How Security Concerns fuel the Rise Of the Far-Right in France

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The French far-right has centred its political narrative around the notion that "security is the first freedom," as unease persists, particularly in Western democracies. By making security a fundamental pillar of their program and successfully shaping public opinion, the French far-right has strengthened its legitimacy and popularity. Therefore, it is essential to carefully examine how this focus on security has influenced their recent position, particularly for France properly.

Past to Present

First of all, it is important to consider the historical context of the French far-right political party, to understand the different concerns of political parties, when it comes to presidential or legislative elections for example.

Anti-Semitism and rooted nationalism were made evident in French culture from the Dreyfus Affair, a political crisis of the late 19th century centred on the false conviction of Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus. Because it mobilized nationalist and anti-Semitic groups who considered the defence of Dreyfus as a threat to the nation's identity, this incident signalled the beginning of the French far-right. Therefore, one could argue that the foundation for the French far-right was laid by these groups, coming together to form a more cohesive political force. These views gained even more traction during the emergence of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s when the far-right took advantage of people's fears of outside dangers and social turmoil. Later on, these nationalist and xenophobic tendencies were reinforced when the far-right aligned itself with collaborationist forces during the Nazi occupation of France in the Second World War, reinforcing its association with xenophobia and authoritarianism. After World War II, the far-right split but reunited once during the Algerian War, when concerns about national identity and the preservation of French culture took over, particularly in light of the perceived danger of decolonisation.

Later, support for the Front National, founded in the 1970s, increased as a result of Jean-Marie Le Pen's 'demonisation' of the party. And recently, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the party attempted to moderate the party's image while maintaining its central tenet of safeguarding French identity. In response to the growth of the far-right, the French traditional right has also adopted more explicit positions. As a result, past events, such as the Paris attacks in November 2015 on the Bataclan and the Stade de France, have heightened security concerns. In this sense, it has positioned itself to protect French identity and culture from perceived external threats.

The Security-Socioeconomic Nexus

Understanding the connection between security and economic factors is crucial for comprehending the extreme right's concern for safety. To illustrate, unemployment and immigration are often perceived as threats to national stability. When unemployment is high, people can feel vulnerable and anxious about their future, fearing that their livelihoods are at risk. This feeling of insecurity can be exacerbated by the perception that immigrants are competing for scarce jobs, further fuelling concerns about national stability and contributing to the attention paid to these issues by the far-right.

As a result, the far-right focuses on immigration-related issues, such as the 2016 demolition of the Jungle of Calais, a migrant camp, to emphasize nationalist sentiments, promote French heritage, and draw attention to perceived external threats. The far-right argues that social unrest is caused

by economic pain, a concern that resonates with many in France. Thus the far-right wants to position itself as the defender of national stability and cultural integrity by framing these socio-economic issues as security threats.

The Power of Cultural Rhetoric in Far-Right Politics

Marion Maréchal is a prominent figure in French politics, emphasizing safety and identity as the key to reviving national pride. She advocates a possessive view of France, rejecting global integration and points out both symbolic and tangible aspects of French culture, such as the Marseillaise, our land, our soil, and our cuisine. A sense of insecurity is fostered by this perspective, which views anything non-French as a threat. The far-right has consistently highlighted these themes, especially in their European election campaigns, where issues like security, violence, and Islam were central. Moreover, in the 2022 elections, figures like Marine Le Pen have successfully normalized these concerns in French politics.

What are the Implications for the EU and for the Future?

It is important to consider the broader impact of the far-right's emphasis on security on both French society and the European Union. In France, this security-driven discourse has led to the promotion of restrictive and nationalist policies. In consequence, social integration and multiculturalism are often ignored by these policies, creating divisions within society and marginalizing immigrant communities. This inward focus not only challenges the principles of inclusivity but also risks fueling tensions by portraying diversity as a threat rather than a strength.

With regard to the European Union, the rise of far-right movements complicates the EU's fundamental commitment to unity, diversity, and cross-border cooperation. Values of human rights, freedom and inclusion are upheld across member states by EU policies. These policies are put under pressure by the increasing influence of nationalist agendas, which advocate for tighter borders, less immigration, and a reaffirmation of national sovereignty. The challenge is reconciling far-right demands with the EU's broader goals, which emphasize collaboration and the protection of minority rights.

A rational dialogue that acknowledges legitimate security concerns without compromising the core democratic values that define both France and the EU is crucial to addressing these tensions. This dialogue must aim to find common ground by balancing the need for security with the preservation of freedoms and inclusivity. It is possible to navigate the complexities of these political turbulences while preserving the fundamental values of democracy, such as equality and dignity.