinity of the reception center” (PS, 2023-pp-5). This problematizes the practice where illegal migrants are allowed to cross national borders by other Member States, enabling them to possibly shift the burden of asylum processing onto another Member State, thus undermining Finland’s interests. Secondly, the party proposes restricting family reunifications, which are currently regulated by the Dublin Regulation, prioritizing the Member State where family ties are present for the newcoming asylum-seeker (PS, 2023-pp-7). PS suggest that no grant for family-based permits in family reunifications should be given if the person is not self-reliant before coming to Finland, not even for family reunifications involving Finnish citizens. Lastly, they refuse to implement a refugee quota, thus clearly opposing to voluntary burden-sharing.

Finally, the party draws a clear distinction between multiculturalism and assimilation, advocating for Finnish policy to prioritize assimilation over multiculturalism and to favor Christians over Muslims in immigration (PS, 2023-pp-11). They argue that the immigration industry fosters dependency and hinders integration by inefficiently using state funds to support organizations that promote multiculturalism rather than assimilation (PS, 2023-pp-11). The underlying assumption is that multiculturalism incentivizes segregation and the formation of parallel societies, posing a threat to social cohesion and security. Moreover, the implementation of multiculturalist policies often carries significant financial implications. These policies necessitate that the state provides support and accommodation for the diverse subcultures and individualistic interpretations of societal norms. This may involve allocating public subsidies to preserve minority religions and languages, as well as ensuring access to culturally appropriate dietary options (De Vries, 2019-pp-203). Simultaneously, PS highlight that assimilation is important for the endurance of Finnish values. By accommodating e.g. Muslim women

swimming during specific hours, they do not only add extra costs for the enforcement of such a policy, but they also undermine Finnish views on women's rights (PS, 2023-pp-11).

## 5.1. PS Program for the European Elections of 2024

PS have divided their program in 6 parts, each addressing one of the main fields in which changes shall be made as perceived by PS except for the first part which is an introduction to the program (PS, 2024). The topics are Decision making, economy immigration, security and a chapter titled “A new Europe is possible”, which mainly summarizes the main points. Our object of interest is the part in relation to migration. However, since the other topics incorporate mentions of migration, they were included in the analysis.

In the introduction, in the first paragraph PS already make a statement offering a clear suggestion of their position: “PS Party is unwaveringly committed to protecting European civilization and addressing the many challenges facing Europe. This does not mean isolation from the world, but every European nation has the inviolable right to cherish its own culture and identity. Europe is not a melting pot of nations like the United States, nor should it aspire to be” (PS, 2024—pp-3). Here the problematization of multiculturalism, framed as mixing European civilization with others seems evident. They assert that European civilization should be protected, implying other civilizations may hinder this objective. Moreover, they go on and state that each European nation has its own inviolable right to cherish its own culture and identity. Therefore, they suggest that alongside protecting European civilization as a whole, each state should retain sovereignty to safeguard its own culture, hinting the EU may hinder this. Contrarily to their national program, where the economic burden caused by migrants seemed the main problem, here and throughout the program they underscore the cultural implications of migration to Europe. This could be as the economic context of Finland is specific to the nation, while threat to cultural identity is a widespread concern across MSs.

Finally, they suggest that Europe should not aspire to be like the United States, rejecting the idea of Europe as a melting pot of civilizations. By making this distinction, they emphasize their opposition to multicultural policies that accommodate diverse cultures, which they associate with liberal systems like the United States. PS also state that the liberal immigration policies of Germany are what is making the country so appealing to foreigners (PS, 2024-pp-12), aligning with the content from their national program, further opposing liberal policies.

Later in the text, in the part about decision making, the party states that recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, Russia's aggression and the consequent strong inflation have increased demands for "so-called common European Solutions" (PS, 2024-pp-4). They go on by stating that the EU is using such crises as a pretext. "Finland's public finances are significantly weaker than those of our comparator countries. We have increasingly less ability and willingness to start reviving the economies of Southern and Eastern Europe with joint debt" (PS, 2024-pp-4). For instance, Finland has entered a recession in 2023, meaning their public expenditure is higher than what the state gets from taxes, causing their national debt to increase. In 2023, the general government deficit was 2.7% of GDP due to economic contraction, decreased tax revenues, and an 8% increase in government spending on public wages, interest payments, and social spending (EC, 2024). Therefore, PS seems to point out that in such situation, it is not manageable for them to sustain Southern and Eastern countries, implying the two areas of Europe to be benefitting more than they are contributing to the EU. Further on in the text, they "demand a restoration of respect for the EU's principles of subsidiarity and proximity. The principle of subsidiarity should ensure the right of MSs to make decisions and act independently on matters that do not fall exclusively under the EU's legislative authority. According to the principle of proximity, decisions should always be made as close as possible to the level affected by those decisions" (PS, 2024-pp-6). With this statement, they clearly point out that the EU is granted decisional power over matters that they

cannot grasp as they are regional and not continental, thus hindering MSs' ability to address issues peculiar to their area in the manner they find most appropriate. As also mentioned in their national program, they have a desire to form a stronger coalition with another northern states. In the program they mention several reasons for this: first, they are all net contributor, thus, assuming the other states must feel the same frustration towards their exploitation by the EU (PS, 2024-pp-6). Secondly, other Nordic countries share similarities, such as demography, geographic location, and cultural values (PS, 2024-pp-6). The assumption is that Nordic countries are not listened by the EU due to their geographical locations and demography, therefore limiting their influence within the Union (PS, 2024-pp-6). "A potential exit from the EU would likely occur simultaneously with other Nordic countries, thereby also intensifying Nordic cooperation" (PS, 2024-pp-6). The prospect of exiting the EU is presented as an option. For instance, their willingness to consider exiting the EU is conditional upon the formation of a new alliance with other Northern countries, indicating a preference for alternative regional cooperation arrangements.

The value given to selective cooperation can also be noticed further on in the text. For instance, PS express their willingness to form coalitions with other EU states when common interests are involved: "We can advance issues important to us with countries that share our perspectives" (PS, 2024-pp-8). The underlying assumption here is twofold: first, that interests are not homogeneously shared, and second, that MSs that do not share Finland's perspective lack compatibility for cooperation. Therefore, if either of these criteria is absent, Finland may choose not to engage in cooperation.

In the migration section of the program, the party main focus is on illegal migration reiterating their stance that such individuals should be relocated to a safe third country (PS, 2024-pp-12). There, their asylum requests would be processed, and if approved, they would be taken care of

in the third country. The problem is that irregular migration has led Europe to a “permanent state of emergency since the 2015 refugee crisis” (PS, 2024-pp-12). This perceived threat is attributed to the high number of illegal border crossings and asylum applications, especially gravitating towards countries with liberal asylum policies like Germany (PS, 2024-pp-12).

However, “Germany's resources are not limitless, which may lead to asylum-seeker pressure beginning to shift towards the Nordic countries in the near future” (PS, 2024-pp-12). The assumption is the resources of countries like Germany and other big nation aspired by migrants are limited. It seems to assume that other countries may decide to restrict asylum policies to limit the ingress of asylum-seeker in the near future, which would lead to an increase in other MSs. This also adds insights as to why in their national programs, they suggest quick changes.

Finally, the program presents a critical view of the EU's development cooperation for developing countries, framing it as an ineffective and economically burdensome endeavour (PS, 2024-pp-14). According to them, decades of EU development aids have not achieved the desired outcomes in recipient countries. Instead, these efforts have coincided with an increase in authoritarian regimes, rampant corruption, and socially and economically harmful migration from developing countries to Europe (PS, 2024-pp-14), therefore implicitly blaming the EU for incentivizing migration into the EU. Moreover, it is depicted as an economic burden that the EU can no longer afford. They employ financial figures to underscore this point: in 2021, the EU's joint public development aid amounted to €70.2 billion, representing 43 percent of the world's publicly funded development aid (PS, 2024-pp-15). PS Party argues that this substantial expenditure is squandered, given the lack of positive outcomes in recipient countries (PS, 2024-pp-15). Additionally, the party also suggests development cooperation to be restructured to ensure mutual benefit, implying that current aid primarily benefits recipient countries without adequate returns for the EU.

### 5.3. FDI Policy Program 2022

The FDI national electoral program for 2022 is divided into 26 parts (FDI, 2022). The first part serves as an introduction, while the remaining sections address various issues perceived as problems within the state, most of which are economic in nature. The program is less detailed compared to PS's and solutions are offered without clear, or brief explanations. Overall, the program suggests higher public expenditures on Italian companies and subsidies. Additionally, many topics reflect nationalist rhetoric, emphasizing the promotion of Italian culture and values both within and outside Europe (e.g. "Made in Italy and Italian Pride" and "Italy as a Protagonist in Europe and the World")

In the introduction, the party states the main problems Italy is going through: "In the abyss of a prolonged and perpetual economic crisis, the financial situation has progressively deteriorated, the tax burden has constantly increased, the poverty rate has reached unacceptable levels, the middle class is increasingly struggling, social conflict is becoming more intense, the productive fabric is becoming less competitive, and the presence of the State is becoming more invasive and less respectful of the fundamental freedoms of citizens and businesses" (FDI, 2022-pp-4).

The main problem, thus, seems to be the prolonged and perpetual economic crisis that led to various negative consequences. Moreover, the assumption seems to be that social conflict and a lack of competitiveness are directly related to the economic crisis and that the state intervention, led by Draghi's technocratic government at the time, was infringing fundamental rights. Draghi's government was not directly elected. For instance, Draghi was appointed by the president of the republic. Their rhetoric, recall populism as FDI claims that the technocratic government was being disrespectful towards its citizens and undermining democratic values by imposing policies without sufficient public input or accountability.



Further on in the introduction, the party states that the Italian left government, who accordingly to FDI was in government for over 10 years (Rai, 2024), has indulged other European partners while neglecting Italians' needs, stating that: "Italy must return to stand tall in international forums, as a full-fledged member of the G7 and as a founding member of the EU and NATO, after too many years of marginalization and subordination" (FDI, 2022-pp-4). Here, they suggest that Italy should regain its stature in international forums. The implied problem is that Italy is no longer taken seriously and has been marginalized. This presupposes that Italy's influence and stature in these forums have diminished over time due to previous left-leaning governments, a notion presented as accepted knowledge within the political discourse. They are also implying that Italy has been marginalized and subordinated by the international forums but seem to blame the left for this instead of the forums themselves. Their opposition to the left and its perceived mismanagement of the state is a recurring theme throughout the program. For example, in the chapter addressing Italy's recovery and resilience plan, designed to drive the country's economic recovery and modernization in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the party asserts that Italy has consistently been a net contributor to the EU, thus deeming the mishandling of funds by the left as intolerable (FDI, 2022-pp-7). While they acknowledge their status as net contributors, they again seem to blame left's mismanagement rather than problematizing Italy's financial contributions to the EU, contrary to the Finns who seem to blame other MSs for being burdensome.

Only one part is dedicated to immigration and already incorporate a solution in the title of its section: "Stopping illegal immigration to give security back to Italians" (FDI, 2022-pp-31). The title suggests that illegal migration is a significant issue for Italy, primarily because it has compromised the security of Italians. This problem is underscored by the fact that Italy is situated on one of the most trafficked illegal migration routes, with many illegal immigrants

arriving from Northern Africa (Frontex,2021). In 2024, it was estimated that there were four hundred fifty-eight thousand irregular migrants in Italian territory (Frontex, 2021).

Furthermore, in the same chapter, the party states that there must be “relentless fighting against all forms of organized crime (og. Translation: mafie), terrorism, and corruption. Ensuring legality and social cohesion by strengthening the network of prefectures as representatives of the State on the territory” (FDI, 2022-pp-31). Therefore, the problem seems to be that illegal migration causes illegal activities. However, it seems that the party is pointing the finger both to illegal migrants and people and activities enabling such activities. Moreover, they suggest that there should be prevention and contrast to women and minor violence, implying that irregular migrants are the ones causing it (FDI, 2022-pp-31). Finally, the pragmatic solution they offer to illegal migration revolve around military and penitentiary measures. For instance, they mention the enhancement of law enforcement personnel, such as police, fire brigade, local police, and armed forces. The inclusion of measures such as the reinforcement of the prison system, as indicated by the mention of the Prison Plan (FDI, 2022-pp-32), further emphasizes the focus on military-penitentiary solutions. This strategy aims to mitigate the negative impacts of migration by confining migrants in a way that prevents them from causing problems.

At the EU level, they advocate for the “defence of national and European borders as envisaged by the Schengen Treaty and requested by the EU, with border control and blocking of landings to stop, in agreement with North African authorities, human trafficking” (FDI, 2022-pp-32). In this case, the entity being threatened encompasses both national and European borders, implying a collective concern over the security of these territories, as in the case of PS. This part of the program is crucial as the party seems very willing to cooperate with third countries and, importantly, with the EU. For instance, they commit to the defence of their borders not only as a national concern but as a European one. However, while initially showcasing a

readiness to shoulder the responsibility for defending Schengen borders, they later appear to advocate for increased burden-sharing. For instance, they advocate for the “Creation of hotspots in extra-European territories, managed by the EU, to assess asylum requests and fair distribution, only to those entitled, in the 27 MSs” (FDI, 2022-pp-32). By suggesting hotspots in extra-European territories managed at the EU level, they imply a shared financial burden for asylum-seekers. Additionally, by calling for fair distribution among the 27 MSs, they imply a shared responsibility for hosting refugees while still reducing the burden of illegal migration and asylum processing by delegating the task to the EU and extra-European territories.

#### 5.4. FDI program for European elections 2024

FDI has divided their program in 15 parts, introduction excluded (FDI, 2022a). The topics treated are similar to the ones in their national program and are even less descriptive, resembling more a list of suggestions. In their introduction, FDI recognize Europe as the nucleus of Western modern civilization and declares that European Conservatives and Reformists of which, they specify, FDI's leader Giorgia Meloni is leading, will “defend the cultural roots of Europe, to preserve the identity of European peoples, enhancing differences without nullifying them ... We do not need a bureaucratic giant. We want Europe to be a political giant with a leading role on the international stage, capable of facing the major challenges it is called upon to address” (FDI, 2022a-pp-2). Similarly to PS, FDI state that the culture of Europe must be defended as differences among states are enhanced. By stating that the bureaucratic giants are not required, they problematise the bureaucracy of the EU. For instance, they state that EU should have more of a leading role in the international arena, thus, problematizing bureaucracy as the reason why the EU is not in a leading position to project influence and shape global dynamics. As they mentioned in their national program they want more power at the EU. Therefore, we may assume the reason they want more power at the

European level is to lead in the international arena. In addition, FDI criticizes the hierarchical structure within the EU, as evidenced by their rejection of the notion of "states of level A and B" (FDI, 2022a-pp-2). This critique suggests a dissatisfaction with the perceived unequal treatment of member states within the EU framework. However, while PS focuses on the specific mistreatment of Finland, FDI adopts a broader perspective, framing the issue as a systemic flaw affecting multiple MSs, without naming any specifically.

In the introduction, finally, they seem to further oppose to the left. In fact, they mention that “We prefer a Europe that supports those who produce and work over a Europe of decline and productive desertification; we prefer a strong Europe that plays a leading role on the international stage over a weak Europe incapable of making an impact; we prefer the Europe of peoples and nations over the 'Super-State' Europe, reminiscent of the Soviet model cherished by the left” (FDI, 2022a-pp-3). The problematization here centres around the perceived decline and unproductive desertification of Europe posing threats to producers, workers, and national sovereignty. This portrayal presupposes that the approach taken by left-leaning political entities is culpable for these issues, implying that alternative policies and ideologies, such as those advocated by the FR party, are necessary to effectively address them.

In regard to Immigration, the party again frames irregular migration and those who enable it, e.g. in the form of human trafficking, to be the problem as they threaten the security and stability of the EU (FDI, 2022a-pp-12). Additionally, they seem to assume that promoting cooperation with third countries, and addressing the root causes of irregular immigration are the main solutions to counter these threats (FDI, 2022a-pp-12). Several solutions proposed point out to this: “Promote cooperation agreements with third countries to combat illegal immigration, to stop departures, and to manage asylum requests and detentions for repatriation on-site” (FDI, 2022a-pp-12), “Support the right not to emigrate by addressing the root causes of

irregular immigration with the Mattei Plan for Africa” (FDI, 2022a-pp-13), “Implement agreements with countries of origin and transit and negotiate further agreements on assisted voluntary repatriations” (FDI, 2022a-pp-12). The discourse suggests that promoting cooperation with third countries to block transit routes and address the root causes of irregular migration constitutes the primary solutions to counter the perceived threats posed by irregular migration.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the securitization of migration by PS and FDI reveals distinct approaches shaped by their respective national contexts and political objectives. Utilizing Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) framework, it becomes evident that both parties frame migration as a security threat but with differing focal points. FDI, operating in a high-pressure migration context, portrays illegal immigration as a dire security threat necessitating robust EU-wide policy intervention to alleviate Italy's disproportionate strain. FDI's approach reflects a pragmatic adaptation of euroscepticism compared to far-right party's theory. While the party recognizes the flaws in the EU, they link them to the incapability of the left to govern. However, it also recognizes opportunities where EU mechanisms can be leveraged to reduce national burdens. On the other hand, PS underscores the economic and social strains of low-skilled migration on Finland and advocates for national sovereignty to reform migration policies. While also advocating for EU policy reforms, their stance suggests a desire to diminish EU influence over national migration policies, as they see it hindering national efforts to reduce influx of migration in the state.

Therefore, while both parties use securitization narratives to frame migration as a threat to the nation, their proposed solutions highlight underlying disparities in their views regarding the role played by the EU in their objectives of burden-shifting for PS and burden-sharing for the FDI.

PS's stance on migration seems to be heavily influenced by Finland's economic model and deriving struggles (EC, 2024). With the country facing a recession since 2023 due to overspending, the economy is in a delicate state. Rising prices have led to a decline in consumer spending, while higher interest rates have slowed down investments (EC, 2024). Moreover, Finland's economic development has further exacerbated the current struggles. For instance, the country experienced a significant shift in the 1990s, transitioning from a depression-led socio-economic model to one focused on high-tech innovation (Kaitila, 2018-pp-48). However, the high wages associated with skilled professionals resulted in expensive products and weakened export performance during the euro crisis (Kaitila, 2018-pp-49). This led to a policy shift from 2012, prioritizing labor cost reduction and cuts to research and development (R&D) under the centre-right government led by Juha Sipilä (Kaitila, 2018-pp-54). Therefore, Finnish companies, strategically started hiring low-skilled immigrants to optimize labor costs and maintain competitiveness (Lillie, 2011-pp-149). Additionally, the Finnish government's austerity measures included cuts to innovation policies and education investments (Kaitila, 2018-pp-64), further hindering quality in exports.

Furthermore, the party raises concerns about the employment of migrants for two primary reasons. Firstly, they highlight that the job opportunities available to migrants often tend to be low-skilled in nature (Lillie, 2011). Given Finland's policy of providing governmental subsidies and tax exemptions for low incomes, migrants may inadvertently impose an economic burden on the state, as highlighted by a report from their funded think tank in 2024 (Salmisen, 2024). Secondly, the influx of migrants willing to work for lower wages is seen as contributing to the

degradation of job market quality (Riikka Purra, 2023). Exacerbating this issue, private companies sometimes exploit loopholes in immigration laws by granting working permits even when residence permits are not granted, thus impeding the state's efforts to regulate this form of migration.

To this regard, PS appears to be aiming to return to the economic model prevalent before the euro crisis. Their proposal involves investing in automatization, robotization, and AI to decrease labor costs, ultimately facilitating innovation in the production of high-quality tech products that can be exported competitively (PS, 2023-pp-5). However, the production of such products requires a skilled workforce, which leads to a focus on education. In an interview with Riikka Puura, leader of PS and current Minister of Finance, she emphasized the need to increase investments in education to produce more high-skilled individuals and counteract the recent decline in education standards (Riikka Purra, 2023). Despite these efforts, migrants present a challenge in this endeavour. The party highlights a significant contributing factor to declining educational standards: the focus on individual needs, which they argue has resulted in slower progress in classrooms. This observation is especially worrisome given studies indicating that first and second-generation migrants often achieve lower academic outcomes compared to native students, thus hindering overall progress (PISA, 2023).

In order to address the problems caused by low-skilled migration PS suggests reforming the national migration regime by making the country less appealing to migrants by e.g. imposing a minimum wage they must receive to reside in Finland, switching from multiculturalism to assimilation, enhancing the years of residence before obtaining citizenship and restricting travel outside of Finland and family reunifications (PS, 2023-pp 10). Moreover, the government also aims to stop companies from exploiting the working permits system by abolishing them from the moment the government denies the migrants residence permits.

However, refugees are protected under the refugee convention, imposing obligations from which Finland, cannot exempt itself. PS's proposed solution in this regard appears to suggest reclassifying refugees as regular migrants by imposing stricter criteria for official recognition as refugees. They also propose reforming the current refugee convention to restrict refugee status exclusively to Europeans.

Furthermore, PS reflects the theory of the FR party as they exhibit clear euroscepticism. They highlight their low influence within the EU, which results in the neglect of Finnish interests within the Union while requiring high monetary burden to the country. Moreover, PS is aware that the EU has the power to oppose actively or passively new policy reforms within the country and will likely disapprove reforms that aim at harming the official status of refugees. Regarding burden-sharing, PS not only seems to be advocating for lower burden-sharing but seems to be burden-shifting. By making their policies less appealing, downgrading refugees to migrants, refusing to accept refugees' quotas, and wanting to reduce development aids, they are subtracting themselves from any type of responsibilities while putting the burden onto others. Moreover, by opposing family reunifications, they reject the only implication provided by the Dublin Regulation that could potentially lead to the distribution of asylum-seekers in Finland. However, they still seek to benefit from certain implications, advocating for asylum-seekers to remain in the vicinity of the recipient state during their request processing, reminiscent of the practice of responsibility to the state of first-entry in the Dublin Regulation.

The solution PS offers to the impeding influence of the EU in national affairs is to coalize with states who share similar problems and perspective to enhance their leverage at the European level. Alternatively, they suggest exiting the Union completely with other Nordic states to forge an alliance of their own.



FDI, in contrast prioritizes the issue of illegal migration primarily due to security concerns. This difference in emphasis is to be attributed to their respective geographic locations. While Finland's concerns are largely centered around regular migration, Italy's focus is on irregular migration. Finland, being buffered by other Member States, faces a lower probability of irregular migrants entering its territory. On the other hand, Italy serves as the main point of entry for the Central Mediterranean route, which connects North Africa, particularly Libya and Tunisia, to the EU, making it the most heavily trafficked migration route (Frontex, 2021).

Irregular migration poses significant challenges for countries facing labor shortages (Ghosh, 1998-pp-76). Firstly, it fosters competition between nationals and non-nationals, leading to a downward pressure on wages, as irregular migrants are often willing to accept lower pay. Additionally, their employment in irregular job positions places an additional economic burden on taxpayers, who end up subsidizing the unemployed. Thus, Italy, already grasping with a 7.8% unemployment rate (compared to the 6% EU average) and an average hourly wage of €21.5 (as opposed to the €24 EU average), is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of irregular migration (Statista, 2024). Moreover, irregular migration is frequently associated with exploitation and human trafficking, often involving criminal activities such as the illegal employment of women as prostitutes, a practice prohibited in Italy (Koser, 2009-pp-187). In 2017, it was estimated that 67.5% of criminal activities were committed by irregular migrants, although it's worth noting that these offenses primarily consisted of minor crimes (Redazione, 2022). Conversely, regular migrants and Italian citizens share a similar proportion of criminal activity (Redazione, 2022), which may explain FDI's relatively muted objections to regular migration.

At the national level, FDI primarily proposes a combination of preventive and punitive measures, which often involve the deployment of armed forces and prison. This is not an

uncommon trait in FR's populism which often emphasize authoritarian attitudes towards crime and law enforcement (Hamilton, 2022-pp-890). This stance can be attributed to what scholars have termed "penal populism," where high media coverage of crime leads to public preferences for harsh punitive measures (Jennings et al., 2016-pp-6).

Furthermore, FDI, like PS, proposes third-country solutions. However, FDI advocates for a third-country solution primarily to curb illegal migration, but they also show a willingness to accept refugees if they qualify for refugee status. In contrast, Finland's PS emphasizes third-country solutions with the aim of easing the economic burden on the state by having both asylum seekers and refugees residing in third countries, rather than focusing solely on migration control. However, there is to note, that Italy's interest in cooperation with Northern Africa extends beyond migration issues. For example, the "Piano Mattei" initiative, proposed in the FDI's program and subsequently implemented by the party once in government, has enabled Italy to establish a significant position by exchanging development aid for energy resources from Africa (Guidolin, 2024). This strategic move positions Italy as a vital hub for the transportation of natural gas from Africa to Europe and is a strategy PS emphasized as well in their EU program.

As anticipated, FDI leans towards advocating for burden-sharing and expresses a readiness to enhance Italy's role within the EU to achieve this aim. They propose increased common aid for developing countries, aligning with their national ideals, and advocate for a share of refugee quotas. FDI seems to perceive the EU as a means to bolster its power and safeguard national interests. Furthermore, the party identifies the left as the true threat to national interests, attributing the shortcomings of current policies to leftist ideologies.

In conclusion, while our initial hypotheses were confirmed regarding both parties advocating for stricter border controls, they were partially confirmed in regard of burden-sharing. While

FDI indeed advocates for stronger burden-sharing, their approach aligns with utilizing the EU as a mechanism to achieve this objective. On the other hand, the PS's perspective leans towards lower burden-sharing, yet they are not content with the existing state of affairs. Their call for reforms reflects a desire to diminish the EU's sway over national sovereignty, ostensibly aiming to reshape migration policies in accordance with their own preferences. This discrepancy can be attributed to two crucial factors: the magnitude of irregular migration and the economic stability of each country. Italy's geographical location exposes it to a substantial influx of irregular migrants, necessitating urgent action to address security and societal challenges. In contrast, Finland experiences a lower influx of irregular migrants, allowing it to prioritize economic protection and stability, which lacks in Italy.

Drawing from our empirical findings, we can propose a theoretical framework that sheds light on the divergent approaches of FR parties toward the EU. It appears that the orientation of these parties is shaped by the interplay of two key factors: the prevalence of irregular migration and the economic context within each member state. In MSs like Italy, where irregular migration poses a significant challenge, FR parties may prioritize strengthening their influence within the EU to achieve burden-sharing. Their aim would be to advocate for policy reforms geared towards burden-sharing, as a means to address the strain on national resources and security concerns. On the other hand, in MSs such as Finland, characterized by lower irregular migration rates and a stable economy, FR parties may seek greater autonomy from EU regulations to achieve burden-shifting. This would enable them to implement national policies focused on minimizing the entry of low-skilled workers and shifting the burden away from the state while keeping national stability under control.

Further research, particularly quantitative studies, could enrich our understanding by testing the newly formulated hypotheses and uncovering any additional insights overlooked in this analysis.

Such research could provide empirical validation and shed more light on the complex interplay between irregular migration, economic stability, and the orientations of far-right parties toward the EU.

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