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# MAPPING EXTREMISM: THE NETWORK POLITICS OF THE FAR-RIGHT

by

SHANNON JONES

Under the Direction of Jelena Subotic, PhD

## ABSTRACT

In recent decades, political parties espousing extreme nationalist, xenophobic, and even outright racist platforms have enjoyed variable success in national elections across Europe. While a vibrant research literature has sought to better understand the sources of support for such parties, remarkably little attention has been paid to the interplay between parties and the broader social networks of extremism in which they are embedded. To remedy this deficiency, the present study examines the relations between far-right parliamentary parties and their extra-parliamentary networks. One level of analysis tests whether there is a relationship between a party's position within a network and its sustainability. Social network analysis is employed to assess the nature and structure of ties between Belgian organizations online. In

addition, systematic textual analysis of website content is used to determine how a party's ideological position within the network impacts its sustainability. The second level of analysis is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with members of Flemish nationalist organization in order to better understand how actors experience social networks. Evidence suggests that the most sustainable parties are those that have dense connections with other nationalist organizations. Mapping relations between far-right parties that compete openly within the rules of institutionalized democracy and their wider social networks can provide important policy-relevant insight into contemporary challenges posed by illiberal forces.

**INDEX WORDS:** Social Network Analysis, Far-Right, Belgian Politics

MAPPING EXTREMISM: THE NETWORK POLITICS OF THE FAR-RIGHT

by

SHANNON JONES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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MAPPING EXTREMISM: THE NETWORK POLITICS OF THE FAR-RIGHT

by

SHANNON JONES

Committee Chair: Jelena Subotic

Committee: Carrie Manning

Eric Friginal

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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## **DEDICATION**

For my husband and partner in crime, William Clancy.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Importance of Understanding Far-Right Networks

Over the past 30 years, far-right parties with extreme nationalist, xenophobic, or racist platforms have become well established across Europe. These parties are part of a larger mobilization of far-right movements and have formal and informal ties to paramilitary movements or neo-Nazi gangs that have been implicated in violent attacks against immigrants. In 2012 and 2013, members of the Greek far-right party Golden Dawn were accused of carrying out acts of violence against immigrants. Similarly, the 2011 massacre in Norway by a member of right-wing extremist Progress Party, Anders Breivik, highlights the threat far-right extremism can pose to safety and security. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Paris and the 2016 Brussels bombings, the anti-immigrant Vlaams Belang (*Flemish Interest*, VB) and the far-right paramilitary organization Voorpost (*Outpost*, VP) have surged in popularity. These groups and the policies they advocate for antagonize and alienate Muslim immigrant communities, creating the potential for further Islamic radicalization and threats to Belgium's national security. In the polls and on the streets, far-right parties and extremist movements have the ability to impact the quality of democracy, the civil rights of immigrant communities, and public safety. In order to effectively counter extremism, it is important to understand the structure of extremist networks.

### 1.2 The Purpose of this Study

Political observers and watchdog groups express concern that the growing acceptance of extreme nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric and policies poses a genuine threat to the quality of democracy in Europe. While a vibrant research literature has sought to better understand the sources of support for such parties (especially those on the far-right), remarkably little attention has been paid to the interplay between parties and the broader social networks of extremism in which they are embedded. To remedy this deficiency, the present study will identify structural



and ideological patterns in far-right networks and determine how these patterns influence the sustainability of far-right parties. The study is guided by the following central research question: How does the structure of far-right networks influence the trajectory of far-right parties? The central hypothesis is that parties that occupy a central position within their broader networks are more sustainable than those that are on the fringe.

There is a tendency to focus only on far-right parties and to ignore the variety of non-party actors in the far-right family. Far-right parties are embedded in broader networks of extremism and they have relationships with non-party actors (e.g. paramilitary organizations, student movements) that can strengthen or undermine their likelihood of success. This study uses social network analysis to examine how relationships between organizations on the far-right influence nationalist mobilization and party sustainability. The study involves two levels of analysis. The first is an analysis of the structure of far-right online networks in Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom. These countries have more than one far-right party competing within the same far-right network. A web crawler will collect data on the links between sites and create digital maps of the organizational structure of the networks.<sup>1</sup> These maps will reveal general patterns of cooperation and contestation amongst organizations on the far-right and illuminate the ways in which a party's centrality within the network shapes its performance.

A second level of analysis will provide an in-depth ethnography of the far-right networks in Belgium. The goal is to provide a structured comparison of Belgium's far-right parties, which vary on the degree of far-right party integration within the larger radical network. Through archival research, participant observations, and field interviews, I will collect data on the density

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<sup>1</sup> The web crawler used was VOSON, which is part of the Virtual Observatory for the Study of Online Networks or VOSON system. This system strives to recreate the typical user experience, collects data on linkages between websites, and incorporates tools to conduct social network analysis and textual analysis. For more information about the VOSON system, see Ackland (2010).

of ties between parties and extremist organizations. The semi-structured interviews with far-right party representatives, members of extremist organizations, and members of nationalist organizations permit an examination of the causal mechanisms behind the theoretical assumptions about the relationship between structure and the capacity of the far-right to achieve its goals. In addition, the interviews provide an opportunity to understand how individuals experience and perceive the social networks in which they are embedded. Mapping relations between rejectionist parties that compete openly within the rules of institutionalized democracy and their wider social networks can provide important policy-relevant insight into contemporary challenges posed by illiberal forces.

### **1.3 Expected Results**

I expect to find that parties that occupy a central position within the network will have an advantage over parties that are on the fringe. Parties at the center of the broader far-right network should have more network power, giving them a greater ability to diffuse their policy platforms and mobilize their support base. While some suggest (Spanje and Van der Brug 2007, Hellström et al. 2012) that successful far-right parties have a tendency to moderate and cut ties with more extreme organizations in an effort to attain or keep their positions; I anticipate that successful far-right parties will continue to maintain their ties with extremist organizations-if not publicly, then covertly. Even when parties deny that their ties with extremist organizations in public forums, I expect that the online and offline analysis of network structures will confirm that the ties exist. A party could publicly disassociate itself from an extremist organization, yet this organization may continue to link to the party's websites or send members to party rallies. This support could prove beneficial to a far-right party even if it does not desire it. Overall, the tendency to believe that links with extremist organizations will delegitimize the far-right in the

public's eye is based in the optimistic premise that the majority of the public will not tolerate illiberalism. However, as Mudde notes, the tendency to treat the far-right as pathological is really an unwillingness to admit that there are large swaths of society, even in liberal democracies, that hold xenophobic or racist sentiments. Overall, I anticipate that far-right parties that occupy a central position within the broader far-right network will prove to be more sustainable than parties that do not. In addition, I anticipate that parties that occupy an ideologically central position within the broader far-right network will be more sustainable than parties that are on the ideological fringe. For example, if the broader far-right network is predominantly xenophobic, but not explicitly Islamophobic, I anticipate that a xenophobic party will prove to be most sustainable.

Far-right scholars often talk about the threat posed to the far-right by the moderate right (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009); however, I anticipate that a potential competitor could emerge from within the far-right family. In some countries such as Britain, France, and Belgium, there are several far-right parties operating with the same far-right network. If two parties occupy a similar structural and ideological position within the network, these parties could be competitors and not allies. I anticipate that, in this situation, the most successful party will be the one with the densest ties with other organizations in the network. However, I believe a party can also become vulnerable to a niche competitor from within the network. I expect that the competitive effect of one far right party over another will increase as the asymmetry in their overlapping memberships increases.

#### **1.4 Impact of Research**

While apocalyptic accounts of the impact of the far-right have been overstated, it has undeniably altered the political landscape in Europe. As Art notes:

It is undeniable that the far-right is profoundly influencing how European states and societies negotiate the issues that immigration has introduced. Even when they have not been in power, radical right parties have shown a startling ability to set the agenda on issues such as asylum, immigration quotas, integration requirement and citizenship laws (Art 2011: 9).

Within the past five years the far-right has enjoyed unprecedented electoral success in Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, and France. This has been accompanied by an increase in anti-immigrant and anti-Islamist activism as disgruntled young men take to the streets and plazas of Europe (Bartlett and Birdwell, 2011). Since 2001, the United States has been concerned with how Europe manages its growing Muslim population and has encouraged measures to better integrate these communities in order to curtail Islamist extremism. A 2011 report of the Congressional Research Service notes that, “in light of the July 2011 killings in Norway by a right-wing extremist disturbed by what he viewed as Islam’s growing influence in the West...U.S. and European security services should cooperate on combating threats posed by domestic radicals on both the extreme right and left” (Archick et al., 2011). In its 2003 Annual Report of the Protection of the Constitution, the German security service reports that

The Internet has become the most important medium of communication for right wing extremists, who use it to present themselves, make verbal attacks, carry on internal debates, and to mobilise attendance at their rallies and demonstrations (BfV 2003: 24).

Given the potential security threat posed by extremist organizations, it is important that intelligence agencies in the U.S. and Europe understand how they mobilize both “online” and “offline.” A better understanding of the organizational structure of the nationalist subculture may help policymakers understand how best to curtail the diffusion of xenophobic sentiments.

This research is part of a larger effort to incorporate social network analysis and ethnographic methods into the study of far-right organizations and political phenomena more generally. Baiocchi advocates the use of political ethnography, arguing that “close-up, on-the-ground observations of people and institutions in real time where the investigator detects how and why agents act think and feel can offer special insights for the study of politics” (2008: 140).

The body of far-right scholarship produced by political scientists has placed much of its emphasis on the role of formal institutions (e.g. electoral engineering or coalition bargaining) and has not paid enough attention to the encounters below formal politics. Taking a closer look at the relationships between individuals who participate in far-right movements will provide insight into the ways in which institutional arrangements and communication patterns are produced.

## **2 EXISTING EXPLANATIONS OF THE FAR-RIGHT**

### **2.1 Defining the Far-Right**

The far-right is a heterogeneous entity. According to Mudde (1996), there are at least 26 definitions of the far-right in the literature, which identify 58 different characteristics. There has been substantial debate over whether or not the far-right is a new phenomenon or merely a resurgence of a preexisting fascist movements (Cole 2005, Rydgren 2005). Those who study the contemporary far-right have referred to it as the “new right,” “nativist,” the “far-right,” the “extreme right,” and “neo-fascist.” Most scholars have focused their efforts on defining the characteristics of far-right political parties and have ignored non-party actors. For example, Ignazi focuses exclusively on “anti-system” parties – parties that do not aim to change the government, but to change the entire system of government (1992, 2003). There are a number of problems with Ignazi’s method of classification, which he himself admits. By 2006, Ignazi acknowledged that it was no longer possible to classify many of the parties he studied as extremist because they had moderated over time. In addition, the anti-system element of his definition is problematic, particularly since there have been several far-right parties that have served in government. The anti-system component of Ignazi’s definition is simultaneously too broad and too narrow to be useful in discerning whether or not a party should be classified as

far-right. In addition, by focusing exclusively on far-right parties, Ignazi's definition excludes the extremist milieu, which is comprised of a variety of actors including paramilitary organizations, student organizations, skinheads, and Oi! bands. These actors have no interest in participating in government, yet they play a vital role in propagating nationalist ideology and frequently participate in political activities including party recruitment, nationalist summits, youth trainings, and demonstrations.

Hartmann et al. (1985) define right-wing extremism as an umbrella term for all "progress-hostile forces." This term is simultaneously too broad and too narrow. Some far-right parties, like the N-VA, are very concerned with economic progress. In addition, the emphasis on being hostile to progress excludes some of the other prominent features of the far-right, specifically their use of xenophobic or nationalist rhetoric. In contrast to Hartmann's study that focuses on one vague and inadequately defined characteristic, there are others who feel that a party must meet a whole host of characteristics in order to be included. For example, Falter and Schumann (1988) have ten elements in their definition of far-right extremism and require that all ten elements be met.

Subsequent scholars have added to our understanding of the far-right by acknowledging its complexity and declaring that it cannot be labeled as a single issue party or one that is defined solely by its oppositionist stance. Kitschelt noted that the new far-right is complex and argued that they are characterized by a combination of neoliberal economic policies with authoritarian politics and a limitation of individual autonomy (Kitschelt 1995: 2). Yet, not all far-right parties have embraced the free market. One of the most successful far-right parties, Hungary's Jobbik, advocates for state regulation of the economy and protectionist policies. There is no uniformity of the far-right's economic preferences. Jamie Bartlett with the

London think tank, Demos, notes that the “far-right is struggling to weave an economic story into their message. They don’t have a coherent story to tell” (The Economist). There is variation in the economic policies of the far-right across time and space. Some parties, like the Vlaams Belang, advocated for a mixed economy in the 1970s, but have moved in a more neoliberal direction since.

The ability to define the far-right through an economic lens becomes even more complicated when one moves beyond political parties to the broader extremist network. For example, the Flemish paramilitary organization Voorpost, does not mention economic policy at all in its agenda, and focuses exclusively on a Flemish nationalist and anti-immigrant agenda. Similarly the British street movement the English Defence League, has no clear economic agenda and focuses instead on combating multiculturalism and the “Islamicization” of Britain. Therefore, it is difficult if not impossible to use economic policy as a means of ideologically unifying the wide variety of organizations that fall under the far-right umbrella. Rather, it is better to focus on the cultural ideology of these groups and the exclusive way in which they define who should and should not be part of the nation.

Many scholars have characterized the ideology of the far-right as populist (Taggart 1995, Bornschier 2010, Swank and Betz 2003, Rydgren 2005). Betz suggests the far-right be defined by their “opposition to social integration of marginalized groups, and in their appeal to xenophobia, if not overt racism,” and notes that they are “populist...in their appeal to the common man and his allegedly superior common sense” (Betz 1993: 413). It is true that many far-right organizations use populist rhetoric, yet to describe them as populist can be misleading because not all populists are xenophobic. Populist rhetoric is used by democratic and antidemocratic organizations, by the pariahs and by the mainstream. Isaiah Berlin notes

that the term lacks clarity and that it is often applied in situations when it does not fit:

There exists a shoe – the word “populism” – for which somewhere exists a foot. There are all kinds of feet which it *nearly* fits, but we must not be trapped by these nearly fitting feet. The prince is always wandering about with the show; and somewhere, we feel sure, there awaits a limb called pure populism (Canovan 1981).

Due to this lack of conceptual clarity, it is best not to require that organizations use populist rhetoric in order to be included under the far-right umbrella. It is better to focus on the first aspect of Betz’s definition which emphasizes xenophobic appeals and overt racism.

Cas Mudde was one of the first to acknowledge the importance of studying not only far-right parties, but also nationalist subgroups. He acknowledged that far-right parties do not exist in isolation, rather, they are part of a broader far-right family (1996). Mudde asserts that the defining feature of the far-right is nativism, which he defines as an “ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (2007:19). He also notes that these groups are characterized by the use of populist rhetoric and their belief in a strictly ordered society. Mudde’s system is broad enough to encompass groups that are explicitly racist and those that are preservationist. It is also inclusive of both neo-fascist organizations and those that are willing to participate within the existing democratic system. Ultimately what binds the far-right together is nativism and a desire to protect and defend their exclusive definition of the nation. This means that the far-right will perceive immigration and asylum as a threat to their exclusive definitions of the nation, and will typically advocate for more restrictive immigration policies, repatriation of immigrants, or engage in acts of violence against immigrants. Mudde’s definition of the far-right is broad enough to include parties, like the Vlaams Belang, who advocate for restrictive immigration and asylum policies in the desire to preserve the Flemish nation, and non-party



actors like the English Defense League, who do not participate formally in politics, but use violent anti-immigrant street demonstrations to demonstrate their preference that Britain exist for Brits alone.

This paper will follow Mudde's (2007) system of far-right classification, which is inclusive of both party and nonparty actors. These actors vary widely in the strategies they use to communicate their policy preferences- ranging from electoral politics, to street politics, to music, to interest groups, they ultimately are united by their belief that foreigners pose a threat to the nation and that action should be taken to decrease, if not eliminate, this foreign influence. In contemporary Europe, the majority of these groups are focused on the perceived threat posed by Muslim immigration and want to see more restrictive immigration and asylum policies (particularly on immigration from the Maghreb and the Middle East). They also want to limit the cultural diffusion of Islam by placing limitations on visible symbols of Islam (bans of the hijab and minarets). In addition to Islamophobia, there are several nativist actors (especially those in France, Hungary, and Italy) who perceive the Roma community as a threat to their nations and want to see Roma expulsion or repatriation and the existing Roma camps destroyed.

## **2.2 Theories of Far-Right Emergence**

Much of the literature on far-right parties seeks to explain the emergence or rise in popularity of far-right organizations. This literature has a tendency to treat the emergence of the far-right as something pathological, a deviation from the norm in generally tolerant and progressive Western democracies. Existing explanations can be categorized into two camps: demand-side explanations and supply-side explanations. Demand-side explanations place emphasis on broad socioeconomic factors that have the ability to change the preferences, beliefs, and attitudes of

voters. Many believe that the resurgence of the far-right is a consequence of globalization and the instability that accompanies economic liberalization (Betz 1998). Ignazi (2006) believes that the far-right emerged to meet the unfulfilled demands of the “losers” of industrialization. According to the Stolper-Samuelson theorem, capital mobility leads to a decline in relative wages and employment for low-skilled workers. Given that the primary support base for many far-right parties are poorly educated male industrial workers, there is some logic behind the explanation that radical right parties emerged to meet the needs of those whose needs are not being met in the current economic system. However, Art (2011) cautions against focusing solely on economic explanations, particularly when it comes to the sustainability of far-right parties. For example, he states that there are some countries, like Austria, with low unemployment where the far-right has been extremely successful, while in other countries with high unemployment, like Germany and Belgium, these parties have failed to achieve representation.

Following the logic of the Stolper-Samuelson theorem, Swank and Betz (2003) argued that states with generous systems of social protection will offset support for the radical right. This is consistent with Garrett’s (1998) argument about the compensation function of the welfare state. Similarly, Andrew Geddes (2003: 123-125) believes that welfare states more efficiently integrate immigrant populations, thereby minimizing the economic and social ghettoization of immigrant populations that can eventually fuel nativist sentiment. He believes that corporatist decision-making structures helped Sweden and the Netherlands recruit and integrate migrant labor and helped foster public support for multiculturalism. However, this argument cannot explain why strong welfare states, like Denmark, have failed to embrace multiculturalism and have been home to successful anti-immigrant parties.

Supply-side explanations emphasize the ways in which changes in the political opportunity structure facilitate the rise of far-right parties. Kitschheimer (1966) described the Western party system as one in which professionalized “catch-all” parties develop broad-based platforms in order to capture the widest possible range of voters. This should mean that moderate parties will enjoy the most electoral success and that parties with more radical ideological agendas will be crowded out. However, Ignazi (2003) suggests that the move towards the center has created a deficit of democratic representation that can be filled by new political entrepreneurs. Similarly, Kitschelt argues that the radical right will be successful only when a convergence of Social Democrats and Moderate Conservative Parties creates an electoral opening for the far-right:

Whether a successful New Radical Right party emerges depends on the opportunity structure of party competition. Only if voters are sufficiently disaffected with the existing moderately conservative and moderately leftist or social democratic parties will the reservoir of potential right-authoritarian voters rally around a new political force (1995: 14).

However, an opening in the political opportunity structure does not guarantee that far-right parties will be electorally successful. In order to perform well at the polls, Kitschelt (1995) argues that these parties need to pursue the “winning formula:” an anti-immigrant, pro-market policy platform. He believes this attracts both small business owners and blue collar workers, allowing far-right parties to establish the cross-cutting cleavages necessary to compete with their mainstream rivals. For example, McGann and Kitschelt (2005) suggest that the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) evolved towards the “winning formula,” adopting an anti-internationalist and authoritarian position which allowed it to expand its support base to blue-collar workers. Yet it is not entirely clear that far-right parties are filling in a representation gap. In fact, Bale (2003) believes that the presence of these parties tends to reinforce the conventional bipolar political system. While the media often present the far-right as a pariah, Bale argues that, in reality, the

far-right is integrated with center right parties. In fact, the center right may incorporate aspects of the far-right agenda and cooperate with the far-right in coalition governments. For example, in Italy, the far-right Lega Nord (*Northern League*, LN) became a coalition partner for the center-right party Forza Italia (*Forward Italy*, FI). In Austria, the Christian Democratic Österreichische Volkspartei (*Austrian People's Party*, OVP) and the Social-Democratic Party (SPO) have been known to coopt policies from the far right party Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (*Freedom Party of Austria*, FPÖ). Overall, Bale finds that while the ugly sisters have been invited to the ball, Cinderella is still winning, and the center tends to cannibalize the smaller parties.

It is also unclear that the “winning formula” is what fosters far-right sustainability. The weaknesses in Kitschelt’s theory became apparent when many far-right parties abandoned neoliberalism in favor of welfare chauvinism. Scholars have noted that neoliberalism was merely one among many economic programs pursued in their efforts to maximize vote share (Mudde 2000; Lubbers 2001). In addition, Van der Brug (2005:543) notes that Kitschelt does not study the ideological platforms of parties, but the policy preferences of their supports, thus, “given the large similarities among the ideological positions of voters for various (successful as well as unsuccessful) radical right-wing parties, the results of Kitschelt’s analyses do not tell us that specific ideological positions of anti-immigrant parties yield the winning formula.” While the economic component of Kitschelt’s “winning formula” may not be necessary, there is some evidence that suggests that the anti-immigrant agenda is essential. Ivarsflaten (2008: 3) finds that while some far-right parties experienced success without mobilizing economic grievances, none of them performed well without mobilizing grievances over immigration.

A large body of scholarship predicts that the trajectory of far-right parties will be

determined by the institutional structure in which they are embedded. The prediction is that it will be more difficult for far-right parties to be successful in majoritarian “winner takes all” systems, in which, according to Duverger’s law, power tends to alternate between two mainstream parties. However, in proportional systems, where legislative seats are awarded proportional to vote share, it should be more likely for smaller parties to achieve representation. Following this logic, within PR systems, the likelihood of far-right representation should decrease as the electoral threshold increases. It is true that, if one measures success in terms of the number of seats, there appears to be a clear relationship between threshold and far-right representation; however, if you look at vote share the picture changes. Studies have demonstrated (Carter 2005; Norris 2005) that there is not statistically significant relationship between the type of electoral system and vote share for the radical right. Art (2011:16) notes that the majoritarian system in France has not prevented the Front National from achieving a large percentage of the vote share. In addition, Arzheimer and Carter (2002) find evidence that, surprisingly, the vote share for the radical right actually increases as the disproportionality of the system increases. Thus, while it is important to control for the type of electoral system, evidence suggests the need to look beyond institutional explanations when explaining variations in party trajectories.

### **2.3 The Nationalist Subculture and Party Sustainability**

Much of the literature on far-right parties over the past two decades focused on why these parties emerged or resurged. Very few studies attempted to predict which parties would fragment or disappear and which would enjoy sustained electoral success. As Art (2011) notes, “when one looks more closely at the trajectories of radical right parties in particular sets of cases, it becomes clear that existing theories cannot account for the variation in their success across different

regions or countries.” In an effort to fill this gap in the literature, Art suggests that party sustainability is influenced by the nationalist subculture and the permissiveness of the political environment. Art believes preexisting nationalist organizations are essential for right-wing parties to succeed as they provide a core of activists and a familiar brand. Far-right parties fail, not because of the institutional structure or broad socioeconomic conditions, but because of factionalism, organizational chaos, and internal pathologies (Art 2011:5). So the key to far-right success is whether that party has been built on constructive or destructive foundations.

In order to assess the level of cohesion in the nationalist subculture, it is necessary to examine the ties between far-right parties and extremist organizations. Extremist organizations are often so small in number that they are not expected to have a significant impact on electoral outcomes. As a consequence, these organizations have received insufficient attention from scholars of the far-right. Mudde notes that “most comparative scholars of the extreme right focus on (successful) political parties, while nonparty organizations tend to feature only in single-country studies which often tend to be fairly idiosyncratic and difficult to use in cross-national comparisons” (2005: 165). He suggests that such studies fail to appreciate the variety of ways in which the far-right organizes and that the trajectory of far-right parties may be influenced by whether extremist organizations are integrated or isolated in the far-right network. Similarly, Art (2011) suggests the relationship between extremist organizations and far-right parties may be important to understanding party viability. He notes that one reason parties fail is because of a “tiny and balkanized extremist subculture that nonetheless managed to derail radical right party building despite its small size (2011: 23).

In order to assess the impact of the nationalist subculture, it is important to make sure

the concept is clearly defined. While it is possible to trace the ideological continuity between contemporary and past far-right movements, Art cautions that the “mere presence of a significant far-right movement at some point in history cannot explain the success of contemporary radical right parties...” (2011: 106). For Art, a strong nationalist subculture requires a critical historical juncture, for example World War II, which links the past to contemporary outcomes. In this sense, Art’s argument is path dependent. If, at the critical juncture, the far-right in a given country is decimated or factionalized, the nationalist subculture will be weak from that point forward. However, if the critical juncture provided the far-right with an opportunity to unite and mobilize, it can produce a more cohesive subculture. However, Art’s theory lacks conceptual clarity. Specifically, he does not demonstrate that the strength of the nationalist subculture can be measured objectively. It is unclear how to distinguish a strong from a weak nationalist subculture or assess variations in strength among states within the two categories. This article suggests that it is not possible or even desirable to capture the complexity of nationalist organization with a dichotomous variable. Rather, it is best to think of the degree of centralization within the nationalist subculture as a continuum that ranges from anarchic to hierarchic.

Determinations of what constitutes a “critical juncture” are made somewhat arbitrarily by the researcher. As Hogan acknowledges:

The concept of critical junctures lacks rigour-it doesn’t offer a basic set of criteria by which to assess potential critical junctures to discover if they are critical junctures or just change that has taken place incrementally...Where does one draw the line as to what is, and what is not, a critical juncture? This is the decisive weakness at the heart of the approach (2006: 663).

Another problematic element of Art’s theory is that it suggests the nationalist subculture becomes “locked in,” or that change is only possible during a critical juncture. More recently, historical institutionalists, without denying the existence of critical junctures, have stressed that

more attention be paid to gradual institutional change. For example, Thelen (2004) introduces the concepts of institutional layering, changing some elements of an institution while leaving others in place, and institutional conversion, whereby existing institutions are redirected to a new purpose. These concepts are better-suited to improving our understanding of the trajectories of far-right parties. For example, institutional layering helps us understand the trajectory of Italy's far right Lega Nord (*Northern League*, LN). Since its foundation, the Lega Nord has been a northern regionalist party. While regionalism remains at the core of the party, beginning in the mid-1990s, the party radicalized and adopted secessionist and anti-immigrant positions. (Huysseune, 2001-2002). Similarly, the Swiss People's Party originated as the Party of Farmers, Traders, and Independents (BGB), a conservative agrarian party. Over the years, it continued to pursue a moderate political agenda until the Zurich branch of the party, under the leadership of Christoph Blocher, began to radicalize the party platform in the 1970s, politicizing asylum policy and European integration. Thus it is not clear that any critical juncture served to crystallize the foundation of the nationalist subculture that facilitated the electoral success of these parties. Rather, the parties appear to have evolved gradually over time, keeping their institutional foundations intact, and modifying their policy platforms when necessary to ensure institutional survival.

#### **2.4 Social Networks and the Far-Right**

Social networks can illuminate the ways the parties mobilize in an era of unstable party systems. Many have said that, after decades of stability, the party system in Europe has become unfrozen: that mass party organizations are disappearing and traditional partisan loyalties are on the decline. Williams and Gulati assert, "as fewer people are members of traditional civic associations, it is here that we see a new frontier for cultivating social capital, which candidates,



elected officials, and civic leaders can tap when wanting to mobilize citizens for political action” (2007:20). While there is a large literature on the relationship between political parties and civil society, it is only recently that scholars have begun to study the ways in which a party may use the Internet to mobilize its support base.

A social network is defined as a “set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships...” (Bih-Ru Lea et al., 2006: 122). These relationships may include friendships, alliances, collaboration, and information exchanges. While social network analysis initially focused on “real world” relationships, there is a growing interest in online social networks and computer-mediated communication. The computer enables actors to exchange information and resources that “can be communicated to others via textual, graphical, animated, audio, or video-based media—for example, sharing information, (news or data), discussing work, giving support, or providing companionship” (Garton et al. 1999: 78). The internet is a new frontier for the creation of social networks, as it provides forums for communication and the construction of online public spaces (Cammaerts, 2009). This study, rather than focusing on the interpersonal relationships of individuals, will focus on the network as a whole and examine the relationships between all organizations that are members of a specified population: the far-right (Garton et al. 1999: 82). This whole network analysis provides an opportunity to discern which actors are at the core and the periphery of the network and to determine how an organization’s position within the network impacts its behavior.

One way of measuring the ties between actors in an online network is by examining hyperlinks between organizational websites. Scholars who study computer mediated communication argue that an organizational website can be conceptualized as actors and that their use of hyperlinks reflects the communicative choices of the website owner (Caiani and

Wagemann 2009; Jackson 1997). Through hyperlinks, organizations are able to direct users to information about other organizations in the network, influence another website's authority or credibility, and to communicate shared interest (Kleinberg, 1999; Park 2003; Mislove 2007). Ackland and Gibson note that, "through hyperlinks, groups can share their audience and thus reinforce their message, conveying a sense of a wider world of supportive and sympathetic voices." (2004:1).

While initially dismissed as irrelevant, there is a growing sense that online social networks can impact real-world political outcomes. Bartlett et al. (2011) argue that this "mélange of virtual and real-world political activity is the way millions of people-especially young people-relate to politics in the twenty-first century" (2011: 15). There is evidence to suggest that participation in online social networks is more than armchair activism and that websites can have a significant impact on electoral outcomes. Gibson and McAllister's (2005) study of the 2004 Australian elections found that having a web site increased a candidate's vote share by 2%. Similarly, Williams and Gulati (2007)'s study of the 2006 midterm elections in the United States demonstrates that Facebook support had a significant effect on a candidate's final vote share. Bartlett et al.'s (2011) study of Facebook supporters of far-right parties finds that 67% of the online supporters of a party voted for that party at the most recent election.

The Internet may be a particularly powerful tool for mobilization for far-right parties, which may be treated as pariahs and excluded from the mainstream media. Michael Whine (1997, 1999) was one of the earliest scholars to draw attention to the affinity between the far-right and the Internet, noting that its anonymity, lack of regulation, and accessibility to young audiences make it ideal for the diffusion of racist and xenophobic ideologies. While extremist organizations may be small in number, in the online public space, the use of links between sites

within a network help to “forge a stronger sense of community and purpose,” convincing, “...even the most ardent extremist that he is not alone, that his views are not, in fact, extreme at all.” (Quoted in Ackland and Gibson 2000: 9). Gerstenfeld et al. (2003) finds evidence that far-right extremists use mutual links to create a collective identity and that these groups often use the same borrowed rhetoric (2003: 29). Similarly, in their study of white supremacist sites, Burris, Smith and Strahm (2000) find that the Internet has helped create a virtual extremist community (p. 30).

While some do not believe that white supremacist organizations have a tangible impact on the fate of political parties, there is evidence to suggest that-both on and offline, white supremacist organizations have real political power. For example, in the aftermath of the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan operated as the terrorist wing of the Democratic Party and allowed the party to operate underground during Reconstruction when its members were still forbidden to vote or hold office (Perryman 2014). Similarly, there is evidence that the Klan bolstered the Democratic Party in the Oregon legislature during the 1920s, leading to more restrictive policies on alien land ownership (Lalande 1992). More recently, there is evidence that white supremacists on social media follow and are followed by the Donald Trump campaign on Twitter. 67.5% of the influencers of the white supremacist #WhiteGenocide online group are followers of Donald Trump, some of whom retweet his posts and provide links to his campaign website. Regardless of whether or not politicians formally acknowledge relationships with white supremacist organizations, there is evidence that white supremacist organizations have shaped politics as they actively diffuse policy messages and endorse political candidates (Kharakh and Primack 2016).

The 2011 Oslo massacre by Anders Breivik heightened the sense of urgency to

understand the relationship between online extremism and real-world political violence as it was believed the Breivik's views were shaped, in part, by his participation in the anti-Islamist blogosphere (Eriksen, 2011). Beyond the Oslo massacre, recent years have witnessed an increase in street-based extremist movements throughout Europe, which often incite violence. Thus scholars and policy-makers are concerned with whether extremist organizations are using the Internet as a tool to mobilize people to take to the streets. In their study of Facebook supporters of the largest British extremist organization, the English Defence League (EDL), Barlett and Littler (2011) find that roughly half of the supporters participated in a protest or march (2011: 4).

In sum, there is a growing interest in how extremist organizations use the Internet to facilitate their activities. However, many have merely identified or described existing extremist web sites (Qin et al. 2010: 77). In addition, while scholars have studied the links extremist organizations have with their international counterparts, none have examined the links between these organizations and parliamentary parties. This study will go beyond description and provide a systematic analysis of the structure and content of far-right networks using tools of social network analysis.

Social network analysis originated in the field of sociology, but has since been incorporated into a variety of fields including communications, anthropology, economics, geography, and sociolinguistics. While its use in political science has been relatively limited, some International Relations scholars have used it to describe the structure of intergovernmental and international non-governmental networks (Burton et al., 2009: 32). For example, Jason Beckfield argues that states with "structural privilege" within IGO and INGO networks "are able, to a significant degree, to set agendas, frame debates, and promulgate policies that benefit them" (Beckfield 2003: 404). This is similar to Barnett and Duvall's (2005) concept of "structural

power,” which asserts that states that occupy positions of power within global structures have a greater ability to alter outcomes in their favor. However, the International Relations literature on networks has been largely descriptive and it is necessary for it to move towards a more empirical investigation of network structures and their effects (Hafner-Burton et al., 2009: 27). In addition, the scope of application of SNA in Political Science needs to be broadened to include an analysis of a wider variety of networks.

The social movement literature examines how networks link a multiplicity of actors and influence coalition-building and collective action (Gerlach and Hine 1970). Scholars within this literature have argued that networks “contribute to organizational formation, sometimes in rough forms of block recruitment and other times by providing the necessary links between the founders. They may also provide the basis for factions and coalitions within organizations. The insights gained from the study of social movements have relevance to the study of far-right parties, whose actions may also be constrained or enabled by the broader networks in which they are embedded. There has been substantial discussion of how the organizational structure of individual parties influences electoral success; however there has been relatively little discussion on the structure of the broader far-right political movement. I argue that it is important to use social network analysis in order to understand the direct and indirect ties between organizations within this movement, explore how information is exchanged, and determine whether or not the organizations within it are pooling mobilization resources.

One example of the application of social network analysis to the far-right is Anheier’s (2003) study of the rise of the National Socialist party in Germany. He argues that the success of the Nazis “lay neither in the divisive Weimar party system nor in volatile voter behaviour alone; they also resided in the ‘prepolitical field’ of local milieus, associations, networks, and

movements.” (p. 51). By being embedded in the wider nationalist organization infrastructure, activists had lower transaction costs and were more readily able to recruit members and establish local party organizations.

## **2.5 Discourse Analysis of the Far-Right**

Discourse analysis originated in linguistics, but has since expanded to a variety of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, communication, and political science. It is primarily concerned with how people use language to communicate. Fairclough defines discourse as a particular way of representing aspects of the world (2003: 124). Like constructivists, discourse analysts assert that the social world is constructed, often through language, thus the world cannot be understood without analyzing discourse (Phillips and Hardy 2002). Discourse analysts believe that language plays an essential role in the construction of social identities and in creating and maintaining power structures. According to Gee, discourse analysis is concerned with how language is “used ‘on site’ to ‘pull off’ specific social activities and social identities (‘memberships’ in various social groups, cultures, and institutions” and he asserts “language-in-use is everywhere and always political.” (1999: 1)

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is specifically interested in the relationship between language and power. It examines how relationships of dominance and discrimination are manifested in language. Often discourse is perceived as an instrument used by those in power to maintain their dominant position (Wodak and Meyer 2001; Van Leeuwen 1993). For example, Habermas claims “language is a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power” (quoted in Wodak and Meyer 2001: 2). However, it is important to recognize that texts are not just vehicles of domination, but also avenues through which competing discourses struggle for domination (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 11). While far-right

parties are typically not the dominant political actors in the societies in which they are embedded, the discourse used by the far-right is a reflection of the power dynamics within the nationalist subculture. This study intends to explore the ways in which discourse contributes to or undermines the success of far-right parties.

While recognizing the utility of CDA's assertion that there is a relationship between language and power structures, this study will rely primarily on the methodology of content analysis, rather than CDA. Content analysis is more systematic than CDA, asks more concrete questions, making it better suited for systematically testing hypotheses. Content analysis is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Krippendorff 1989: 403). It involves a quantification of the "what" messages communicate (Laswell 1948). Content analysis involves an analysis of a large body of "real life" language use which is referred to as a corpus (McEnery and Wilson 1996: 1). Quantitative analysis of a corpus involves identifying certain properties, like the frequency with which certain words or word pairs are used, and making inferences based on these properties (Biber et al. 1998; Baker 2006). It also requires a systematic method of extracting the most frequent recurrent strings from a large corpus, for example by specifying a cut-off frequency. Through word frequency lists and keyword analysis, I can identify discursive patterns within a pattern and the network in its entirety. This will provide an opportunity to test the theory that a party's ideological position relative to the broader network can shape its sustainability. Content analysis is the most applicable method for the theory I intend to test, namely that a party's ideological position relative to the broader networks can shape its sustainability.

With the emergence and diffusion of new technology, there has been increased scholarly interest in computer-mediated communication and the creation of online discursive communities

(Acquisti and Gross 2006, Cherny 1999). Computer-mediated discourse is defined as the

communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers...distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus (Herring 2015: 127).

Some studies of computer-mediated discourse focus on the medium itself-for example how people communicate differently via Facebook, email, or Twitter. However, this study will be more discourse-centered than medium-centered, with a specific focus on the patterns of communication of the far-right online.

The literature on the discourse of far-right parties is relatively sparse, with the majority of emphasis having been placed on institutional or sociocultural factors that explain far-right success. However, as the structure of European party systems is changing and conventional party loyalties are weakening, scholars have become increasingly concerned with the ways in which parties market themselves (Norris 2004, Lin 2004). Scholars of political marketing have increasingly turned to discourse analysis, which is used in the marketing literature to understand identity and power relations, and explain how the success of the extreme right can be interpreted in terms of making discursive connections with voters (Moufahim et al. 2010: 541). For example, Patrick de Vos (2002) argues that the upsurge in popularity of the anti-immigrant party the Vlaams Blok (*Flemish Blok*, VB) can be explained by the party's ability to blend the discourse of xenophobic populism with separatist nationalism. Anastasakis suggests that far-right parties have been successful, in part, because of their highly opportunistic use of discourse. He notes that while all the far-right parties have a common ideological core of xenophobia, ultra-nationalism, and hatred of immigrants, the most successful parties, like the Freedom Party in Austria, have moderated their discourse, embracing a catchall ideology in order to reach as broad an audience as possible (2000:18). However, it is difficult to make



generalizations about far-right discourse solely on the basis of analyses of individual parties. My goal is to provide a comparative and systematic analysis of far-right discourse in order to reveal discursive patterns across countries and determine whether there is a relationship between the discursive structure of the nationalist subculture and far-right success.

## **2.6 A New Approach to Far-Right Networks**

### *2.6.1. Networks and Party Sustainability*

I argue that the sustainability of far-right parties is influenced by the nationalist subculture. However, while Art focuses on the characteristics of potential party members (radicals vs. activists) and critical historical junctures, I emphasize the organizational structure of far-right networks. Closer examination of this structure will provide insight into whether far-right parties, once established, will be destroyed from within due to factionalism. Several studies have suggested that far-right organization influences party success. However, most studies of far-right organization have focused on the party's internal characteristics, and not on its relationships with other far-right groups (Kitschelt 1995, Lubbers et al. 2002). Analyzing the ways in which far-right parties cooperate or compete with other nationalist groups may help scholars gain a better understanding of how successful parties mobilize their support base. This analysis also might help us understand why unsuccessful parties splinter due to division within the nationalist movement.

In order to assess the organizational structure of the far-right, I use social network analysis to examine the degree of centralization within the far-right network. I do this both online, collecting data on the links between organizational websites, and offline, collecting data on overlapping organizational memberships. I believe that parties that occupy a central position within the far-right network will be better able to raise funds, recruit members, and diffuse

information about their policy preferences. I also believe that highly centralized networks will be less prone to factionalism.

*Hypothesis 1: As centrality of the parliamentary party within the far-right network increases, the likelihood of party sustainability increases.*

According to social network theories, actors that occupy a central position within a network have network power (Ibarra and Andrews 1993, Brass 1992). It may be useful for the far-right to have strong connections with other far-right actors as it could enhance the party's ability to raise funds, recruit members, and diffuse information about their policies. There is also a possibility that a party that occupies a central position within the network will be less prone to factionalism. For example, De Witte and Verbeeck (1998) argue that the extreme right has been successful in Belgium and not the Netherlands because the Vlaams Blok was able to cooperate with Flemish-nationalist groups and clubs. And in Hungary, there is evidence to suggest that the participation of the paramilitary organization, the Hungarian Guard, at Jobbik party rallies has helped attract voters and intimidate members of the Roma community to prevent them from opposing anti-Roma policies (Waterfield, 2010; Day 2010).

*Hypothesis 2: As the ideological centrality of party within a network increases, party sustainability increases.*

A preexisting nationalist subculture can be an advantage for a far-right party, but this advantage may be negated if the party has to struggle with rival ideological factions. I argue that the ideological structure of the nationalist subculture can influence party sustainability. In *When Parties Fail*, Lawson and Merkl (1998) describe how the parties are threatened when alternative organizations emerge as competitors. Factionalism has repeatedly undermined the success of far-right parties (Givens 2005). Fitzmaurice describes the factionalism of the francophone far-right

in Belgium:

The French-speaking extreme right has seemed ‘groupusculaire’, fractious, divided, insubstantial, amateurish and unable to choose a clear strategy as between forms of ‘entryism’ on the fringes of the traditional Christian Social and Liberal parties of the right, romantic violence and destabilisation through links with paramilitary groups and limited infiltration of security services, ideological debate such as the so-called revisionist or neo-occidental philosophies, as against electoralism. (Fitzmaurice 1992: 305-6)

A party that is not near the ideological center of the broader network is more vulnerable to ideological competitors and factionalism as there will be rivals who do not feel that the party is representative of their ideology or interests. In addition, a lack of ideological cohesion within the party can influence the internal organization of a party, making it more likely that the party will divide into factions. There is often a divide between pragmatists, who are willing to moderate the party platform for votes and hardliners who are reluctant to weaken the movement’s ideological purity. For example, in the 1990s, there was a divide within the Front Nationale between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Megret, who disapproved of Le Pen’s extremism and anti-Semitic rhetoric (Givens 2005:105). Megret split from the party in 1998 to form the *Mouvement National Republicain* (National Republican Movement, MNR). While this split did not destroy the FN, certainly splits of this sort have the potential to destroy far-right parties, particularly if there is a lot of support for the ideological position of the breakaway party amongst nationalists.

### ***2.6.2 Competitive Crowding in Networks***

*Hypothesis 3: As the asymmetry of a party’s overlap with a competitor in the network I increases, its sustainability decreases*

The Flemish nationalist subculture is well-established and the connections between its organizations have facilitated party building. As David Art argues, “The support of the radical wing of the Flemish national movement was critical for the VB in its early years.” (2008: 428)

For example, in the early days of the Vlaams Blok, it was able to draw hardline members from the preexisting Flemish national party, the Volksunie (*People's Union*, VU) and the paramilitary organization, Voorpost. However, the density of ties between Flemish nationalist organizations can, paradoxically, make these organizations weaker, as they present opportunities for internal competition and shifting loyalties. When organizations are too densely connected within a network, they can become competitive for the loyalty of members. In their study of the semiconductor industry, Podolny, Stuart, and Hannan (1996) found that there is a relationship between niche position and organizational survival. Specifically, they found that a crowded niche position is negatively associated with a firm's survival. In order to assess whether a niche has become crowded, one must measure the density of ties between similar organizations. In this case, competitive crowding, is the sum of an organization's overlapping memberships. These overlaps are not necessarily symmetric, as some organizations will have more overlapping memberships than others. The greater the asymmetry of the overlap, the stronger the competitive effect of organization j on organization i. (Podolny et al. 1996: 666).

*Table 2.1. Niche Overlap of Two Hypothetical Organizations*

Area of overlap between Organization i and Organization j  25 overlapping members	Area of j that does not overlap with I  75 members
Area of i that does not overlap with j  25 members	

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Social Network Analysis

This study uses social network analysis to investigate the structure of the far-right's online

network. Social network analysis is a method used to study the relationship between individuals, or nodes, within a network in order to identify “persistent patterns of association...that can define, enable, or restrict the behavior of nodes” (Hafner-Burton et al., 2009:8). The concept of a network has been interpreted broadly, ranging from tightly bound networks like tribal communities to more loosely bound networks like those created by links between websites. The strength of a tie is conceptualized as a combination of the magnitude and frequency of interaction between the nodes. The structure of the network helps determine its usefulness to the nodes within it: networks with tighter ties between the nodes may be more useful than those with loose ties. In addition, a network’s usefulness to a node may depend on the node’s position within the network. The primary way to measure this is the node’s centrality, which gives one a sense of how important an individual node is to a given network. While there are a number of ways to measure centrality, one of the most frequently used is degree centrality. *Indegree centrality* is the number of ties that come in to a node from the broader network, whereas *outdegree centrality* is the number of ties that the node directs out to others (Freeman 1979). As a node’s centralization within a network increases, it accumulates more social capital, “more easily accessing resources and information from other nodes...” that “may allow that node to have the ability to shape the flow of information” (Hafner-Burton et al 2009: 570).

For the online network analysis, the nodes within the network are organizational websites and the ties between them are hyperlinks (Park 2003, Barnett and Sung 2006). I constructed a database of the far-right network organizational websites in three European countries: Belgium, France and the UK, all of which have multiple far right parties competing within the same electoral system and far right network. An organization was included in the far-right network on the basis of whether or not it met Mudde’s criterion for inclusion in the far-right. Specifically,

an organization was included if it touted that the state “should be inhabited...by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (2007:19). In constructing the database, I made use of databases of hate groups constructed by the Wiesenthal Center, VOX-POL, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. In addition, groups were identified for inclusion using relevant scholarship on the far-right in a given country. It is not possible to construct a database of far-right organizational websites that is exhaustive as many of the sites are temporary or have restricted access. While the dataset may be imperfect, it is still worthwhile to examine the relationship between far-right organizations that have a prominent and public online presence. Using a web crawler, I collected data on network centrality in three European countries, operationalized as the number of incoming links from the broader network to the parliamentary party’s homepage (Ackland 2010). The VOSON web crawler permits the construct of network maps that allow one to visualize patterns of cooperation and contestation within the broader network.

### ***3.1.1 Dependent Variable: Party Sustainability***

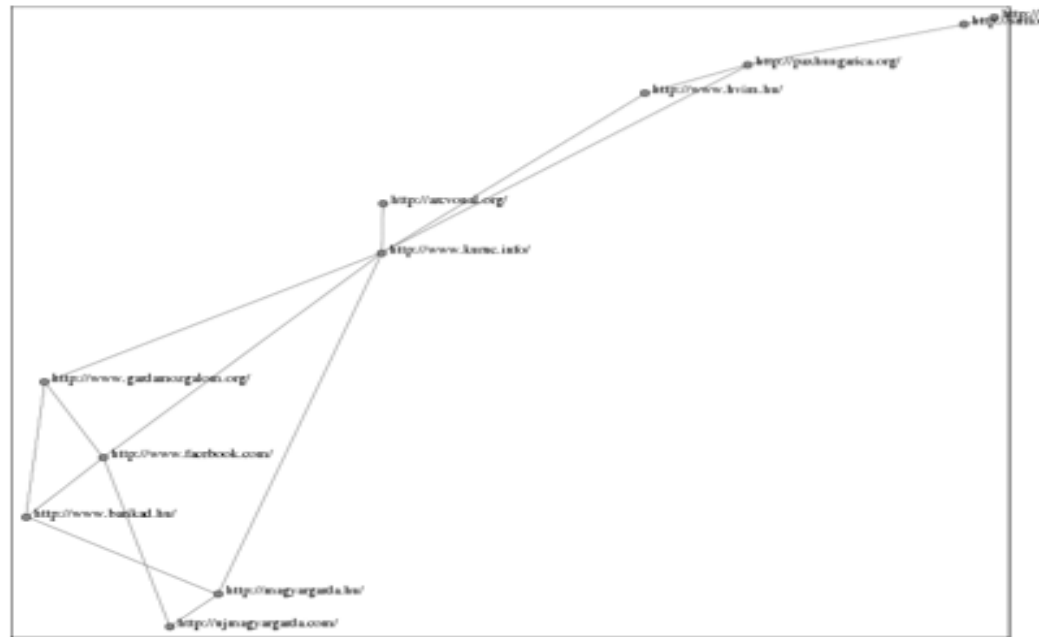
The study is ultimately concerned with how an organization’s network power influences its sustainability. It suggests that interorganizational relationships might help predict which parties will have a long lifespan and which will merely be a flash in the pan. In his study of the nationalist subculture and party sustainability, Art (2011) defines a sustainable party as one that receives 5% of the vote share in three successive parliamentary elections. His goal is to move beyond explanations of far-right party emergence in order to predict the trajectories far-right parties will take once they have been established. However, Art’s measurement still defines sustainability solely in terms of electoral performance and ignores other dimensions of

organizational continuity. In addition, by making party sustainability a dichotomous variable, Art fails to capture the full extent of variation in party trajectories. The measure of party sustainability I advocate includes the following elements: durability and modality. A party's durability is a measure of the number of years it has been an operation.

Modality is the number of times it has exceeded the representation threshold and gained seats in the legislature. Dividing a party's modality by its durability provides a sense of how the party has performed over the course of its lifespan.

### ***3.1.2 Network Centrality***

The key independent variable of interest is network centrality. I intend to measure the centrality of both online and offline networks of the far-right. For the online networks, my primary measurement is the party's *indegree centrality*, or the number of incoming links to the party's website from the broader network. This data has been collected using VOSON, a service that crawls all of the sites within a given network. In social network analysis, links are understood to be ties of affinity between actors within the network. In order to assure that the links are being used in this manner, I took a representative sample from my universe of cases and analyze the links in context.



*Figure 3.1 Visualization of the Centrality of Hungary's Far-Right Network*

### **3.1.3 Niche Competition**

Far-right parties can be vulnerable to internal competition within the network. This competitor can capture some of the party's members, ultimately hurting the party's performance. I hypothesize that as the asymmetry of party's overlapping membership increases relative to a competitor, its sustainability decreases. Due to the nature of far-right organizations, many of them do not publicize membership data. Because of this, and due to the fact that this study is concerned in part with online networks, overlapping memberships will focus on an organization's Twitter followers. While all of the followers of a far-right organization on Twitter are not necessarily active members of the community offline, following an organization on Twitter is an indication of a willingness to belong to an organization's online social network (Ye and Wu 2010). In addition, it is useful for an organization to have a large number of Twitter followers, as this increases its network power and its ability to diffuse information



(Bakshy et al. 2012). Using Followerwonk and my own database of Twitter followers, I compared the Twitter followers of actors in the far-right network in order to evaluate whether there is a substantial overlap in membership. The total number of overlapping members for two organizations was divided by the total number of followers of that organization (Podolny, Stuart, and Hannan 1996). This analysis helps identify which organizations are niche competitors within the network. In addition to the online analysis, I conducted interviews with representatives from far-right organizations in order to collect additional information about overlapping organizational ties and the ways in which interorganizational relationships are perceived by their members.

### **3.2 Discourse Analysis of the Far-Right**

In spite of the wide range of research activities concerning extreme right-wing parties, their ideology and their discourse has been given relatively little attention (Mudde 2000). In order to assess the overall structure of the Belgian far-right network, I intend to use content analysis to identify discursive patterns in the community. Content analysis is the “analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect” (Krippendorff 1980: 1). In recent decades there has been increased attention paid to content analysis of computer-mediated discourse (De Laat 2002). One way to identify the overarching themes in a network is to examine meta-keywords. Meta-keywords “describe the main focus or purpose of a website and are often embedded into the HTML to ensure appropriate ranking by search engines” (Ackland and O’Neil 2011: 182). The VOSON program includes a text analysis component, including information about meta-keyword frequencies. The meta-keywords are from the homepages of each seed site, where organizations typically place the most important

information about their organizations. While there are limitations on the inferences one can draw from meta-keywords, it is a useful way to identify and compare the central focus of each organization's website. For example, in a crawl of the far-right network in the UK, the following meta-keywords are used with the most frequency:

*Table 3.1 Meta-Keywords in the British Far-Right Network*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Word</b>
10	British
6	government, elections
5	young, foreign, cannibal
4	issue, website, death, happy, racial, African, political, democracy, European, immigration
3	forged, society, change, Asian, own, law, fear, deny, views, money, workers, Muslim

I hypothesize that ideologically cohesive networks will produce more sustainable parties. In order to test this hypothesis I examine the frequency with which certain types of discourse are used by radical right parties and compare it to their use in the broader network. The most frequently used meta-keywords were located in context on the organizational homepages and classified into the following discursive genres: anti-establishment populism, xenophobia, biological racism, and preservationism. While there are a wide variety of discourse employed by the far-right, these types of discourse have been recognized as the main pillars of far-right discourse in the existing literature (Guibernau 2010, Wilson and Hainsworth 2012). Each type of discourse has been conceptually defined and can be identified through certain key words or phrases. *Anti-establishment populist* discourse constructs a view of society where “the people” are pitted against the powerful elite. Leaders frequently use “us versus them” rhetoric, expressing opposition to the government or an elite group of individuals who wield power (Barr, 2009: 31). For example, Moufahim et al. (2010:549) notes how the Vlaams Blok's discourse includes a repertoire of confrontation:

The words used in the text strengthen the dichotomy between the party and its supporters and the opponents willing to bring it down. It is a) describing the action of the opponents with words such as: “forces”; “endanger”; “killed”; “bury”; “execute”; “terrorism”; “non-founded reports”; “hate” which could associate the opponent’ actions with undemocratic and violent practices; and b) describing actions related to the VB with: “defend”; “fought for”; “protect”; “the good fight”; “bury” (but only in reaction to the establishment attempt to bury the party), which relates the VB’s actions to the concept of self-defense (e.g. in 1991 the theme of the VB’s campaign was self-defense and was illustrated by the image of boxing gloves).

In order to identify anti-establishment populism, I count the number of times the words “government” and “EU” are clustered with a negative term. I collected data on the frequency with which the phrase “the people” is used. I make this phrase country specific as well, for example counting the number of times there is a reference to the “British people” in the UK or the “Dutch people” in the Netherlands.

*Xenophobia* is defined as a fear or hatred of people or elements that are considered alien. Xenophobic discourse makes clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders, “othering” groups that are considered foreign, like immigrants and racial or ethnic minorities. In order to identify xenophobic rhetoric, I counted the number of times immigrant/immigration was clustered with a negative term. For example, xenophobic discourse often includes “metaphors of threat,” like referring to an “invasion,” “river,” or “flood” of immigrants (Erjavec, 2003: 96). In addition, there may be a reference to the “problem of immigration” or emphasis placed on the relationship between immigration and crime. Other key phrases I will be searching for include references to immigrants “failure to integrate,” “stealing jobs,” and “taking advantage of social services” (Engelken-Jorge 2010). *Biological racism* is a more overt expression of racism than xenophobia, as it stresses the innate differences between ethnic groups. It often depicts foreigners as a biological threat to ethnic homogeneity and promotes a physical segregation of the races (Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn, 1993: 24). Explicit references are made to the inferior characteristics of specific ethnic groups. For example, there may be assertions that an ethnic group is less intelligent, greedy, or prone to engage in criminal behavior. Thus, I search for the

frequency with which a specific ethnic group is explicitly linked to a social problem. For example, I quantified references to “Gypsy crime” or the “Jewish conspiracy.” In addition, I tried to capture discourse that promotes physical segregation of the references by counting the frequencies of language that promotes “ethnic cleansing” or condones “miscegenation.”

Finally, the contemporary far-right may not use overtly racist discourse against a minority group, but prefer to portray their organization as the defender of Western values and a protector of citizens who, in their view, have become marginalized within their own society. *Preservationism* refers to discourse that portrays the far-right as a part of a wider project of preserving endangered European identities (Guibernau 2010: 12, Liang 2007: 10). Key words and phrases associated with this genre would be: protect, defend, preserve, Europe for Europeans, national preference. In addition, I search for country-specific phrases that have been employed by far-right parties in the past (e.g. “Britain for the British (National Front), “Denmark for the Danes” (Danish People’s Party), “Bulgaria for the Bulgarians” (Ataka). While the aforementioned discursive categories have been emphasized, I recognize that this list is not exhaustive. The lexical analysis of the corpus also undoubtedly revealed other relevant forms of discourse that were ultimately incorporated into the study, such as the discourse on law and order that is used by the N-VA.

In addition to the analysis of the meta-keywords, I also created a concept map of the Belgian far-right network in order to visualize the most frequency used words in the network and identity conceptual hubs (Ackland 2010). While there are limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from these maps alone, it does provide insights into conceptual patterns in the network.

### *3.2.1 Building a Corpus of Far-Right Discourse*

The VOSON program collects data on meta-keyword frequencies; however one weakness of the program is that there may be limitations in its representativeness. The meta-keywords are only from the homepages and therefore are not wholly representative of the entirety of an organization's discourse. To remedy this, I have constructed an original corpus of far-right text. A corpus is defined as a "large body of naturally occurring language data," that is typically stored on computers (Baker 2006: 1). The corpus is a specialized corpus, as it does not represent an entire body of language, but one specific genre of language. For example, Baker et al. (2013) created a 140 million word corpus of British media discourse in order to identify patterns in the way the media portrays Islam. Similarly, Posch et al. (2013) created a corpus of German extremist discourse that included editorials, interviews, and campaign materials in order to identify discursive patterns in German fascist rhetoric.

In order to ensure that the corpus is representative, I have followed the recommendation that each contain a million words (Pearson 1998, Baker 2006: 27). In addition, I have made efforts to ensure that my corpus contains a variety of forms of language. Corpus-based analysis has revealed that there are substantial differences in grammar, lexis, and discourse depending on the form of language that is used. Each corpus I have created has internal variety and incorporates multiple linguistic forms. At the present moment, I have constructed a corpus for the three Belgian far-right parties: the N-VA, the Vlaams Belang and the Belgian Front Nationale. Each corpus is comprised of a variety of language including online forums, campaign materials, twitter feeds, party manifestos, magazine articles, Facebook posts, news articles, and speeches. The size and internal variety of each corpus help guarantee that the corpus I have built is truly representative of each organization's discourse.

Each corpus has been constructed manually by cutting and pasting text-based website content into a Word Document. Subsequently, the text was transferred into a Concordance program, *Wordsmith* (2016)<sup>2</sup> Like VOSON, Wordsmith collects data on word frequencies, but these frequencies can be calculated as a percentage per 1,000 words in a 1 million word text file. Relative frequency lists facilitate the ability to make comparisons across cases. Frequencies are significant because, as Stubbs has argued, word choices are not neutral and reflect an ideological position (1996: 107). He argues that “repeated patterns show that evaluative meanings are not merely personal and idiosyncratic, but widely shared in a discourse community.” In addition, Wordsmith allows the researcher to examine the context in which words are being used, which will ultimately facilitate a more meaningful analysis than one might achieve through an examination of word frequencies alone.

### ***3.2.2 Keyword Analysis***

The present study also employs keyword analysis to examine variations in discourse between far-right parties. Keywords can be used to identify discursive patterns within a network. Keywords are words that occur more frequently within a body of text than would be expected by chance alone (Scott and Tribble 1996, Baker and Ellece 2011). Keyword analysis involves examining a corpus and identifying words that appear unusually frequently in comparison to the reference corpus (Barbieri 2008: 64). This will allow me to identify similarities and differences in the words used by far-right parties relative to one another. . The corpus for the National Front cannot be compared to the others using keyword

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<sup>2</sup> Wordsmith is a software for those involved in corpus linguistics. It helps to identify patterns in language by creating wordlists, concordances, and key words. For more information, see Mike Scott, 2016, *Wordsmith Tools*. Stroud: Lexical Analysis Software.

analysis as the text of this corpus is in French and the corpora are Flemish.

However, it is possible to compare the corpora for the two Flemish-speaking parties: the N-VA and the Vlaams Belang.

*Wordsmith* (2016) was used to create word lists of the corpora that are being compared: one for the Vlaams Belang Corpus and one for the N-VA Corpus.

*Wordsmith* compares the word lists and creates a key word list that based on a cross tabulation of word frequencies in the word lists. Key words for each corpus are those that are “unusually” frequent relative to the reference corpus. Each word is ranked according to its “keyness” value or the statistical likelihood of its occurrence relative to the reference corpus. Words with a positive keyness occur more frequently than would be expected by chance in comparison with the reference corpus and words with a negative keyness occur less frequently than would be expected by chance relative to the reference corpus (Bondi and Scott 2010).

### **3.3 Interviewing the Belgian Far-Right: The Flemish Nationalist Network**

The online network analysis will be accompanied by a qualitative comparison of the political parties in Belgium: the Vlaams Belang, the N-VA, and the Belgian National Front. Critics of quantitative research have charged that it only reveals simplistic correlations between variables and fails to explain *why* or *how* outcomes occur (George and Bennett, 2005). To remedy this, I will use case studies to identify the causal processes that link my independent and dependent variables. Cases were chosen on the basis of variation on the independent variable, the cohesion of the nationalist subculture. Following Mudde’s (2005) typology, cases were chosen on the basis of whether extremists organizations are integrated (Vlaams Belang, N-VA) or isolated (Democratie Nationale) from a broader extremist network. There is substantial evidence

to suggest that the successful far-right party in Belgium, the Vlaams Belang, has strong ties to other Flemish nationalist organizations which have helped it mobilize its support base. In contrast, the Belgian National Front is a lone wolf and has found it difficult to establish relationships with other organizations. As a consequence, the party has been prone to factionalism and has never enjoyed significant success.

In order to establish the causal mechanisms at work in the relationship between the organizational structure of nationalist networks and party sustainability, I conducted field research in Belgium. I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with far-right party representatives, members of extremist organizations, and members of nationalist student organizations.

All of the organizations were a part of the broader Flemish nationalist movement. I chose to accompany the online analysis with a qualitative approach in order to gain an understanding of how individuals perceive and experience network structures. This gave me the opportunity to talk to members firsthand and gain an in depth knowledge that is not necessarily provided by an online analysis of network structures. Focusing on the Belgian far-right network as a case study provides an opportunity for theory-testing and allows me to move beyond the simplistic correlations between variables that characterize statistical analysis and illuminate the casual mechanisms at work.

### ***3.3.1 Population Data and Recruitment***

The medium size subject pool (40) allows the researcher to sample across the spectrum (including both policy elites and rank and file activists). Due to time constraints and the difficulty in attaining access to these types of participants, limiting the study to 40 participants is reasonable. The sample size is small enough to permit in-depth interviews and open-ended



questions, yet larger enough that there is reason to believe the findings could be generalizable for the Belgian far-right network on the whole.

Because the aim of this research is to understand far-right networks, subjects used for interviews were selected based on their membership in a far-right party or organization. There were four organizations studied, all of which are based in the Flemish region of Belgium. I obtained contact information with leaders and members of organizations through internet searches and official organization websites. I compiled a database of emails and provided study information and an invitation to participate via email. Recruitment emails were provided in both English and in the individual's native language.<sup>3</sup>

If an individual expressed interest in participating, a follow up email was sent to schedule a meeting at a time and public location of their choice. Over the course of two months, I received a response from 35 individuals. 34 consented to participate in the interview process and one refused. Individuals who participated in the interview were asked to pass on study information and the researcher's contact information to other individuals who may be interested in participating. This recruitment method is particularly useful when conducting a social network analysis, as this provides insight into the ties between actors in the network. It is also useful technique for reaching far-right activists, as these actors can be difficult to approach directly (Goodwin 2010).

### ***3.3.2 Informed Consent Process***

At the meeting, the participant was read the informed consent script. All participants were fluent in English, but a written script in the participant's native language was provided to ensure the participant clearly understood his or her rights. Participants were informed that their

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<sup>3</sup> Full text of the recruitment email is available in Appendix A. This email was also translated into Dutch and French for native Dutch and French speakers.

participation was voluntary, that the interview would take approximately one hour of their time, and they were asked their preference about the confidentiality of the research materials, specifically whether or not they wanted their name to be used in any research publications. The participants were read the informed consent script and subsequently asked to provide oral consent to participate.<sup>4</sup> All participants provided oral consent to participate in the research. They were provided with a copy of the informed consent form to keep in the event that they had questions for me, Dr. Jelena Subotic, my dissertation supervisor, or the Georgia State University Office for Human Research Protection about the study.

Potential interviewees were contacted via email and a follow-up phone call. Included in the email was an invitation to participate. If a contact was willing to be interviewed, arrangements were made for an appointment. Interviews were conducted at the interviewee's workplace or an agreed upon public location. Upon arrival, I informed the participant about the purpose of the research, his/her rights as a participant, and the risks and benefits associated with participation. The principal investigator obtained oral informed consent from the participant prior to the interview. In the event that the participant was not fluent in English, a copy of the informed consent form was provided in the participant's native language (Dutch or French). Once informed consent was obtained, I began the interview, which lasted approximately one hour. The interview was based on a set of open-ended questions. A semi-structured interview protocol was used during this study to ensure the interview would address the central research question, while giving the respondent flexibility to expand on a given topic.<sup>5</sup> This permitted new questions to arise during the interview, enabled me to establish a rapport with the interviewee, and ultimately generated greater insights (Flick 1995).

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<sup>4</sup> The full text of the Informed Consent script is available in Appendix B. The French and Dutch language versions of the form are available in Appendix C and D respectively.

<sup>5</sup> The full text of the semi-structured interview questions is available in Appendix F.

### ***3.3.3 Data Collection***

I took shorthand notes during the interview with each participant. The notes were kept confidential as provided by law. All of the research records were stored in locked cabinets and password protected computer files. Identifiable data was only released if participants explicitly give permission. Transcriptions of written notes were kept in password protected computer files. Participants were informed that information would be shared with individuals who would make sure the study is done correctly, including my supervisor, Dr. Jelena Subotic, the Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) at Georgia State University. All files containing identifiable information were destroyed within six months of the initial data collection. To ensure that my research adheres to ethical standards, I completed Georgia State University's Educational Program on the Protection of Human Research Subjects. This program includes a component on the ethics of field research. In addition, the project received approval from Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board.

### ***3.3.4 Observations and Archival Research***

I also attended public meetings and celebrations of nationalist organizations and conducted observations (Fenno, 1990). These observations help paint a more holistic picture of the far-right as it operates in a natural setting. This helped me to humanize or create a "peopled ethnography" or the far-right network, based on my field notes, interviews, and the products created by group members (Fine 2003). I did not attend these events as a participant observer, but rather an "observer as participant," whose primary role was to collect data. All events were public events that I was invited to by party leaders and my identity as a researcher was known to all participants (Alder and Alder 1994: 380). All events were held in public squares in the city of

Antwerp or Belgium and did not pose a significant risk to my safety or the safety of participants beyond that posed by day-to-day life. The purpose of these observations was to gain further insight into the lived experience of those in the Flemish nationalist networks, and to conduct observations about which organizations were in attendance at these events, in order to better understand interorganizational relationships. These observations were focused and intended to reinforce the data collected through more formal interviews.

In addition to observations, I also engaged in local archival research in order to better understand the historical development of nationalist organizations, and collect data on membership organization, funding, activities, and discourse through an analysis of movement-generated documents.

### **3.4 Challenges**

One of the challenges of this study is the issue of endogeneity. The central hypothesis is that parties that occupy a central position within the broader network will be less vulnerable to factionalism, better at mobilization, and ultimately more sustainable than parties that are isolated relative to the broader network. However, it is unclear what comes first—party success or party centrality. In other words, it is difficult to discern whether integration is a cause rather than a manifestation of mobilization and sustainability. The primary means through which this concern is addressed is through the qualitative interviews, which reveal the causal mechanisms that link network position to party performance. George and Bennett have advocated process tracing as means of “identifying the intervening casual process” and “causal mechanisms” that connect hypothesized causes and outcomes (2005:206). One of the benefits of adopting a mixed method approach is that the case studies will help reinforce the correlations found in the online network

study and illuminate causal mechanisms that are difficult to capture in the absence of in-depth qualitative analysis.

Conducting interviews with members of far-right parties and extremist organizations poses a unique set of challenges, which helps explain why ethnographies have been underused in this field of research. There are many barriers to access including “extremists’ mistrust of scholars” and “scholars’ resistance to establishing ‘the rapport necessary for closeup studies of those they regard as inexplicable or repugnant” (Barrett-Fox 2011: 14; Avanza 2008). Some of these organizations are secretive, engaged in illegal activity, or socially stigmatized, which would make members of these organizations reluctant to share information with scholars (Blee, 1999). However, as Mintz notes, “some of the best and most trying fieldwork has been done with people with whose values their ethnographers were not in accord” (2000, p. 175; quoted in Barrett-Fox, 2011: 14). Goodwin notes that, despite assumptions to the contrary, it was relatively easy for him to gain access to far-right communities (Goodwin 2010: 34). It did prove difficult to get participants from some of the most extreme actors in the community, specifically the paramilitary organizations and members of the Walloon far-right. However, I did find that members of the Flemish nationalist parties and student organizations were very willing to participate in field interviews. While the interviews are not entirely representative, I feel confident that they nevertheless provide valuable insights into the ways in which actors experience the Belgian far-right network.

## **4 MAPPING THE FAR-RIGHT ONLINE**

### **4.1 The Online Network of the Belgian Far-Right**

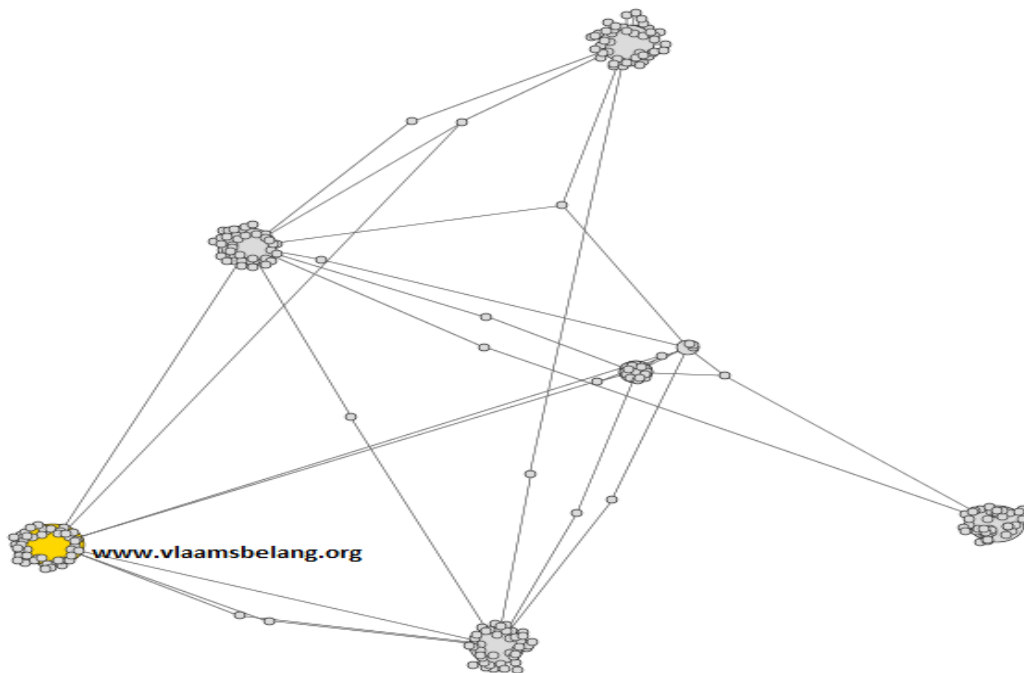
Belgium is an ideal case to study causal mechanisms of far-right success as it has two far-right parties operating within the same national context. One party, the Vlaams Belang, has become

one of the most successful far-right parties in Europe while the other, the FN, has never been able to gain electoral momentum. Conventional explanations of far-right success do not explain the trajectory of the far-right parties in Belgium. Explanations linked to the level of immigration would predict that Wallonia's FN would be more successful as it has a higher level of immigration than the home turf of the VB, Flanders. Explanations linked to unemployment would also predict more success for the far-right in Wallonia, which has a higher unemployment rate than Flanders (Art 2008: 425-426). The FN has had a strong anti-immigrant ideology since the 1970s when its rallying cry was to send "parasitic foreigners" home in order to ensure "work for Belgians and Europeans" (Delwit 2007: 145). One might think that, in the face of high unemployment, Walloons would be more likely to use the immigrant community as a scapegoat, and find the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the FN compelling. Yet the ideological appeal of the FN in Wallonia has been limited and it has almost always been perceived as a pariah.

To understand why the Flanders-based VB has been the more successful, it is necessary to look beyond socioeconomic explanations and examine the organizational foundations of the party. The evidence from the Belgian case suggests that the most successful far-right parties are those with network power. Network power is defined by the centrality of the party within the broader network. Highly successful parties have high indegree centrality, meaning that a large number of other actors in the network are linked to them. These linkages enable a party to communicate with other actors in the network, distribute policy information, recruit members, and garner electoral support.

The Vlaams Belang is one of the most successful parties in Europe. In its eight-year lifespan, it has achieved representation in the legislature seven times (sustainability: .875). It is

apparent that a number of organizations are clustered around the Vlaams Belang. One can see that the VB (depicted in yellow on the network map below) is bonded, or densely connected, to a group of actors (Burt 2005). This clustering is referred to as *bonding*, a tightly knit, highly connected subgroup. (Hoppe and Reinelt 2010: 601). These dense connections are an indication of a sense of trusted community where interactions are frequent and efficient (Hoppe and Reinelt 2010: 602).



*Figure 4.1 Bonding with the Vlaams Belang*

The network map provides additional evidence to support the claim that the VB is closely linked to other Flemish nationalist organizations: including Voorpost, Volksunie, and the Nationalistische Studentenvereniging (*Nationalist Student Organization*, NSV).

The trusted community in which the Vlaams Belang is situated is the Flemish nationalist movement. The party can trace its origins back to the Vlaams Nationaal Verboond (VNV), a Flemish nationalist organization that collaborated with Nazi Germany during the

Second World War. Following the war, the VNV was banned, but because it was an aggregate of several preexisting Flemish nationalist organizations, it continued to exist in the form of secret societies. This included the Vlaamse Concentratie (*Flemish Concentration*, VC), the paramilitary organization Vlaamse Militanten Orde (Flemish Military Order, VMO), Were Di, and the paramilitary organization Voorpost. The Flemish nationalist party Volksunie (*People's Union*, VU), born in 1954, was able to draw upon the organizations for members and support. Art's interview with an activist within the Flemish nationalist movement illustrates the interdependency of organizations with the network:

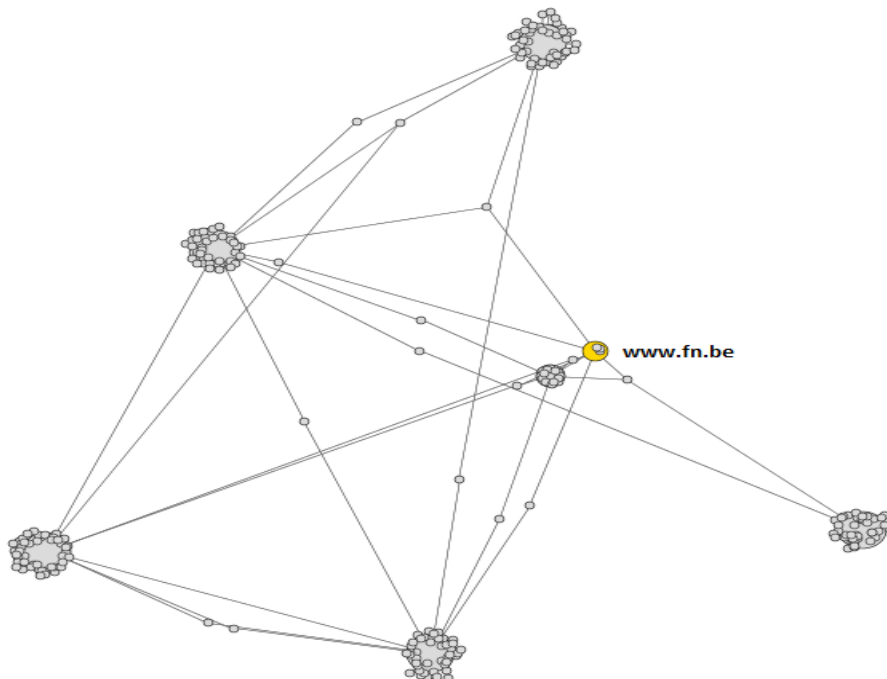
My grandfather was with the VNV. He was a teacher and pro-Flemish....After the war, my grandfather spent several years in prison....My grandmother also did some time. So more or less grew up in the Flemish Movement....When I was 6, I became a member of the VNJ. It's an ideological youth movement, and many children of Flemish nationalists are members. You are given certain values and a particular vision: the pan-Dutch and right-wing view in general. When I was 16, I joined the VNJ leaders' corps....At a certain point, X asked me to become a member of Voorpost. I agreed, because ideologically I backed Voorpost, and because I had already participated before....It's assumed that someone from my background knows what Voorpost is about. In fact, not much has changed....I recently became a member of the Vlaams Blok.

Many members of the Vlaams Belang came out of the Volksunie or several other Flemish nationalist organizations Verbond van Nederlandse Werkgemeenschappen Were Di (Association of Dutch Working Groups Protect Yourself, Were Di) and the Vlaamse Militanten Orde (*Order of Flemish Militants*, VMO) (Art 2008: 428). The Vlaams Belang also has ties with the Nationalist Student Organization (NSV), which acts as a feeder for its members. By building on this organizational foundation and focusing on party building at the local level, the VB was able to become one of the most durable and electorally successful far-right parties in Europe.

In contrast to the network centrality of the VB, the network map reveals that the FN is in a relatively isolated position with limited network power. The map reveals that the FN is on



the outskirts of the organizational network and that it is not bridged or densely bonded with other actors in the network. The Vlaams Belang is densely connected to many other nationalist organizations; however the FN is located in Wallonia, a region without a strong nationalist subculture, and this is reflected in its scarcity of linkages to other actors on the network map. While the VB occupies a position at the center of a densely connected the cluster, the FN is relatively marginalized. In contrast to the VB, which shares linkages with 50 other sites, the FN only has ties with seven other organizations in the network. This means that only seven sites in the broader network link to the website of the FN. This relatively isolated position limits the power of the party within the broader network, affecting its ability to communicate with other organizations, recruit members, and mobilize an effective campaign. While the party has proved to be fairly durable with a lifespan of 27 years, it has never achieved representation in the legislature (sustainability: 0). Its vote share in the most recent election was only .1 percent.



*Figure 4.2 The Relative Isolation of the National Front*

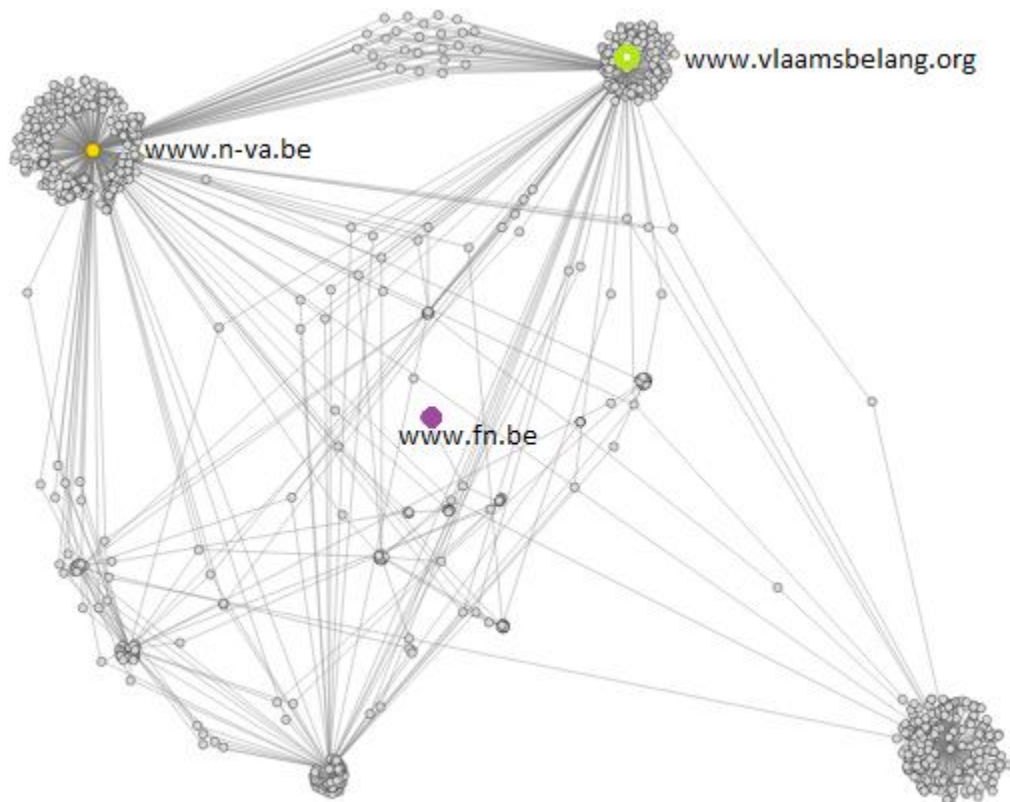
In order to understand why the FN has always been on the fringe, one must examine the history of far-right nationalism in Wallonia. The origins of the far-right in French-speaking Belgium date back to the 1930s, when Catholic dissidents formed the anti-Communist Rexist Party. The Rexist Party advocated corporatism and Catholicism and criticized governmental and societal corruption. Their perspective on societal corruption was informed by anti-Semitism and, in 1936, the party underwent a process of fascization and collaboration with Nazi Germany. This process of fascization is similar to the one the Flemish Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (VNV) experienced in the 1930s and 40s; however the postwar experience of the two differed dramatically. Like the VNV, the Rexist party was banned, however the Rexist Party was unable to maintain a presence in Wallonia, even in the form of secret societies.

The Rexist Party of the Walloon far-right were not situated within a larger nationalist movement and the ban resulted in the disappearance of the French far-right from the political scene from the postwar era up until the 1970s. Thus, when the BNF was formed in the 1980s, it had no preexisting foundation on which to build and no network of organizations to recruit members from. As a consequence, the BNF has always been “evanescent from an organizational point of view” (DeWitt: 148). The party has been plagued by infighting and factionalism and frequently will splinter into smaller movements. The likelihood of the BNF establishing a more central position within the far-right network in the future is slim. In March 2015, the party’s namesake, the French Front Nationale, dissociated itself from the party, asserting that the Belgian NF was no longer allowed to use its name or logo. Thus, a party lacking in ties with domestic far-

right organizations was also robbed of its international ties to one of the strongest far-right parties in Europe, making it difficult for the party to market itself and attract new members.

#### *4.1.1 Changes in the Network Structure*

A network map from 2016 reveals change over time in the network structure, most notably a change in network size and an increase in the number of incoming links to the website of the Vlaams Belang. The first noticeable change is an increase in the size of the network overall. The same far-right seed sites were entered in to both the map from 2012 and the map of 2016; however there are nearly 200 more organization sites that appeared in the crawl of the 2016 network.



*Figure 4.3 The Belgian Far Right Network 2016*

The increase in overall size may be a reflection of the upsurge in popularity of far-right websites in the aftermath of the Paris and Belgian terrorist attacks. In addition, the Vlaams Belang's indegree centrality has increased from 50 to 185, meaning there are incoming links from 185 other actors in the network. This makes the Vlaams Belang the most central actor in the network; however the site of N-VA has nearly the same indegree centrality (181). The fact that both of these actors are equally central within the network suggests that the two are in competition for the central position within the network.

#### **4.2 The Cross-Fertilization of the Flemish Far-Right**

In addition to the database of organizational websites, I constructed a database of Twitter followers of Belgian far-right organizations. Whether following an organization on Twitter translates into a vote at the polls is subject to debate, however several studies have indicated that social media does impact political behavior and that is frequently used by activist organizations to mobilize and proselytize (Elinas 2009, Phillips 2010, Barlett and Littler 2011).

The data is limited to the four organizations with active Twitter accounts: the Vlaams Belang (VB), Front Nationale (FN), Voorpost (VP), and the Nationalistische Studentenvereniging (NSV), a Flemish nationalist student movement that has chapters throughout Flanders. Unfortunately, many of the most extreme organizations are highly secretive and do not use Twitter as a mechanism of online communication. However, the existing dataset does incorporate five of the most significant organizations in Belgium. I constructed the following alliance matrix, which illustrates the overlapping followers for each pair of organizations in the network (Wasserman and Faust 1994). This graph provides

normalized data on the overlapping memberships within the network, revealing patterns of interconnectivity.

The first notable observation is there is a significant overlap in membership between the NSV and the Vlaams Belang. 298 followers of the NSV (or 66%) also follow the Vlaams Belang. While the nature of the relationship between the NSV and other far-right organizations has been subject to debate, the data does seem to support the assertion that the NSV is closely linked to the VB. . In the words of one outspoken student critic of the NSV it is the “cross-fertilization” of NSV and other far-right organizations that boosts far-right organizational membership, with each organization “fishing within the same pool of Flemish radicals” (Peeters 2010). It is interesting to note that key officials in the VB follow the NSV on Twitter including Philip Dewinter (who joined NSV as a student in 1982), Bart Laeremans, and Bert Schoofs.

*Table 4.1 Density Matrix of Twitter Followers*

	<b>FN</b>	<b>NSV</b>	<b>VB</b>	<b>VP</b>	<b>N-VA</b>
<b>FN</b>	58 (1)	2 (.03)	10 (.17)	2 (.03)	10 (.17)
<b>NSV</b>	2(0)	448 (1)	298 (.66)	249 (.55)	194 (.43)
<b>VB</b>	10 (0)	298 (.03)	7454 (1)	449 (.06)	3376 (.45)
<b>VP</b>	2 (0)	249 (.30)	449(.54)	835 (1)	227 (.27%)
<b>N-VA</b>	10 (0)	194 (.01)	3376 (.10)	227 (.01)	33,210 (1)

The overlapping followers of the NSV and Voorpost is another significant trend.

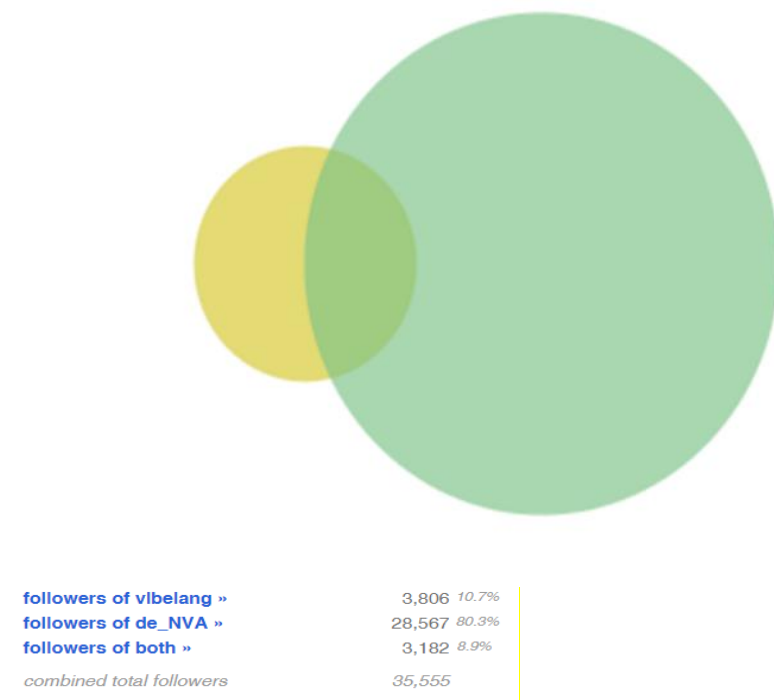
Voorpost is one of the more extreme Flemish nationalist organizations, which broke away from the more moderate Volksunie following a period of radicalization in the 1970s. 249 or 55% of NSV followers also follow Voorpost. This lends support to the assertion that the NSV and Voorpost have overlapping memberships in the real world and frequently attend one another's events. One student observer notes that members of Voorpost often attend NSV events as "stewards" or security officials at NSV events. Voorpost is typically characterized as militant organization and its members frequently participate in street movements, protesting the monarchy and immigration.

Voorpost has more overlapping followers with the Vlaams Belang than it does with the N-VA, which suggests that Voorpost has denser ties with Vlaams Belang than it does with the N-VA. 449 or 59% of Voorpost followers also follow the Vlaams Belang compared to 249 or 30% who follow the N-VA. Qualitative studies of the far-right in Belgium suggest that it is not unusual for a person to belong to both Vlaams Belang and Voorpost or to transition from one to the other. For example, Jan, a Vlaams Belang activist, states that he became part of the Flemish nationalist movement in the 1970s, protesting against the university system's shift to the left. He joined VMO and later Voorpost, which he said naturally led him to support Vlaams Belang when it was established (Klingerman's and Mayer 2013). In addition a leading Vlaams Belang politician, Luc Vermeulen, was also an action leader in Voorpost up until June 2013 when he named a successor, but indicated that he was not "saying goodbye" and would remain active in the organization (Verreycken 2013).

In contrast to the high density of overlapping memberships between the Flemish nationalist organizations, the FN is relatively isolated. It has a total of 24 overlapping memberships, including 10 with Vlaams Belang and 10 with N-VA. It is not at all shocking to

find that a Wallonia-based party does not have a high degree of overlapping supporters with Flemish-based movements. However, there are very few French far-right organizations in Belgium to begin with. The organizations that do exist (e.g. Les Villains) are not officially represented on Twitter. Thus, the ability of the FN to link up with other Belgian far-right organizations via social media is extremely limited.

While one should be cautious about assuming there is a direct link between online and offline political behavior, the alliance matrix of Twitter followers suggest that there are dense connections between the followers of Flemish nationalist organizations. The organizations use Twitter to post news stories, promote policy preferences, and advertise upcoming events. This has the potential to diffuse policy preferences throughout the network and facilitate the recruitment of new members. While overlapping memberships can indicate dense ties between organizations that could be beneficial to a party as it seeks to mobilize and recruit, an overlap in membership of two parties within the same network is not beneficial. Unless the parties are intentionally cooperating with one another to form a coalition, parties are inherently competitors of one another. Therefore, an overlap in party followers suggests that the organizations have followers with dual loyalties, which could impact a party's performance at the polls.



*Figure 4.4 The Overlapping Twitter Followers of VB and the N-VA<sup>6</sup>*

An analysis of the Twitter followers of the N-VA and the Vlaams Belang reveals that there is a significant niche overlap of the two organizations; however the overlap is asymmetrical and is more detrimental to the Vlaams Belang than to N-VA. The total number of overlapping members is 3,182 or 8.9% of the combined total followers. This data supports the claim that the N-VA, the newer of the two parties, has been able to capture the support of some VB supporters. The data suggests that there is an asymmetry in the overlap that gives the N-VA a competitive advantage over the Vlaams Belang. The N-VA has 25,385 followers or roughly 89% of followers that do not overlap with VB. In contrast, the Vlaams Belang has only 624 or roughly 16% of followers that do not overlap with N-VA. This suggests that the N-VA has a competitive advantage over the Vlaams Belang.

<sup>6</sup> Graphic created using Followerwonk. MOZ (2016). Followerwonk is a tool for Twitter analytics that is predominantly used by businesses to track their followers and increase their social media power. It generates comparisons of the followers of Twitter users.



### **4.3 Mapping the Ideology of the Belgian Far-Right**

This portion of the study seeks to identify contemporary discursive trends in the far-right network and to assess whether parties which use discourse that is more dominant within the network fare better than those who use a discourse that is less prevalent. Far-right scholars have often studied the ideology of the far-right in comparison with that of the center right. However, scholars are beginning to recognize the importance of examining how discourse is used by far-right parties to connect or disassociate with internal competitors (Harrison and Bruter 2011). The discourse analysis portion of this involves an exploration of discursive patterns in the network as a whole and compares it to the discourse used by individual actors. The goal is to determine the degree of ideological fit between the network and a party within it in order to identify which parties occupy a position in the ideological center and which parties are on the ideological fringe. I expect that parties at the ideological center of the network will be more sustainable than parties on the ideological fringe.

#### ***4.3.1 Historical Trends in Belgian Far-Right Discourse***

In the 1930s, the dominant ideology within the Flemish nationalist network was an anti-Enlightenment posture and, by the end of the 1930s, a fascist form of Flemish nationalism was dominant (Sternhell 2010). Fascist Flemish nationalist groups who cooperated with Germany during WWII were delegitimized once the war was over; however Flemish independence remained on the agenda and many of the more radical elements in the Flemish movement remained active underground. The Volksunie was established in 1954 and advocated for Flemish independence. The discourse of Flemish nationalism radicalized again in the 1970s, when the radical wing of this organization split in the 1970s to form the Vlaams Blok (People's Union). The Vlaams Blok, like its contemporary the National Front in France,

ushered in a resurgence of neofascist rhetoric, and was ultimately found to be in violation of Belgian laws prohibiting xenophobia. The successor of the Vlaams Blok, the Vlaams Belang, continued its legacy of using explicitly xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric; however, in more recent years, the party has moderated its discourse. In addition, the new Flemish nationalist party, the N-VA, while it advocates for Flemish separatism, is trying to market itself as moderate nationalist party that does not use racialized language.

In contrast to radical Flemish nationalists, who want to separate from Belgium and, the Walloon far-right tends to be in favor of maintaining Belgian unity, in part because they believe that the Flemish will pursue a more restrictive immigration policy. The factor that tends to unify the Walloon far-right with the Flemish far-right is its authoritarianism and its use of xenophobic rhetoric. For example, a study conducted by Swyngedouw and Ivaldi (2001) found that both the Vlaams Belang and the FN espoused an anti-democratic and ethnocentric ideology.

#### ***4.3.2 Contemporary Trends in the Network***

In order to identify contemporary discursive trends in the Belgian far-right network, I conducted an analysis of meta-keywords for each party and in the network as a whole. The first notable observation is that the Vlaams Belang is more likely to use xenophobic discourse than the FN. Specifically, the Vlaams Belang is nearly five times as likely to reference “immigrants,” “migration,” “strangers,” and “criminality” than the FN. For example, on the homepage of the VB, they note that “immigrants are difficult to integrate.” They also note that “foreigners are overrepresented in crime.” The overall tendency is to equate foreigners as the other and to hold them culpable for societal problems. This finding is consistent with Harrison and Bruter’s study of Belgium’s far-right ideology, which also finds that the discourse of the

VB is more xenophobic than the FN (2011: 105). The Vlaams Belang is also more xenophobic than the Belgian far-right network on the whole. This may help us understand why the once successful Vlaams Belang has become vulnerable to a less overtly xenophobic party, the NVA.

The broader network is characterized predominantly by preservationist nationalism. The word *nationalism* is the most frequently occurring meta-keyword in the Belgian far-right (frequency 56). Examining these meta-keywords in context reveals that the majority of the references to nationalism refer to the goal of preserving the Flemish nation.

Example A: Nationalism is the most natural, most harmonious organization anywhere in the world... Survival and self-defense are legitimate urges. Self-determination is essential for Flanders and for individuals.

Example B: The Nationalist Student Union emerged in the 1970s, a time when tradition Flemish nationalism was petering out in the universities. Our mission then was to propagate nationalism in a principled and radical way-and that's basically still our mission.

*Table 4.2 Meta Keywords Used by Belgian Far-Right*

Network	Nationalism, Dutch, Cordon, Stranger, Independence, Youth, Free, Islamization
FN	Important, Our, Communal, Laws, Belgium, False, Articles, Islam, Adhere, Sharia, Cordon Sanitaire, Left, Immigration, Liberty, Tribune, Free, Releases, More, Manipulation, Masses, Presentation, Europeans
VB	Belang, Blok, Flemish, Action, Immigrants, Annemans, Boss, Belgium, First, Reports, Boycott, Cordon, Criminal, Strangers, Dewinter, Own People, Ethnicity, Europe, European, Filip, Gerolf, History, Tough, Identity, Youth, Communication, Opinion, Migrant, Migration, Nationalist, New Party, Independent
NVA	Flemish, Safety, Brussels, March, Budget, Trade Policy, Invest, Flanders, Mobility, Document, Minister, Justice, Home, Work, Government, Policy

The three major parties all depart in some way from the broader discursive trends in the network and none of the parties alone seems to be a perfect ideological match. However, the data suggests that parties that use a preservationist nationalist rhetoric are a better match than those who use overtly racist or Islamophobic rhetoric.

*Table 4.3 Meta-Keywords in the Belgian Far Right Network*

	Xenophobia	Biological Racism	Anti-Islam	Populism	Preservation
Entire Network	1	0	1	0	3
FN	1	0	2	1	2
VB	5	3	0	1	2
NVA	0	0	0	0	2

On the whole, the VB tends to be more xenophobic, biologically racist, and populist than the broader far-right network. While the FN and the broader network both incorporate Islamophobic discourse, the FN has two keywords that relate to Islamophobia (sharia and Islam), relative to one keyword (Islamization) in the broader network, suggesting that the FN places even more of an emphasis on combating Islam. While both the FN and the broader network use preservationist nationalist rhetoric, the dominant pattern in the broader network is Flemish preservationism, whereas the FN focuses on preserving Belgium and preserving Europe:

Example A: No to the Islamization of Belgium and Europe

Example B: The European race is almost to the point of ethnocide.

The NVA is less xenophobic and Islamophobic than the other parties and the broader network, with no meta-keywords that explicitly refer to foreigners, immigrants, or Islam. While it is not a perfect ideological match, its absence of racist rhetoric does appear to make it closer to the ideological center in the network than the other parties. The NVA is notable for the absence of xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse on the homepage, with no meta-keywords that relate directly to immigrants, foreigners, or Islam. This is to be expected as the party has intentionally marketed itself as a nonracist alternative to the Vlaams Belang. The

feature it shares with the broader network is its emphasis on preservationism. For example, it focuses on the necessity of people speaking Dutch in order to “preserve the character of Dutch Flanders” and to “restore the Dutch language character of the Vlaamse Rand.” Similarly, it supports more autonomy from Wallonia and a confederation so that the Flemish can focus on “their own problems, with their own money...to make Flanders better.” It suggests that the present system, coexistence with Wallonia, is weak and that “immobilism is threatening the prosperity of the entire population,” therefore, separatism is necessary to maintain a “strong Flanders in a strong Europe.” This emphasis on the necessity of Flemish nationalism, separatism, and protecting Dutch culture is a dominant theme within the broader network. Nearly all of the far-right organizations in Belgium, with the exception of those in Wallonia, advocate Flemish nationalism.

The concept map of Belgium reveals that it is not ideologically centralized; rather there are several conceptual hubs within the network. Concept maps are a way to visualize the connections between concepts. The concept maps suggest that nationalism is the dominant concept within the network.

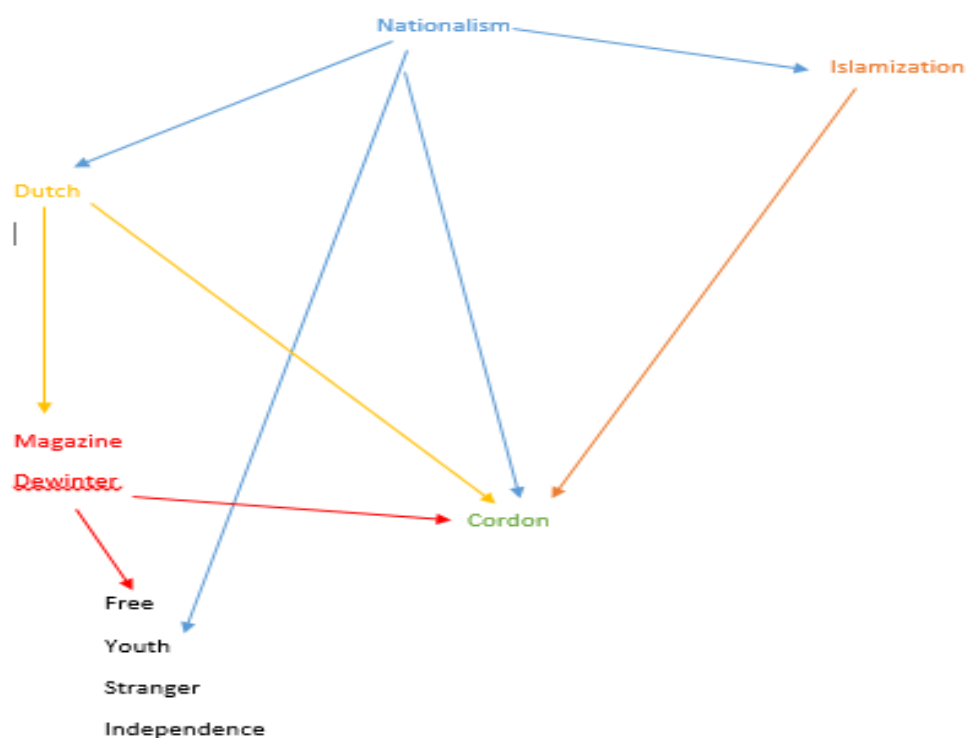


Figure 4.5 Concept Map of the Belgian Far-Right Network<sup>7</sup>

An examination of the conceptual map of the Belgian far-right network suggests that the most frequently used meta-keyword in the Belgian far-right network is *nationalism*, which appears on 56 of the homepages of the organizational websites. *Nationalism* is also the meta-keyword that co-occurs most often with the other conceptual hubs in the network (*cordon*, *free/youth/stranger/Dutch*, and *Islamization*). This suggests the ideological center of the Belgian far-right network is Flemish nationalism. This involves a combination of preservationist and xenophobic rhetoric. Islamophobia is prevalent within the network, but occurs with less frequency, suggesting that overtly Islamophobic rhetoric is more on the ideological fringe relative to Flemish nationalism, which is the ideological core.

<sup>7</sup> The concept map was created using VOSON Textual Analysis Software. The graph was modified from its original version and translated into English.

It is difficult to draw concrete conclusions about the relationship between a party's ideological centrality and its sustainability based on this data; however the findings do suggest the preservationist Flemish nationalism is the dominant discourse in the Belgium far-right network and that explicitly xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric does appear, but not as frequently. Therefore, in order to be ideologically central within a network, a far-right party would need to advocate for Flemish nationalism. Parties that use overtly xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric may be closer to the ideological fringe of the Belgian far-right network.

One avenue for future research is to explore whether the impact of a party's ideological fit within a network is dependent upon the ideological structure of the network itself. It is possible that a party's ideological centrality is only an asset in a highly centralized network, but provides no advantage in a decentralized network. In addition, it would be helpful to construct a corpus that is representative of the entirety of the Belgian far-right's discourse and compare network trends to individual party trends in order to further substantiate the findings in this study.

#### **4.4 A Corpus-Based Analysis of Belgian Far-Right Discourse**

In addition to the text analysis provided by the VOSON system, I also created an original corpus of text for each party. Each corpus has at least one million words and contains a variety of genres of text including online forums, party manifestos, news publications, and Facebook and Twitter feeds. The advantage of the corpus analysis is that one can calculate *relative* frequencies of words per 1,000 words. This permits comparisons in the relative rate of occurrence of a word across cases. Using Wordsmith, a word-list was produced for each corpus which listed the words in order of frequency and displayed the frequency of each word

relative to the total number of words.<sup>8</sup>

*Table 4.4 Relative Word Frequencies<sup>9</sup>*

<b>FN</b>	<b>Vlaams Belang</b>	<b>NVA</b>
We 12	Flemish .45	Must .45
Country .24	Yet 40	Can .32
Our .18	Our 23	Justice .27
Again .15	European .18	Year .23
Politics .15	Must 17	Minister .18
world .13	year .17	All .18
Belgian .13	Europe .17	Himself .17
Muslims .13	land .15	Belgium .17
against .12	Euro .15	One .17
Women .12	Party .15	Us .17
society .11	Flanders .14	Flemish .16
Europe .11	Belgium .13	Today .16
Others .11	Brussels .13	European .16
European .10	Other .12	Flanders .15
Women .10	Politics .11	Euro .14

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the use of wordlists in discourse analysis see Alessia Cogo and Martin Dewey's *Analysing English as a Lingua Franca: A Corpus-Driven Investigation*. London: Continuum: 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Relative word frequencies list were generated using Wordsmith and are given as a percentage per 1,000 words.



Life	.10	New	.11	New	.14
Islam	.10	Government	.10	Brussels	.14
Children	.09	Today	.10	Shall	.13
Liberty	.09	Shall	.10	Government	.13
Europe	.09	State	.09	Other	.12
Society	.09	Islam	.09	Policy	.11

#### *4.4.1 Islamophobic Discourse of the FN*

The word frequencies suggest that the FN is the most explicitly Islamophobic party, placing it on the ideological fringe relative to the dominant theme of preservationist Flemish nationalism in the broader community. The FN is more likely to explicitly reference Muslims (freq. 13%) and Islam (freq. 10%) than the VB (freq. 9%) or the NVA (freq. 0%)<sup>10</sup> Islamophobia appears to be a critical component of the FN's discourse. An examination of the context in which Muslims are referred to by the FN reveals the following patterns. The first is a tendency to refer to the growing number of Muslims in the country. There are multiple references to the growing number of Muslims in Belgium and the concern that they are becoming the new majority to the detriment of the European population. For example, there is a statement that "Europe will be a Muslim continent within a few decades." Similarly, there are projections that "half of the population in the Netherlands will be Muslim" and that "in France, a French family has 1.8

<sup>10</sup> Frequencies are given as a percentage per 1,000 words.

children and Muslims have 8.1 children.” These statements involve an “othering” of the Muslim community and an effort to draw a boundary to exclude Muslims from national identities. By creating a false dichotomy of French versus Muslim, the party is suggesting that it is not possible to be both French and Muslim, thereby perpetuating their belief in exclusive definitions of national identities (Eastmond 1998).

In addition to the demographic concern, the FN is also concerned with the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Europe. They assert that Muslims see the world as “divided in two: Muslims and non-Muslims and non-Muslims are the target.” They repeatedly express the concern that the ultimate goal of Muslim immigrants in Europe is the “ethnocide” of the non-Muslim population. Specifically, there is concern that the Islamists will oppress “atheist minorities,” as well as “Christians and Jews.”

Another salient theme is the FN’s perception that Islam is degrading towards women and that the diffusion of Islam will lead to an increase in sexual violence against women. The perception is that the Koran justifies the oppression of women and the existence of slavery, frequently linking the two together. For example one account notes that, if Muslims are involved in a war, “women and children POWs will be taken as slaves.” Even the absence of references to war, “women” and “slave/hostage” frequently appear together. For example there are references to “veiled women” as “hostages” who will be “stoned to death” if they commit adultery against their husbands. Thus, non-Muslim women are depicted as at risk of being taken hostage and Muslim women are already hostage within the oppressive Islamic system. There is also a concern that the oppression of women will lead to sexual violence against women. There are three references to the fact that “85% of rapists in Sweden are Muslim” and one account of how “Swedish women are afraid to go out at night,” for fear of being raped by Muslim

immigrants. Similarly, another news story asserts, "47% of women in rural areas of Turkey have experienced physical or sexual violence," and links this to the fact that the "Koran allows domestic violence." The repetitive associations between Islam and criminality and violence towards women suggest that the FN is an explicitly Islamophobic party.

#### ***4.4.2 The Xenophobic Discourse of the Vlaams Belang***

While the FN is the most likely to use Islamophobic rhetoric, the Vlaams Belang is more likely to be self-referential ("Flemish," "Europe," or "European"). The rhetoric of the Vlaams Belang focuses on the threat immigrants pose to the Flemish national identity. While the Vlaams Belang does use Islamophobic rhetoric, it also frequently mentions the threat of immigrant without making specific reference to Muslim immigration, making its rhetoric more dominantly xenophobic than Islamophobic. For example, party leader Tom Van Grieken remarked: "More immigration-less Flanders." Similarly, they state that "Flanders is flooded with more and more immigrants." Like the FN, the Vlaams Belang emphasizes the demographic shift taking place in Flanders and perceives it as threatening, but it does not always specifically identify the threat as Muslim. In addition, as a Flemish nationalist party, many of the references are to Flanders being threatened not only by immigration, but also by the lack of an independent Flanders. Many of the references to "Flemings" emphasize the necessity of establishing an independent state. For example, they note, "Vlaams Belang believes that not only Scots, Basques and Catalans, but the Flemings deserve an independent state. It is time that Flanders follow the Catalan example."

In addition to the desire to preserve Flemish identity, the Vlaams Belang makes repeated reference to the necessity of preserving European identity. For example, they do not favor the integration of Turkey into the EU, saying "We as Vlaams Belang know that Turkey is

not a European country.” Similarly they suggest that in order for Europe and immigration to coexist, “Immigrants needs to adjust to our European way of life.” This statement implies that multiculturalism is not desirable and that the behaviors of immigrants must be controlled in order to preserve the status quo. It is notable that the Vlaams Belang, a Flemish nationalist party references not only Flemish identity, but European identity. Buonfino finds that a similar shift in the “size of the community of belonging” from the national to the European level is apparent in the discourse surrounding immigration in Europe more broadly (2004: 42). He suggests that “through cultural and political discourse, the European Member States have seen a reaffirmation of we-identity by sustaining a politics of belonging aimed at the exclusion of the Other (the non-European or “third country national”) (Buonfino 2004: 42). Like the FN, the discourse of the Vlaams Belang suggest that immigrants pose a threat to the national and European identity; however the Vlaams Belang is less likely to explicitly identify the threat as Muslim. Thus the data does not suggest that one party is a better ideological match with the broader network than the other.

#### ***4.4.3 The Moderate Nationalism of the N-VA***

While the N-VA does advocate for Flemish nationalism, it is the least Islamophobic of the three parties and does not explicitly link migration with Islamization. This finding supports the claim that the N-VA is a more ideologically central party in the network relative to those, like the FN, that use overt forms of Islamophobic rhetoric that are more peripheral in the network. The word Muslim is only used twice in the entire corpus and never in an Islamophobic way. For example, in its statements on migration policy, the NVA notes that “It is tragic that to many migration automatically evokes notions of poverty, abuse of social security, housing problems, and even criminality and Muslim extremism.” In stark contrast to the accounts of the FN which discuss

the flood of Muslim immigration to the country and the threat this poses to national identity, the NVA point out that “less than 1 in 8 migrants comes from a Muslim country.” It appears that rather than trying to fan the flames of Islamophobia, the NVA is trying to create a more positive discourse around the issue of immigration. When the NVA does discuss migration, which it does with .06% frequency, it does not tend to categorize migrants by their religion or ethnicity, rather the NVA refers to migrants in a generic sense. There is a tendency to discuss migration from an economic standpoint. Seven of the references to migration are about migrant workers. Once again, there is a tendency to deescalate tension around the immigration issue. For example, they state, “growth of underprivileged migrants is not so great that the labor market cannot keep pace. Unlike the VB and the FN, the NVA does not explicitly assert that immigrants and Islam pose a threat to the cultural and economic security of the nation.

#### **4.4.4 Comparative Keyword Analysis: N-VA and Vlaams Belang**

The word frequency lists provide information about word frequencies; however in order to best compare the corpora of far-right discourse, it is also useful to conduct a keyword analysis, which involves examining a corpus and identifying words that appear with unusual frequency in comparison to the reference corpus. This permits the creation of a list of keywords or words that occur more frequently than would be expected by chance alone (Scott and Tribble 1996, Baker and Ellece 2011). Because the FN corpus is a French language corpus, I am unable to compare it to the Flemish nationalist corpora; however it is possible to compare the corpus of the NVA and the VB and identify similarities and differences in their discourse.

Table 4.5 Keywords in the N-VA Corpus

KEYWORD NVA	FREQUENCY	%	VB Corpus Frequency	VB %	Keyness	P
Justice	275	.27	48	.04%	210.99	0.0000
Must	459	.45	202	.17	143.48	0.00000
Accompaniment	85	.08	0	0	130.65	0.000
We	599	.58	353	.30	105.11	0.0000
Prisons	103	.10	13	.01	93.12	0.00000
Court	103	.09	13	.01	76.43	0.0000
Workload measurement	44	.04	0	0	67.63	0.0000
Magistrates	53	.05	2	0	66.77	0.0000
Can	332	.31	177	.15	66.48	0.0000
Punishment	87	.08	16	.01	64.70	0.0000
Appeal	59	.06	5		61.82	0.0000
Unity Court	39	.04	0	0	59.94	0.0000
Perpetrator	65	.06	8	0	59.41	0.00000
Policy	117	.11	36	.03	57.74	0.0000
Must	335	.33	199	.17	57.63	0.0000
Education	43	.04	1	3	47.65	0.00000
Migration	60	0.06	1	10	47.27	0.00000
Courts	45	.04	1	4	46.44	0.0000
Internees	28	.03	1	0	43.04	0.00000
Punishment	27	.03	1	0	41.50	0.00000

Jail	72	.07	20	.02	39.25	0.0000
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One of the most prominent patterns in the NVA Corpus is the party's use of terms related to the maintenance of law and order. Nine of the first twenty keywords are related to law and order including *prisons, courts, punishment, and perpetrator*. The majority (roughly 80%) of the references to punishment focus on recommendations for improving the criminal justice system through electronic monitoring systems for perpetrators, and better community service programs. Much of the emphasis is placed on the necessity of timely punishment. For example, they argue, "unless the punishment is immediate, it will have no effect." Similarly, the references to perpetrators emphasize the need for speed and the necessity of tailoring the punishment to fit the perpetrator. It is noticeable that among the N-VA's frequent mention of perpetrators there are no explicit linkages made between immigrants and crime.

Example A: Perpetrators of crimes are often only penalized after many years.

Example B: A judge does not know the criminal history of a perpetrator because, for example, a conviction of a half year earlier is not yet in the registry.

Example C: Sometimes it is better for the perpetrator of a crime to be immediately punished with a house arrest rather than imprisonment.

While both parties are concerned with crime, the N-VA places more emphasis on the strengthening the institutions and procedures that achieve justice and is roughly ten times more likely to mention prisons and nine times more likely to mention courts than the Vlaams Belang.

*Table 4.6 Keywords of the Vlaams Belang*

KEYWORD VB	FREQUENCY	%	NVA Corpus Frequency	NVA %	Keyness	P Value
Islam	108	.09	1	0	320.59	0.0000

Muslims	459	.45	202	.17	143.43	0.00000
Party	173	.15	28	0.03	96.33	0.000
Obama	73	.06	3	0	90.97	0.00000
Women	106	.09	8	0	86.45	0.0000
Islamic	67	.06	0	0	83.49	0.0000
EU	236	.20	64	.06	81.45	0.0000
Against	270	.24	94	.09	71.01	0.0000
Immigrant	80	.07	5	0	69.34	0.0000
Media	71	.06	5	0	59.28	0.0000
Violence	87	.07	11	.01	56.49	0.000
June	70	.06	6	0	54.57	0.0000
Immigration	73	.06	7	0	54.25	0.0000
Journalist	43	.04	7	0	53.58	0.0000
Dutch	80	.07	10	0	52.57	0.0000
Multicultural	41	.03	1	0	51.09	0.0000
Immigrants	50	.04	3	0	48.06	0.0000
Men	41	.03	1	0	43.18	0.00000
Free	57	.05	5	0	39.66	0.00000
Voters	41	.03	2	0	37.99	0.0000
Islamization	23	.02	1	0	28.66	0.0000

The Vlaams Belang is much more likely than the NVA to explicitly reference Islam.

Four of the top 20 keywords in the network relate directly to Islam-*Islam, Muslim, Islamic, and*



*Islamization*. *Islam* is the most significant keyword in the VB corpus, with a frequency of .09% relative to 0% for the NVA. Of the 459 uses of the word *Muslims* in the corpus, 10% are paired with the word *extremism* or *fundamentalism*. As a point of comparison, a study of the use of the word *Muslim* in the British press revealed that the word *Muslim* was paired with an extremist word (*fanatic* or *militant*) only 5% or 1 in 20 times (Baker et al. 2013: 8).

- Example A: There is a bizarre monstrous alliance between communism and Muslim extremism.
- Example B: The eternal excuse culture of the left is the only real racism, giving Muslim extremists wings.
- Example C: In early August, the state reported that there are many Belgian Muslims among the Muslim extremists in the free Syrian Army.”
- Example D: There is no place for Muslim extremists in the Scheldt City or anywhere in Flanders.

Another pattern in the discourse of the Vlaams Belang is the appearance of *Muslim* and *women* together, in seven instances as one word *moslimvrouwen* (Muslim women). 45% of the times that the word *women* is used, it is in the same sentence as *Muslim*, *Islam*, or *Islamic*

*Fundamentalism*. There is a tendency to portray Islam as a threat to the rights of women with a focus on whether or not women should wear the veil.

Example A: Are we living in Belgium? The proselytism of Muslim converts is striking. All Muslim women continue to believe in the hijab.

Example B: If a Muslim woman cannot get a job because she chooses to dress according to the code of Islam or submits voluntarily to the crazy demands of Muslim men that is her own choice.

Example C: No to the compulsory hijab, women in Iran have the right to decide themselves whether they wear a veil or not.

This finding mirrors the finding in the study of discourse on Islam in the British media, which also found a greater tendency to refer to Muslim women than Muslim men and focused on a women’s decision to wear the veil (Baker et al. 2003: 11).

Overall, the meta-keyword analysis, the word frequency analysis, and the keyword analysis suggest that the Vlaams Belang is more xenophobic and Islamophobic than the N-VA, which uses more neutral language to advocate for Flemish nationalism. This suggests that, in a network where preservationist Flemish nationalist discourse is the most dominant form of discourse, parties that use overtly racist and Islamophobic rhetoric, like the FN and the VB, will be at a disadvantage relative to parties, like the N-VA, which do not use overtly Islamophobic rhetoric.

## **4.5 Beyond Belgium**

### ***4.5.1 The French Far-Right Network***

The Front National (*National Front*, FN) in France is one of the most successful far-right parties in Europe. The party is characterized by its opposition to the EU and its nationalist opposition to immigration. Similar to the Vlaams Belang, the National Front has its roots in the interwar fascist movement. Linkages with international and domestic fascist organizations were critical during the establishment phase of the party. The FN was created in attempt to unify several organizations of the French far-right including the far-right student organization Groupe Union Défense (GUD) and the anti-immigrant paramilitary organization Ordre Nouveau (*New Order* ON). The FN has also been supported by a paramilitary organization, the Département Protection et Sécurité (*Department for Protection and Security*, DPS). Under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, it was evident that the FN was an overly racist party with clear linkages to extremist organizations. However, with the passing of the torch to his daughter Marine Le Pen, many believe that the FN has moderated, pursuing a “de-demonisation” strategy and breaking its ties with extremist groups (Gombin 2015). Marine Le Pen has upset many of the more radical members of the FN, making “every possible attempt to cast the FN as non-anti-Semitic, more

republican (albeit, still anti-immigration), and more acceptable to mainstream French voters” (Le Corre 2015).

While the FN has tried to distance itself from neo-fascist extremists in recent decades, the network map reveals that the party continues to have virtual linkages to neo-fascist and white supremacist organizations. The network map reveals that the FN occupies the most central position within the broader French far-right network, with dense connections to other extremist organizations.

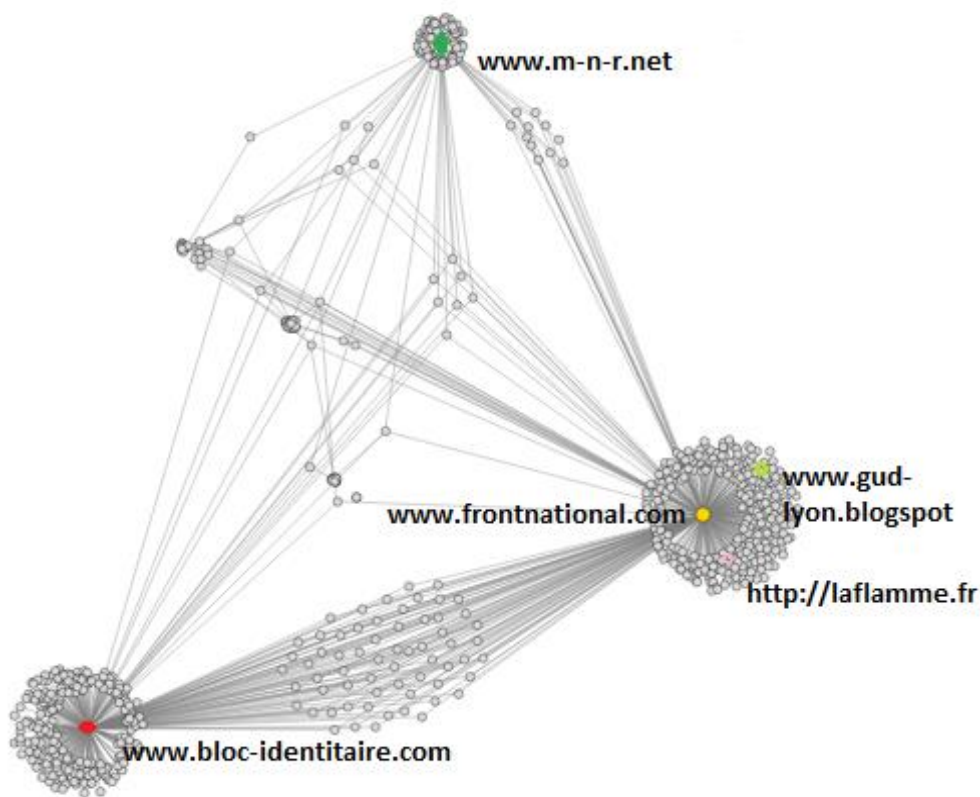


Figure 4.6 The French Far-Right Network

There are 374 sites in the broader French far-right network that link directly to the website of the FN. There are a large number of organizations clustered around the FN, including the paramilitary organization the GUD that is based in Lyon. In addition, the FN has dense ties with the neo-fascist organization La Flamme (*The Flame*) which advocates against Islamization of

Europe and celebrates white supremacy. The FN does not have to publicly acknowledge linkage to an entity like La Flamme or GUD in order to benefit from a connection to them. Users who visit La Flamme's website can be directed to the site of the FN, ultimately bolstering the FN's ability to diffuse its policy platform. The FN is the most central and the most sustainable far-right party in the French network, having achieved representation in the French National Assembly four times over the course of its career (sustainability .10). This supports the theory that there is a positive correlation between network centrality and party sustainability.

While the Front National is the most central party in the French far-right network, the Mouvement National Républicain (National Republican Movement, MNR) is relatively isolated. Mégret founded the MNR as a breakaway party from the FN in 1998. While the MNR, like the FN, is a French nationalist party that opposes Muslim immigration to France, Mégret was moderate relative to FN founder Le Pen, particularly in regards to anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial (Ivaldi 2003). As the more moderate of the two wings, the MNR was unable to maintain relationships with more radical actors in the French nationalist community. The split hurt the performance of both parties, particularly the MNR which has never performed well at the polls. In 2005, another faction split off from the MNR, the Parti Populist (*Populist Party*), seeking to resurrect the radicalism of the movement and to support Jean-Marie Le Pen as part of the Union Patriotique (*Patriotic Union*). Despite efforts to reconcile the MNR in 2006 when Jean-Marie Le Pen was running for President, and in 2007, the two parties remain divided. The FN has an indegree centrality (374) that is more than double that of the MNR (115). The FN has proven to be the stronger and more sustainable of the two parties, achieving representation in the legislature four times (sustainability .10); whereas the MNR has never exceeded the electoral threshold (sustainability 0).

A prominent non-party actor in the French far-right network is the regional nationalist group, the Bloc Identitaire (*Identity Bloc*, BI). Founded by former members of the group *Unite Radicale* and the FN, the Bloc Identitaire advocates for the protection of French and European heritage and opposes Islamization. They have achieved notoriety in the past for serving “soupes identitaires” (*identity soups*) that contain pork as a mechanism of protesting against Muslims in major European cities (Marquand 2010). Despite the historical linkages between FN and Bloc Identitaire, Marine Le Pen has tried to distance her party from the Bloc Identitaire in an effort to clean house. Marie Le Pen claims that the two groups have “insurmountable ideological differences.” She declared, “Where the FN defends national identity, [the Bloc Identitaire] primarily promote local identities...The FN defends a Jacobin vision of society based on the vision that it maintains the nation. This is the core of the movement that I lead” (Jarrassé).

The map of the French network reveals that the Front National does not have direct hyperlink ties with the nationalist group Bloc Identitaire. Thus the FN’s real world effort to distance itself from this organization appears to have a parallel in the virtual world. The two organizations do not link to one another directly, rather they are connected through intermediary organizations like the far-right news blog Francois Desecouche (fdesouche). The network map suggests that the FN and Bloc Identitaire do occupy different spaces in the network, each acting as a separate hub with its own cluster around it. The Bloc Identitaire is densely connected to regional organizations like Jeune Alsace (Alsace Youth), which reject the system of the nation-state. However, overall, the network has more nationalist organizations than regionalist organizations, which puts the FN at a more central position in the network, with 347 incoming links compared to the 111 of the Bloc Identitaire.

While the FN and Bloc Identitaire are not directly linked through hyperlinks on their websites, there is evidence that the two groups have overlapping Twitter followers. 4,471 of the followers of Bloc Identitaire or 50% of its followership also follows the FN. However, the overlap is asymmetrical. More Bloc Identitaire supporters follow the FN than vice versa. Only 3% of total followers of the FN also follow the Bloc Identitaire. This finding is consistent with those who believe, despite the FN's efforts to distance itself from Bloc Identitaire, some members within the Bloc Identitaire support the FN with a hope that it can push the party's agenda in a more radical direction. For example, Jarrassé (2014) argues that Bloc Identitaire has tried to form a sort of alliance with the FN, but that it has been resisted by both Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen. Nevertheless, members of the youth wing of the Bloc Identitaire have worked for FN campaigns and some, like Damien Rieu, have even been hired to work for FN officials (Le Monde 2014). Thus, the FN may benefit from the support of members of the Bloc Identitaire both on and offline, even though the two organizations do not have a formal relationships and do not link to one another on their official websites.

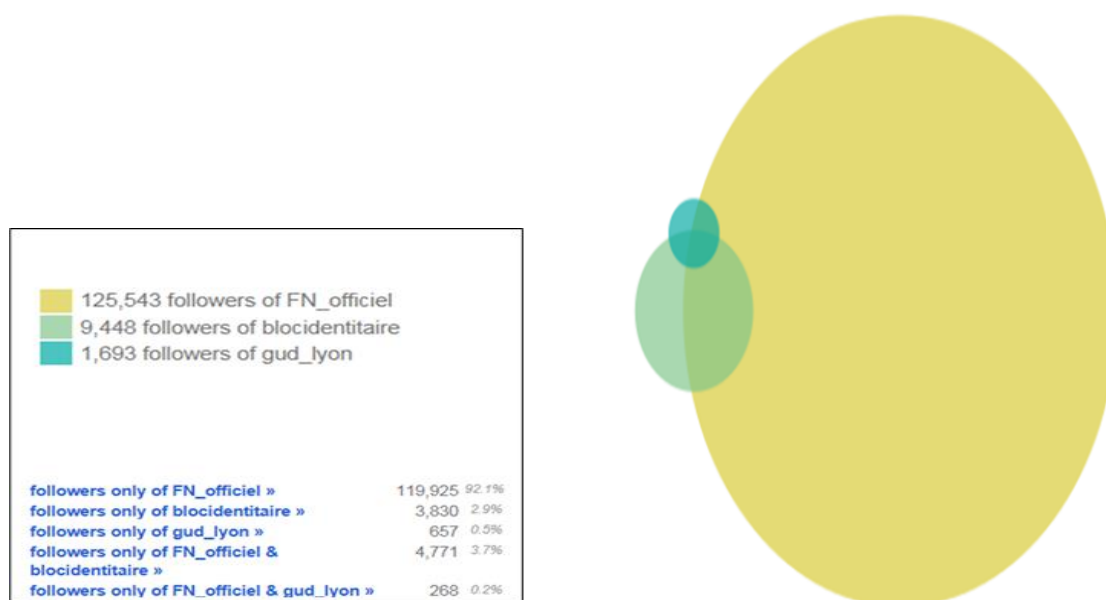


Figure 4.7 Comparison of Twitter Followers: FN, Bloc Identitaire, and GUD Lyon

In addition to an overlap in Twitter followership with the Bloc Identitaire, the FN has an overlap with the GUD, a finding consistent with the linkages between the organizations on the network map. 268 or 15% of the followers of the Lyon branch of the GUD also follow the FN. While the FN continues to deny any linkages with this organization, this finding is consistent with other studies show that some followers of the FN do belong to or support this violent paramilitary organization (Marcus 1995).

Overall, the network map reveals that the FN is the most central and sustainable party in the French far-right network. The FN's position is more central than that of the MNR, which is relatively isolated and less sustainable. Despite the efforts of Marie Le Pen to clean up the party's image and distance the FN from neo-fascist and white supremacist organizations, there is evidence that the FN does have linkages with the paramilitary organization the GUD and the Bloc Identitaire.

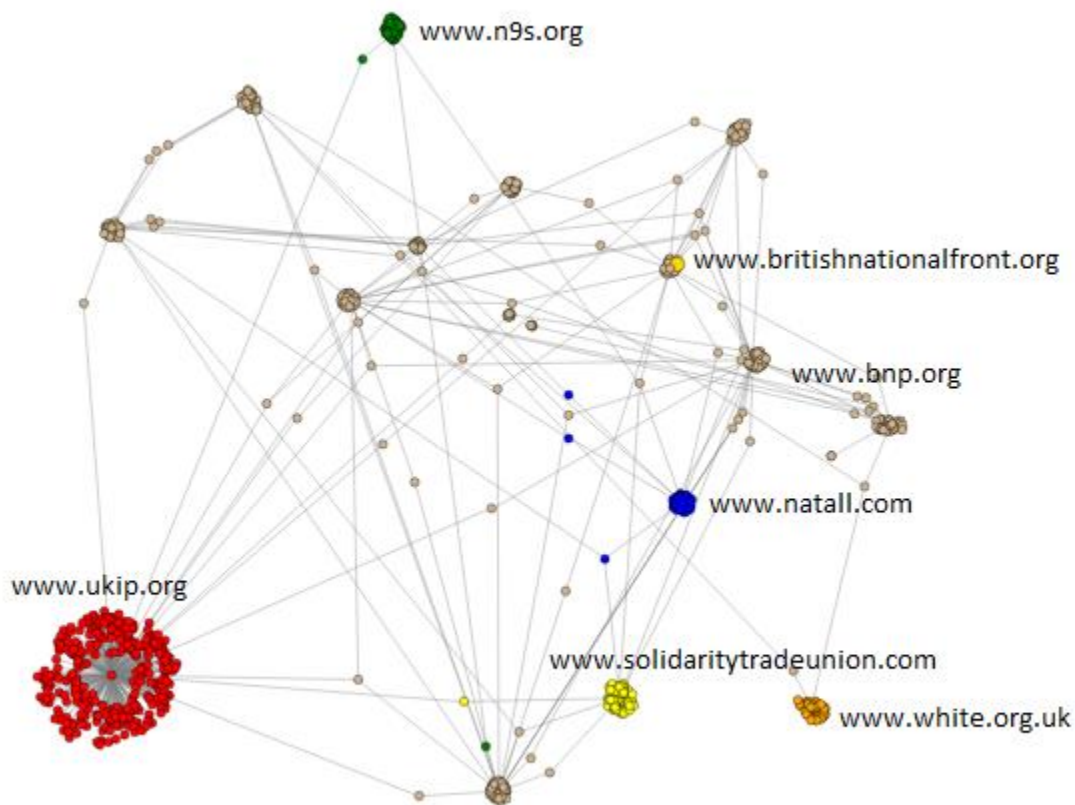
#### ***4.5.2 The British Far-Right Network***

Britain has a strong far-right network with three far-right parties, the British National Party (BNP), the National Front (NF), and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). The National Front is the older and more radical of the parties, founded in 1967 to oppose the immigration of non-white persons to the UK. The party denies that it is a neo-fascist group; however it does have ties with fascist parties locally and abroad. Paul Wilkinson notes, "though they try to play down their past affiliations with more blatantly Nazi movements...they covertly maintain intimate connections with small neo-Nazi cells in Britain and abroad, because all their beliefs and motives make this not only tactically expedient but effective" (Wilkinson 73). The British National Party was formed after a split in the National Front in 1982 and seeks to achieve Britain for

“indigenous Britons.” The party opposes multiculturalism and the Islamification of the UK.

UKIP is the newest of the three parties and was founded in 1993. While the party self-identifies as libertarian and not far-right, scholars have grouped it into the far-right family (Trilling 2012).

The party’s primary emphasis is on Euroscepticism; however it does advocate restrictive immigration policies and the majority of its supporters believe that Islam does pose a danger to the West (Goodwin 2012). In addition it has used anti-immigrant rhetoric when politically expedient (Art 2011).



*Figure 4.8 The British Far-Right Network*

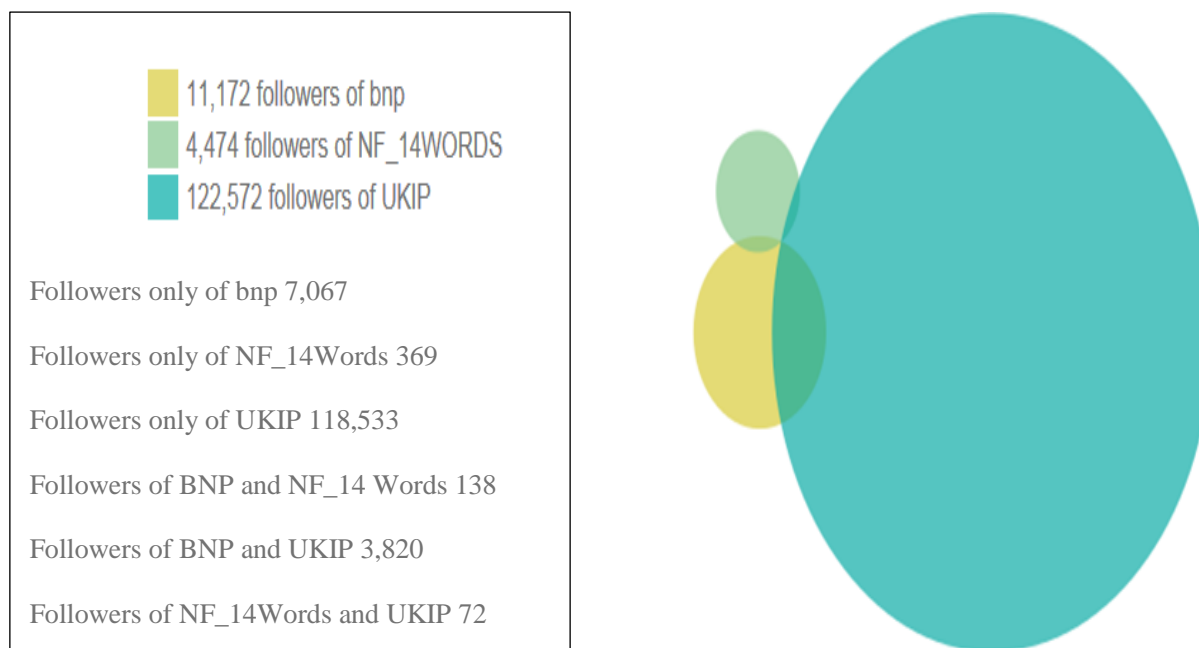
The most central and most sustainable actor in the British far-right network is the UKIP. UKIP has an indegree centrality of 341, nearly 6 times that of its competitor parties, the NF and the



BNP. UKIP has proven to be more sustainable than its competitor parties, earning a higher percentage of the vote share in the legislative elections in 2001, 2005, 2010, and 2015. The party reached an all-time peak in electoral performance in 2015, earning 12.6% of the vote share and 13 seats in the House (sustainability .04). It also performed well in the European Parliament elections, earning 27.5% of the vote share and 24 seats. Many of the most extreme actors in the network are not closely linked to UKIP, which appears to support the party's claim that it is a moderate, non-violent organization. Many of the overtly white supremacist or neo-Nazi organizations, like the November 9<sup>th</sup> Society/Britain First Party are noticeably distant from UKIP. Despite this distance, there is a linkage from the Britain First Party's site to UKIP's site, suggesting a tie of affiliation between the organizations. The party leader Nigel Farage has dismissed connections to Britain First and has called its members "racists and extremists" (Farage 2015). In addition, the leader of Britain First, Paul Golding, has actively endorsed UKIP, offered to send armored vehicles to protect UKIP, and claimed that 2015 will be the "year of Britain First and UKIP" (Cusick 2015). In addition, while there is a distance between UKIP, BNP, and BNF in the network map, there are links coming from BNP and BNF to UKIP's website. Regardless of whether or not a party like UKIP publically acknowledges its linkages with more extreme far-right actors, the fact that these actors actively endorse them could help the party increase its vote share.

The British National Party occupies a less central position than UKIP, but is more central than the National Front. The BNP has incoming links from 59 other sites in the network compared to 50 for the National Front. While the National Front has been in existence longer, overall, the BNP is the more sustainable of the two parties when comparing vote share and the number of times each party has exceeded the electoral threshold. A member of the BNP earned a

seat in the London assembly in 2008 and the parties won two seats in European Parliament in 2009 and had more than 50 local councilors (sustainability .03). The BNP achieved a peak in its performance in the general elections when it earned 1.9% of the vote in the 2010. In contrast, the NF earned 0% of the vote in the 2010 general elections and has never earned a seat in parliament (sustainability 0).



*Figure 4.9 Comparison of Twitter Followers: BNP, UKIP, BNF*

There is a substantial and asymmetrical overlap in the followers of the British National Party and UKIP which suggests that the BNP is vulnerable to competition from UKIP. 118,533 or 97% of UKIP's followers only follow UKIP and do not follow the other two parties. 7,607 or 63% of BNP's followers only follow the BNP, but 34% of BNP's followers also follow UKIP. In contrast only 3% of UKIP's followers also follow the BNP. This evidence is consistent with the claims made by scholars, journalists, and party members that UKIP is largely to blame for the demise of the BNP. UKIP party leader Nigel Farage claims that "No one has done more damage

to the BNP than me,” asserting that UKIP has captured nearly 1/3 of BNP’s voters (Farage 2016). British scholar of the far-right Matthew Goodwin also sees a “clear relationship between the rise of UKIP in local elections and the disintegration of the BNP,” which he believes is not surprising considering that “the same social groups are underpinning both parties, as they are radical right parties across Europe” (Goodwin 2016). The rise of UKIP as a niche competitor in British far-right network parallels the rise of N-VA as a niche competitor in the Belgian far-right network. This finding suggests that there is support for the theoretical claim that a far-right party can become vulnerable to a niche competitor within the broader far-right family.

The National Front has a relatively smaller followership than the other two parties. While there are overlapping memberships between the NF and the other two parties, it does not appear that either party is presently a significant niche competitor for the NF. Only 138 or 3% of the National Front’s followers also follow the BNP. Similarly only 72 or 1% of NF’s followers also follow UKIP. While the NF cannot presently blame its poor electoral performance on phagocytosis of the other parties, it is important to remember that this graphic of overlapping memberships only captures a moment in time. In the past, factionalism impacted the NF and motivated former party leader John Tyndall to create the New National Front in 1980 which was subsequently absorbed into the British National Party.

Overall, the network analysis of the British far-right suggests that the most central actor in the network, UKIP, is also the most sustainable and that it has benefited from its relationships with other extremist actors in the network, even when it has denied the relationship. In addition, the network map suggests that UKIP is a niche competitor for the BNP, given the asymmetrical overlapping memberships of the two organizations, which suggests that UKIP has been able to

capture former BNP supporters. The most isolated actor in the British far-right network is the National Front, which is on the fringe of the network and has loose ties with other actors.

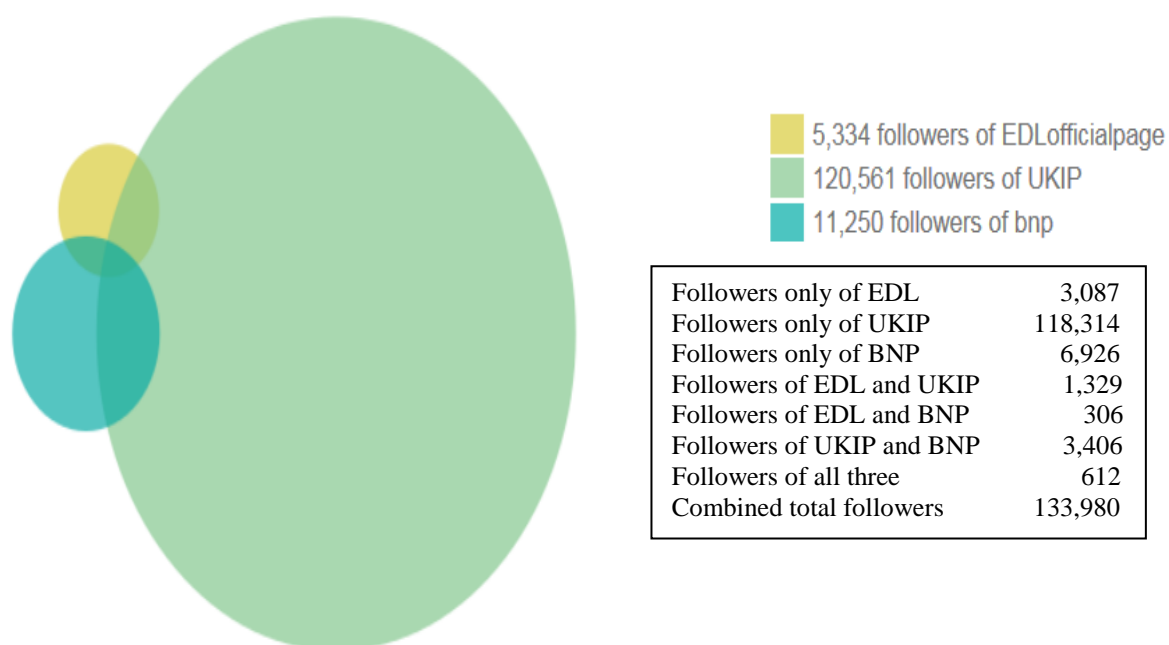


Figure 4.10 Comparison of Twitter Followers of EDL, UKIP, and BNP

The English Defence League (EDL) was created in 2009 and is the most significant far-right street movement in the UK and has been involved in a number of violent anti-Muslim protests in recent years.<sup>11</sup> The movement claims that it is committed to “protect the inalienable rights of all people to protest against radical Islam’s encroachment into the lives of non-Muslims” (English Defence League 2014). With an estimated 25,000-35,000 supporters, this organization is a major player within the broader British far-right network. Regardless of whether or not a far-right party publicly acknowledges ties with the EDL, the loyalty of the EDL to a party could substantially bolster the party’s network power. While the EDL is sometimes understood as an

<sup>11</sup> For more information about the violence perpetrated by the English Defence league see Matthew Taylor English Defence League: Inside the Violent World of Britain’s Far-right.” *The Guardian* 28 May 2010; Kevin Rawlinson and Lauren York. “EDL to spread its far-right creed to new target towns.” *Independent*, 13 January 2012.

organization that appeals to those who are disenchanted with party politics and prefer direct action against immigrant communities, there is evidence that the EDL has linkages with far-right parties. In fact, the BNP has actively pursued a strengthening of its relationship with the EDL in the past in an effort to keep the party from splintering. The UK Team of the Extremis Project notes:

Since 2010, the BNP has been ramping up its involvement in non-electoral activities, partly as an attempt to flirt with disgruntled factions of the English Defence League...Far-right parties like the BNP are also social movements, which view electioneering simply as one of several strategies available to them. Just as important as the quest for votes is sustaining a loyal band of true believers-through the good times, and the bad (Extremis Project 2012).

Despite the BNP's efforts to strengthen its relationship with the EDL, the analysis of the Twitter followership of the EDL suggests that the organization presently has stronger ties to UKIP than it does to the BNP. 25% of EDL followers also follow UKIP. In contrast only 5% of EDL followers follow EDL and the BNP. This is somewhat surprising considering surveys that indicate that the BNP is the favored party of the EDL and that UKIP supporters are less inclined to support violent action than the BNP (Goodwin and Evans 2012). However, it is possible that the relationship between the EDL and BNP has changed in recent years as UKIP has become a stronger niche competitor within the network. While UKIP has claimed that "UKIP has no association with, or support for, the EDL" and has banned EDL members from joining the party, there are incidents of EDL members holding "I'm voting UKIP" signs at rallies (Culbertson 2015). The evidence suggests that UKIP may have successfully hijacked the BNP, stealing away votes not only of former BNP members, but also the support of EDL members who had previously been loyal to the BNP.

## 4.6 Chapter Summary

Many far-right parties refute claims that they are tied to more extreme organizations; however there is substantial evidence that indicates there are indeed dense networks based on formal and informal ties. Those with an interest in understanding the far-right have focused on broad socioeconomic conditions or the structure of the electoral system. Yet in order to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the far-right, it is important to examine the subculture in which they operate. Through social network analysis, researchers and policymakers have the potential to identify patterns of relationships between organizations on the far-right. Despite the limited size of many of these organizations, they still have the potential to influence the sustainability of a party over time.

Organizational ties within the far-right network provide a foundation upon which a party can be built. Parties like the Vlaams Belang have relied on recruitment from other organizations to form its activist core. While the VB has begun to publicly disassociate from fascist organizations, the evidence suggests that it remains connected to them online, which facilitates the diffusion of its agenda. Similarly, the French National Front and Britain's UKIP are the most central actors in their broader far-right networks, with dense ties to other far-right organizations. Overall these cases suggest that a central position within a strong nationalist subculture is a part of the recipe for success.

It is less clear how a party's ideological position in a network impacts its trajectory. However, the exploratory analysis of Belgian far right discourse suggests that preservationist Flemish nationalism is the dominant discourse in the network. While Islamophobia is also present in the network, it is not as prevalent. This suggests that parties with Flemish nationalist discourse will be closer to the ideological center of the network and that parties that use overtly

racist and Islamophobic rhetoric will be relative peripheral. Further research is needed to confirm these findings. Specifically, one would have to construct a corpus that is representative of the entirety of the Belgian far right's discourse and compare this corpus to the corpus of each party to determine whether or not a party is a good ideological match with the broader network.

A comparison of the discourse used by the Vlaams Belang and the NVA revealed that the former is more Islamophobic, making references to the threat Islam poses to security and to women's rights. In contrast, the NVA does not use overtly Islamophobic rhetoric or equate Islam with criminality and instead focuses on the necessity of law and order. Given that both the Vlaams Belang and NVA are Flemish nationalist parties in a predominantly Flemish nationalist network, the Vlaams Belang's use of Islamophobic rhetoric places it on the ideological fringe.

## 5 COMPETITION IN THE BELGIAN NETWORK

### 5.1 The Organizational History of Flemish Nationalism

The Flemish nationalist movements dates back to the 1830s when Belgium became an independent country. The early Flemish nationalist movement was primarily a linguistic movement and focused its efforts on having Dutch recognized as an official language (Klandermans and Mayer 2009: 21). The movement politicized after the First World War and turned extreme right wing during the Second World War when the *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (VNV-Flemish National Union) collaborated with the Germans in the hopes of achieving an independent Flemish nation. Following the war, the radical branch of the movement was largely discredited and leaders of the movement were imprisoned for their collaboration. While the movement was no longer mainstream, it continued to exist along the fringe as a number of small extremist groups. These groups helped form the *Volksunie* in 1954 and eventually split from the

party in the 1970s, when they felt the organization had become too moderate. This is when the far-right party Vlaams Blok was formed.

Around the same time as the establishment of the Volksunie, the Vlaamse Volksbeweging (VVB-Flemish People's Movement) – a Flemish nationalist think tank and lobbying organization – was established by Maurits Coppitiers as an anti-fascist Flemish nationalist movement. The organization is not directly affiliated with any political party; however they advocate for an independent Flanders and celebrate Flemish language and culture.

### ***5.1.1 The Role of Youth Movements in the Flemish Nationalist Network***

Student organizations and youth movements have played a vital role in the creation and duration of the Flemish nationalist network, particularly in the radical branch of the Flemish nationalist family. The Flemish nationalist Volksunie was established in the 1950s and the youth wing of the movement, the Vlaamse Nationale Jeugd (VNJ, Flemish Nationalist Youth Association) was established in the 1960s. The VNJ is based in Flanders and is similar to the Boy Scouts in its activities, which include summer camps, a youth band, and participation in marches and commemorative ceremonies. Critics of the movement refer to it as a neo-fascist organization; however the movement does not self-identify as fascist, but rather as a nationalist organization. Many families of the radical wing of the Flemish nationalist movement have their children participate in the VNJ and this helps develop the Flemish nationalist social network. In his study of Flemish radicalism, De Witte noted that there was a “great deal of continuity from youth to adulthood,” in the movement and that members would often be approached by representatives from other Flemish nationalist organizations and asked to join (De Witte 2006: 431). The following excerpt from an interview with a member of Voorpost-the radical Flemish



paramilitary organization-illustrates the role of youth movements as introductions to the broader Flemish radical network:

My grandfather was in the CNS. He had been a teacher. My family branches were previously Flemish nationalist, not in a pronounced way, but the reflex was there. After the war, my grandfather spent seven years in prison, mainly I think because he was a teacher, and that was unsavory, collaboration as an educator. My grandfather after the war spent seven years in prison, mainly I think because he was a teacher, because that was usually taken unsavory, collaboration as an educator. My grandmother was imprisoned for a while. I grew up in the Flemish Movement. My parents took us to the bigger activities (Iron Pilgrimage, singing parties). At 6 years old, I joined the VNJ. That is an ideological youth movement, where many are children of Flemish nationalists. When I was 16 I went in the direction of the VNJ, and on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, I was active in the Language Action Komité (TAK), which my father was also active in. It was the overarching [aspect of the Flemish movement] which interested me, because with more people that you can achieve more. In my region, the TAK actions were always performed with Outpost, because the positions overlap of both organizations. At a certain point X asked me to become a member of Outpost. I considered this because I stood by Outpost ideologically, and because I had already participated...It is assumed, when one is from my background, that he is already a little Outpost. It really has not changed much...I have recently become a member of the Vlaams Blok (De Witte 2006: 431).

## **5.2 Niche Competitors: The N-VA and Vlaams Belang**

### ***5.2.1 The Rise of the N-VA***

The Vlaams Belang, a far-right Flemish nationalist party, performed well in municipal and national level elections in 2006, establishing itself as the second strongest party in Belgian politics. However, in the 2012 and 2014 Belgian parliamentary elections, the Vlaams Belang fell from the second-ranked party to the fifth, largely due to the rise of the N-VA. The N-VA, formed in 2001, has been able to increase its vote share dramatically from 3.1% in 2003 to 20% in 2014, making it the largest party in Flanders and leader in the Flemish Government.

The Vlaams Belang was the clear loser in the 2014 elections, earning only 3.7 % of the votes in the parliamentary elections and losing nine federal seats and 15 in the Flemish Parliament. Despite claims to the contrary from Vlaams Belang party leadership, many perceived the election as the death knell for the party (Otte 2014).

N-VA was successful, in part, because it was able to capture a large number of votes from those who previously would have voted for Vlaams Belang. Swyngedouw's study

revealed that the VB lost 231,500 voters to N-VA in 2010 or 32% of those who would have voted for the VB in 2007, a process which he refers to as the “phagocytosis” of the VB. “We knew that the N-VA has taken much from the VB, but we did not think it was so much. This is incredible!” (Swyngedouw 2012). Leading member of the Vlaams Belang in Antwerp, Filip Dewinter, acknowledged this capture: “N-VA has just proved that they are just naughty enough to charm the voters of the VB and just clean enough to please the traditional parties” (Dewinter 2014). Dewinter implied that he, and other members of the Vlaams Belang had dismissed the N-VA as a minor player in the past, but that the party had become more sophisticated over time and began to pose a legitimate threat to the survival of the Vlaams Belang. “The competition was right,” Dewinter asserted, “the puppy that the N-VA was then has become a bloodhound.”

The N-VA’s ability to capture voters from the VB was facilitated by the fact that it occupied a similar niche. Both parties are Flemish nationalist parties and, as such, are competing for the Flemish nationalist vote. Peter Thijssen argued that the “preexisting relationships with the Flemish nationalist movement have bolstered” the success of both the N-VA and VB.<sup>12</sup> A study by Marc Swyngedouw at the University of Leuven revealed that in 2007, 57% of those in favor of a divided Belgium voted for the Vlaams Belang. By 2010, only 21.5 of those in favor voted for Vlaams Belang, whereas the N-VA attracted 49% of the radically pro-Flemish vote.<sup>13</sup> The Vlaams Belang and its predecessor the Vlaams Blok played a significant role in shaping the Flemish nationalist agenda. The party has its origins in the pro-Flemish Volksunie, but split from the organization due to tensions over the federalization of Belgium. The founding members of the Vlaams Blok felt that the Volksunie had become too liberal and was giving too much power to francophone Belgium. The Vlaams Blok recruited its initial members from

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Peter Thijssen, Skype Interview, 5 February, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Klaas Debacker. “Welke kiezers willen splitsing België?” *De Standaard*. February 14, 2014.

radical Flemish organizations including Were Di, the Vlaams Militanten Ordre (VMO) and Voorpost. The Vlaams Blok was a minor player in Belgian politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s and earned only a single seat in the Chamber of Representatives in the elections of 1978, 1981, and 1985.

The Vlaams Blok became more influential throughout the 1980s and 1990s by combining a Flemish separatist agenda with an anti-immigrant agenda, mirroring the platform of successful far-right parties like France's Front National. By 1995, the Vlaams Blok had 7.8 % of the vote and by 1999 it was the third largest party in Flanders, with 33 of the vote in Antwerp (Downs 2012: 92).

Despite this increase in popularity, the Vlaams Blok was considered a pariah by the political establishment and was subjected to a *cordon sanitaire* beginning in 1989 when the five major political parties promised to refuse "political agreement or negotiations with the Vlaams Blok, be it in the context of democratically elected bodies on the local, national, and European levels, or in the context of elections for these bodies" (Coffee 2005, 213). In the 1990s, the Vlaams Blok, under the leadership of Filip Dewinter, adopted the 70-points plan, which focused on mandatory repatriation of immigrants and prohibiting the practice of Islam to curtail the diffusion of Islamic fundamentalism. Many felt the 70-points plan was in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and there was renewed support for maintaining the cordon against the party. The cordon was renewed in 2002, as the major parties agreed not to join in an alliance with "nondemocratic parties." Despite this cordon, the Vlaams Blok had a successful year at the polls and, in 2004, earned 11.6 percent of the national vote and 18.1 percent of the vote in Flanders. However, in June of 2004, the Vlaams Blok was found guilty of "permanent incitement to segregation and racism" in the city of Ghent. This decision was upheld

by the Belgium's Supreme Court later that year and the party lost access to state funding, was barred from the media, and effectively disbanded as a consequence.

The party quickly reorganized itself under the same party leader (Filip Dewinter), but with a new name, the Vlaams Belang. In the wake of the formal declaration that the party had a racist agenda, the Vlaams Belang softened its anti-immigrant platform from mandatory repatriation to repatriation only for those who “deny or combat our culture and certain European values such as separation of church and state, liberty of expression, and equality between men and women” (Vlaams Belang 2004: 495). However, the Flemish nationalist agenda remained intact as the party continued to demand an independent Flanders with Belgium as the capital and amnesty for Flemish nationalist who collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War. Party leader Dewinter admitted that the changes were primarily cosmetic and that “they had nothing to do with content and everything to do with tactic.” One might think that, with a similar platform to a party declared to be in violation of national law, the Vlaams Belang would be doomed to electoral failure. Yet the Vlaams Belang enjoyed electoral success throughout the next decade. According to Belgian political scientist, Lieven De Winter, “the psychological threshold is already passed. For Flemish voters, a vote for the Blok is seen as a legitimate option” (De Winter 2004). One of the founding members of the Vlaams Blok and current member of the Vlaams Belang agreed that the agenda, particularly in regards to Flemish independence, has increased in legitimacy over time:

When we started in the late 70s, we talked about Flemish independence and everybody called us crazy, nowadays almost the majority of people agree that it is possible...now even the Green Party admits that there need to be adaptations to multiculturalism....”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with far-right party member 2, June 2014.

In 2005, a public opinion poll revealed that over 50% of Flemish people believed the Vlaams Belang should be represented in the federal government (Vaes 2005). In 2006, the Vlaams Belang experienced a victory at the polls, nearly doubling its seats in the parliament from 439 to 800. In 2007, the party won 17 seats in the Chamber of Representatives and five in the Senate. The Vlaams Belang was beginning to be considered one of the most successful far-right parties in Europe. According to the political scientist Stefaan Walgrave, “the party’s base used to be working class, but now it has become mainstream” (2006).

The Vlaams Belang began to suffer at the polls beginning in 2009, with the rise of the N-VA. The N-VA was established in 2001 and, like the Vlaams Belang, has its roots in the Volksunie and has a Flemish separatist agenda. The party was founded by seven members of the Volksunie with Geert Bourgeois, former chairman of the Volksunie serving as chairman. The party’s “final target is indeed an independent Flanders as a European member state,” however it asserts that it wants the process to occur gradually rather than through a revolution. The N-VA began contesting elections in 2003, but it did not achieve the electoral threshold in any region of Belgium apart from Western Flanders. Despite these results, Bourgeois was not discouraged, claiming that “he did not want to seem pretentious, but I think we might be the people’s party and we may already be” (Bourgeois 2003).

He distinguished the N-VA from the Vlaams Belang, saying, “they call themselves the right, but attract mostly dissatisfied SPA voters.”<sup>15</sup> The N-VA began to enjoy electoral success after forming an alliance with the Christian Democrats (CD&V) in 2004, winning 18.5% of the overall vote in the federal parliamentary elections. That same year the party replaced Geert Bourgeois with Bart De Wever becoming the new head of the party. By 2010, the N-VA had become the largest political party in Belgium, a position that was reaffirmed in the federal

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

elections of 2014 and the party leader Bart De Wever is presently serving as the mayor of Antwerp.

The N-VA owes its success, in part, to votes that it was able to capture from the Vlaams Belang. This vote capture was made possible by the fact that the N-VA is competing within the same niche of Flemish nationalism. One founding member of the Vlaams Belang acknowledged:

Now we have a big competitor with the N-VA with Bart De Wever who has taken a lot of our ideas. Our people believe that he has taken a lot of our ideas. Essentially he just made people believe that he has the same ideas, but they are not the same at all... When Bart De Wever came with his party, they saw that as an opportunity to frame us as the bad guys and Bart De Wever as the better guys....they made them believe 'here you have a perfect alternative for the Vlaams Belang.'<sup>16</sup>

Walgrave et. al's study (2011:14) of Belgian party manifestos confirms that there is a strong similarity in the agendas of the Vlaams Belang and the N-VA, with an overlap score of 70.4. This means that approximately 70% of the stances they take on various issues are similar. The key similarity is the agenda of Flemish nationalism. Both organizations have roots in the Volksunie and feel that Flanders should be an independent state. Additionally, they both feel that Wallonia is holding Flanders back from realizing its true potential:

Vlaams Belang Party Manifesto:

Within Belgium can be no good governance. What a naïve observer would think is that the country is in good hands...but nothing could be less true. Federalism is the wrong way to get Flanders where it is entitled to be. Federalism is a strategy of the French-speaking politicians to force the Flemings to make concessions.<sup>17</sup>

N-VA Party Manifesto:

The federal government is underperforming...One does not have to look far to find the reason for this substandard performance: each time the Flemings throttle the federal government forward, Wallonia stands on the brakes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Interview conducted with member of Vlaams Belang member 3, June 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Volkens et al. The Party Manifesto Collection. Berlin: Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

While the two are in agreement regarding Flemish independence, this is a strategic distinction. Vlaams Belang loyalists emphasize that the N-VA is too gradual in its approach and that they are in favor of a more immediate solution:

Though the N-VA claims to be for Flemish independence, the strategy to obtain that in our view is so wrong...if you have the same goal, but your strategy is so different, it is impossible to cooperate. We want a call for independence tomorrow. We want a revolution, they want evolution. We see that evolution only leads to a stronger Belgium. We see that as contradictory.<sup>19</sup>

### ***5.2.2 Competition in the Anti-Immigrant Niche***

The core of the Flemish nationalist network is Flemish nationalist, but no overtly racist. Thus, many of the actors in the Flemish nationalist community would like more restrictive immigration policies in order to preserve Dutch language and a Flemish identity. Both the N-VA and the N-VA overlap in their advocacy for more restrictive immigration policies. The parties are also in agreement that the Belgian immigration policy in the previous decades was too permissive and contributed to the rise of radical Islam.

Filip De Winter of Vlaams Belang: Tolerance, mass Muslim immigration, and multiculturalism effectively shut down all criticisms of Islam...If we don't take steps to stop Islamization now, we will see many more Charlie Hebdo type attacks."

Bart De Wever of N-VA: We allowed (to come) the wrong kind of migrants en masse and too little has been done....the recent bad immigration policy was the cause of the radicalization of certain Muslim youth and therefore the large number of Belgium jihadists to fight in Syria.<sup>20</sup>

The similarity in the agendas helps explain why it was easy for some voters to transition from the Vlaams Belang to the N-VA. Vlaams Belang party members believe that the N-VA intentionally coopted aspects of its agenda in an effort to capture votes. Vlaams Belang party leader Tom Van Grieken asserted that voters were tricked into believing that the agenda of the VB and the N-VA were one and the same, saying "I think some voters did leave the VB for the N-VA because perception is reality and the perception is that we have a similar party program, but that

<sup>19</sup> Interview conducted with far-right party member 3, June 2014.

<sup>20</sup> RTBF.be. "Nous avons autorise la mauvaise sort de migrants en masse." 25 March, 2015.

is not a reality.”<sup>21</sup> Specifically, Van Grieken sees a major difference between the two parties when it comes to immigration policy. The Vlaams Belang advocates repatriation for illegal immigration and those who do not assimilate into Belgian society, whereas the N-VA feels that immigration is appropriate to fill job vacancies in key industries. The promotion of economic migration is a distinguishing feature of the N-VA. Specifically, they believe immigrants should only be allowed in if they will be an asset to the country in the professional and academic domains. For example, in 2014 there was a scarcity of nurses, and N-VA supported allowing immigrants to come and fill the vacancies in that industry. However, this difference is not as significant as one might expect. Both the N-VA and Vlaams Belang make a distinction between desirable and undesirable immigrants, they merely differ in their definition of desirability. The Vlaams Belang emphasizes the immigrant’s ability to *culturally* assimilate into Belgian society, whereas the N-VA emphasizes the immigrant’s ability to *economically* assimilate into Belgian society. In addition, when one moves beyond the party manifesto and examines the rhetoric of the N-VA, it is clear that there is an ethnic or cultural component to their definitions of desirability. For example, Bart de Wever made a statement of the Flemish television news program Terzake, suggesting that Moroccan immigrants posed a challenge to Belgian society:

Well, then we’re talking about people from North Africa, in particular the Moroccan communities and especially Berbers. And 80% of the Moroccans in Antwerp are from Berber origin. We are having a hard time to organize social mobility in that community. They are also very closed communities who distrust the government. [They have a] weakly organised Islam, are very susceptible to the salafist stream and as such also to radicalisation and that is of course not the best publicity. People who turn on the television and see day after day decapitations and while people here sympathize with that, or even go there to participate...

Two Moroccan human rights organizations, Movement X and the Moroccan human rights association, filed a formal complaint of racism against Bart de Wever for the above comments

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<sup>21</sup>Interview conducted with Tom Van Grieken, June 2014.



the implied linkage between immigrants from the Maghreb and increasing crime rates. They also asserted that De Wever's claim that he "never met an Asian in Antwerp who says 'I am a victim of racism' implied that Asians are "good immigrants" and Maghrebis are "bad immigrants."<sup>22</sup> Thus, both the N-VA and the Vlaams Belang seem to share a reluctance to admit certain ethnic groups of immigrants into the country. In addition, the two parties both believe that there should be stricter asylum policies, more discouragement of illegal immigration, and an immigrant repatriation policy.

### *5.2.3 Evaluating the N-VA as a "non-racist" Alternative to the Vlaams Belang*

The overtly racist and Islamophobic rhetoric of the Vlaams Belang placed it on the ideological fringe of the Flemish nationalist network. It was able to perform well despite this because it was one of the only parties to advocate for a more restrictive immigration policy; however, with the rise of the N-VA, the Vlaams Belang now has a competitor from within its own network that is more ideologically centrist and is perceived as a non-racist alternative to the N-VA. There is an undeniable overlap in the policy preferences of the N-VA and the Vlaams Belang; however many believe that the key difference between the two lies not in the platform, but in the rhetoric. While both parties want immigration restriction, the Vlaams Belang has used overtly racist ideological rhetoric that is on the fringe relative to the rhetoric used by the Flemish nationalist network on the whole. The N-VA has emerged offering similar policies, but its rhetoric is not overtly racist, which helps it occupy a more central ideological position in the network than the VB. There is a perception that the Vlaams Belang is a racist party and the N-VA is not. One member of N-VA suggested that the reason why the N-VA was able to capture votes from the VB in 2014 is because it provided a non-racist alternative:

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<sup>22</sup> Maria Novak, "Two associations and a dozen people lodge a complaint against De Wever," *The Brussels Times*, 21 March, 2015.

When Vlaams Belang appeared years ago, it became a resort for people who were not happy with the existing parties...But that new party did not translate exactly what the people wanted because the people did not want to become racist. Originally the supports of Vlaams Belang came from the Socialist party, the Green party...because they felt that something has to change. And then N-VA appears with no racist intentions whatsoever, so people are coming from Vlaams Belang....Now the N-VA comes with no racist intentions at all and this is what they want.

There is sufficient evidence to bolster the claim that the Vlaams Belang is a racist party.

It was able to succeed with overtly racist rhetoric and despite a party ban because it did not have a strong niche competitor within the Flemish nationalist network. The predecessor of the Vlaams Belang, the Vlaams Blok was found to be guilty of racism by the Belgian Court of Cession. When the party reorganized under a new name, but with many of the same members and ideological platforms, there was a little reason to believe that the racist viewpoints of the party had changed for the better. Members of mainstream parties continued to perceive the Vlaams Belang as a pariah and pledged not to associate with them. Guy Verhofstadts of CV&D declared, "Vlaams Belang is run by fascists." Much of the controversy surrounding the Vlaams Belang and race has centered on former party leader, Filip Dewinter. Dewinter, in particular, was singled out as a neo-fascist. He was known to advocate for the amnesty for those who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, he put flowers on their graves, he befriended Nazi Bert Eriksson (leader of the neo-Nazi movement in Antwerp and commander of the neo-fascist militant organization the VMO in the 1970s), and he had a reputation for making racially offensive comments at rallies and in interviews.

Despite the affiliation with neo-fascism and neo-Nazism, most of Dewinter's, and the Vlaams Belang as a whole, rhetoric is not anti-Semitic, but Islamophobic. Both the Vlaams Belang and the N-VA want support from the large Jewish community in Antwerp and Dewinter, while a controversial figure in the Jewish community, repeatedly asserts that he is sympathetic with the suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. However, Dewinter is decidedly

unsympathetic towards Muslims and has written a book about the threat Islam poses to European civilization. He sees the hijab and the burqa as symbols of women's oppression under Islam and has even gone so far as to say that "if Mohammad were alive today, I would call him a terrorist."<sup>23</sup> He has also written a book, *Inch Allah*, about the dangers of Islamization and, during his political tour of the United States in 2011, Dewinter posted the following message on his website about the threat Islam poses to Europe:

Islam is Europe's hereditary enemy. Islam is a religion of conquest that tried two times to subject Europe... The third Islamic invasion is taking place as we speak... Islam is like a predator. It only attacks weak preys. Europe is weak. Europe is on the verge of extinction, losing its identity and culture and becoming an economic giant on clay feet. Europe is not only committing a demographic suicide, but is terrified to defend the norms and values of our European civilization. Just like AIDS affects the physical resistance of human beings, multiculturalism affects the identity and demographic resistance of a people and a civilization. Islam takes advantage of our weakness and behaves like a cuckoo that lays its egg in the warm European nest (Dewinter 2011).



Figure 5.1  
Freedom or Islam  
Campaign

© Cateris News Agency

Filip Dewinter also launched a controversial ad campaign in 2012 on the theme "Women against Islamization" in which his daughter An-Sofie Dewinter, posed in a bikini and a burqa, asking viewers: "Freedom or Islam? We must dare to choose." The campaign coincided with the release of VB Senator Anke Van Dermeersch's book *Hoer Noch Slavin* (Whore Not Slave), which details ways in which Islam promotes discrimination and humiliation of women. Van Dermeersch is the leader of the "Women against Islamization" campaign and played a pivotal role in getting legislation passed to ban the burqa throughout

Belgium.<sup>24</sup> For his part, Dewinter has been unapologetic for the statements he and his party have made against Islam and recently even embraced the label “racist” on Twitter, saying:

#racist has not become a term of abuse, but honorific. Criticism of immigration/Islam/multiculturalism= #racism...#ikbenracistendaarbenikfierop. –Filip Dewinter

Despite this overtly racist and Islamophobic rhetoric, under Dewinter’s leadership, the party was able to achieve 11.3% of the vote in the Belgian federal elections in 2003, 14.3% of the votes in the European Parliament, and 12% of the vote in the Belgian federal elections of 2007. All of these elections took place prior to the emergence of the N-VA as a niche competitor of the Vlaams Belang.

#### ***5.2.4. The Subtle Racism of the N-VA***

The core of the Flemish nationalist movement is not overtly racist, rather they tend to emphasize nationalism and the failures of multiculturalism (De Witte 2006). In order to appeal to the Flemish nationalist core and distinguish itself from the Vlaams Belang, the N-VA markets itself to the public as a non-racist alternative. In their study of far-right Islamophobia, Ansari and Hafrez argue that “explicit opposition to the racist aspects in the VB programme are part of the N-VA programme” and that “if you look at the N-VA you immediately see the picture of a nice ‘black’ girl representing, among others, the image of the N-VA” (2012: 79). However, when it comes to the degree of racism exhibited by each party, I would argue that there is more convergence than divergence. In the words of one supporter of the N-VA, “their views [about race] aren’t really that different, the N-VA just sells it better.”<sup>25</sup> The racism of the N-VA is more subtle than the Vlaams Belang. For example, one can examine their promotional materials. In

<sup>24</sup> Vlaams Belang, “Hoer Noch Slavin,” March 7, 2012. Available at <http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/nieuws/9217>.



<sup>25</sup> Interview with member of far-right student organization 4, June 2014.

2011, the Vlaams Belang borrowed a popular, but controversial ad campaign from the anti-immigrant Swiss People's Party. In the Swiss version, a white sheep superimposed over the Swiss flag is kicking a black sheep out of the country. In the version by the Vlaams Belang, the *Belgian* flag is added alongside the Swiss, and the sheep being kicked out is a red one, symbolizing Turkey and Morocco. This overtly racist imagery is easily identifiable and could limit the appeal of the Vlaams Belang to those who are comfortable with blatant expressions of racism.

The imagery the N-VA uses in its discourse on migration policy is also racialized, but rather than using overt racism, the N-VA uses subtle racist imagery (Coltrane and Messineo 2000, Shabbir et al. 2014). In its party program from 2007, the N-VA chose to put an image of two baby chicks, one yellow and one black. While one could argue that the colors yellow and black were chosen primarily because they are the color of Flanders, the two colors are also laden with racial connotations. The structure of the image creates a subtle racial bias. Positioning the lighter colored chick on the left side of the image is a subtle way to reinforce its superiority. Art psychologists find that most right-handed people who read left to right, have “left preferences,” when they view images and will find the object on the left more aesthetically pleasing than the object on the right (Nachson et al. 1999). The lighter colored chick is also larger than the black chick, which implies dominance. Finally, the entire image is reminiscent of the original cartoon with the white and black sheep created by the Swiss People's Party. This image received worldwide publicity the year that it came out, 2007, which—perhaps not coincidentally—is the same year that the N-VA incorporated this image in its official party platform.

The core of the Belgian far-right network is nationalist, but not overly racist or Islamophobic. As a consequence, now that there is competition between parties within the

network, both the Vlaams Belang and the N-VA have made an effort to transition away from racialized discourse and move towards the ideological center. They are both trying to dance the same dance of talking about the failure of multiculturalism and the necessity of more restrictive immigration policy without appearing racist.

Ad campaign of Vlaams Belang, 2011	Party program of the N-VA, 2007
 <p data-bbox="207 1134 763 1207"><b>VLAAMS BELANG</b></p>	 <p data-bbox="893 1165 1446 1228"><b>MIGRATIE - ASIEL GEZINSHERENIG ECONOMISCHE MIGRATIE</b></p> <p data-bbox="1031 1239 1463 1323"><i>Lange tijd waren migratie en inburgering politiek incorrec onderwerpen waar men beter niet over kon praten. Nocht de problemen zich op bij gebrek aan een echt beleid. De N- een antwoord bieden op de vragen en problemen. Een posi</i></p> <p data-bbox="795 1354 1404 1459">Translation: For a long time migration and integration were politically incorrect subject matters best not to talk about. However the problems piled up in the absence of a real policy. The N-VA wants to provide answers to questions and problems. A positive response. <sup>26</sup></p>

*Figure 5.2 Overt and Subtle Racist Imagery of the Belgian Far-Right*

Just as some of the VB leadership has tried to distance itself from the overt racism of Filip Dewinter, the N-VA has tried to move away from imagery and speech that carries any implications of an immigrant group's ethnic inferiority. In 2007, the N-VA presented itself as

<sup>26</sup> NVA. Programma Federale Verkiezingen. 2007, p. 25.

organization that was going to save Belgium from all the politically correct liberals who were too afraid to admit that immigration was a problem (see translation above). Presently, the N-VA, like party chairman Van Grieken of the Vlaams Belang, is framing its advocacy for stricter immigration policy in an “immigrant-friendly way.” For example, in their official standpoint on immigration, they begin by acknowledging that immigrants who “come here to work or study, make an active contribution to society.” In addition, rather than saying that a more restrictive asylum and family reunification policy is in the best interest of the Flemish, they suggest that it is also in the best interest of the immigrants themselves, saying “unfortunately,” when “too many migrants enter the country through a passive immigration policy (asylum, family unification, or regularization)... too often people end up in unemployment.” Similarly, instead of incorporating imagery—like the two baby chicks—that thinly veils their preference for racial exclusion, the N-VA has chosen images that portray immigrants in a more positive light.



*Figure 5.3 The "Immigrant-Friendly" Imagery of the N-VA<sup>27</sup>*

It is no longer true that the Vlaams Belang is on the ideological fringe while the N-VA is closer to the moderate center. When it comes to a racist discourse surrounding immigration, both

<sup>27</sup>

Image available at N-VA Standpoints: Migration. 2015.

parties are converging towards the center and striving to adopt more “immigrant-friendly” rhetoric. Tom Van Grieken is no Filip de Winter. He was chosen as the new lead of VB because he has a more “modern” perspective. Van Grieken’s rhetoric would fit comfortably within the N-VA and, in fact, he was even courted by the N-VA, but declined to change parties. In fact, due to the unpopularity of racist rhetoric and imagery, the discourse of both parties is converging towards the center and the language of both parties has the appearance of being more accommodating of immigrants and their best interest. As the Vlaams Belang moves away from the ideological fringe and towards the ideological center, the N-VA may lose its competitive edge over the Vlaams Belang.

#### *5.2.5 The VB Softens its Racist Image*

The VB has been on the ideological fringe of the Flemish nationalist network because of its racist rhetoric. However, the Vlaams Belang has been engaging in efforts to soften its racist image and move closer to the ideological center of the network in order to regain a competitive edge over the N-VA. Controversial frontman Filip Dewinter has been replaced by a younger and more rhetorically moderate Tom Van Grieken. In contrast to Dewinter, who coined the slogan “A Flemish Flanders in a White Europe” under the Vlaams Blok, Van Grieken claims that he “does not want to decide who is Flemish and who is not. If someone says they are Flemish, I will not say they are not.”<sup>28</sup> Where Dewinter openly embraces Islamophobia, Van Grieken is more likely to frame his anti-immigration stance in a humanitarian way. For example, he suggests that, by promoting economic migration, the N-VA is actually perpetuating the disempowerment of the developing world:

What they think is that immigration is fine for labor...what we think is that immigration for labor creates a brain drain from developing countries and if this continues, the gap between them will never close...N-VA

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<sup>28</sup> Interview conducted with Tom Van Grieken, June 2014.



is happy for immigrants to work the jobs that Belgians do not want...I think it is cruel because it says that some jobs are more important than others.<sup>29</sup>

Thus Van Grieken seems to say that immigration restriction is actually in the best interest of the immigrants and of their home countries. It is clear that it is important to Van Grieken for the VB not to be perceived as a racist party. He suggested that the reason that the VB lost so many votes to the N-VA in 2014 was because of “miscommunications.” Similarly, one supporter of N-VA noted that there were people within the VB who wanted to change its image, but “then there are people like Filip de Winter who mess it up again.”<sup>30</sup> Van Grieken tries to rectify de Winter’s “miscommunications” so that potential voters can see the VB in a new light. Van Grieken believes that, despite the poor performance in 2014, the Vlaams Belang is one its way back and that the “communication and packaging have changed, but the contents not at all” (Van Grieken 2015b). One illustration of this new communication strategy was made evident via Twitter when former party leader Filip de Winter publicly embraced the label “racist,” Gerolf Annemans and Tom Van Grieken were quick to respond:

Gerolf Annemans@gannemans : @FDW\_VB: Sorry. Disagree. Abuse of words is for the leftists. It was not me. It's not me. I will never be #racisme.

Tom Van Grieken: Racism has become so eroded and abused term that Dewinter and Annemans did not know. :D.<sup>31</sup>

In an unusual twist, rather than embracing racism, Van Grieken suggests that the Flemish racism is in part responsible for the Islamization of Flanders. He expresses his disappointment with the sacrifices that are being made to accommodate the Muslim population, specifically “separate swimming [pools], paying for halal meat in the schools and imam training” all paid for by the Belgian taxpayers; however he feels that, in the absence of racism, these accommodations would

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with far-right party member 5, June 2014.

<sup>31</sup> The full text of the Twitter conversation between and Annemans is available at “Dewinter en Annemans Ruzien op Twitter over Racisme” *De Redactie*, 1 March, 2015.

not be necessary. He suggests that, under the current system, “Both are under attack and it is because of our racism and our intolerance” (Van Grieken 2015). Van Grieken has not substantially altered the policies of the Vlaams Belang and continues to support strict asylum policies, immigrant repatriation, and the necessity of immigrants assimilating to Flemish culture, but by scrubbing away the racist rhetoric surrounding these policy preferences, Van Grieken may be able to legitimize the party in the eyes of the Flemish public.

### ***5.2.6 The Loyalists***

The N-VA is a strong niche competitor of the Vlaams Belang; however there are some Vlaams Belang hardliners who are unlikely to shift their loyalties. The loyalists are those most dedicated to the party and include party officials (particularly those who have been with the party since the 1970s), unreconstructed fascists, and members of extremist paramilitary organizations. Their viewpoints are more radical than those of the broader Flemish nationalist movement and they believe the N-VA is not aggressive enough in its efforts to achieve Flemish independence and restrict immigration. The loyalists are also regionally defined to some extent. The Vlaams Belang built itself from the municipal level up, using Antwerp as a foundation and then broadening its appeal throughout Flanders. There is evidence that the Vlaams Belang still enjoys support in Antwerp, particularly from the local chapter of NSV-a nationalist student organization- and the neofascist paramilitary organization, Voorpost. It is telling that, on the celebration of an important holiday in the Flemish community, July 11<sup>th</sup>, the N-VA held its celebration in Brussels while the VB celebrated in Antwerp. July 11<sup>th</sup> is the Day of the Flemish Community, held to commemorate the Goldensporenslagen (Battle of the Golden Spurs) between French and Flemish forces in 1302. The narrative surrounding this battle has played a vital role in the construction of Flemish nationalism, as it focuses on the oppression of the

Flemish people by the French and on their ability to overcome that oppression (Rutten et al. 2010). The N-VA celebrated the day in Brussels, accompanied by the Young N-VA and KVHV-Antwerp (Jong N-VA 2014). The party was held at the Vlaams Huis (Flanders House), which is the headquarters of the Flemish nationalist movement in Brussels. The Vlaams Huis is a sort of neutral ground for supporters of Flemish nationalism and politicians and activists from the far-right, the far left, and every position in between regularly attend meetings or meet for drinks there after work.

The Vlaams Belang did not advertise the meeting at the Vlaams Huis and instead, focused on the July 11<sup>th</sup> celebration happening in Antwerp. At this celebration, one was more likely to see the organizations that remain loyal to the VB, including members of Voorpost and NSV- Antwerp. The event was held in a small square, Hendrik Conscienceplein, a site with symbolic significance because it is named in honor of Hendrik Conscience, Flemish nationalist and author of *De Leeuw Van Vlaanderen* (1838), a romanticized account of the Flemish victory over the French at the Battle of the Golden Spurs. Key members of the Vlaams Belang were in attendance, including Filip de Winter and Tom Van Grieken. Traditional Flemish music was played, free beer was served, and, towards the end of the event, members of the NSV gathered together and sang songs from the Studentencodex. At the end of the celebration, many of the remaining participants headed over to the bar, De Leeuw van Vlaanderen (The Lion of Flanders), to continue drinking and singing Flemish nationalist songs. Tom Van Grieken went home, but Filip De Winter and many members of Voorpost and the NSV Antwerp were still in attendance.

The Leeuw van Vlaanderen is a headquarters for radical Flemish nationalists. The bar was frequented by those who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and the walls are

plastered with years of Flemish propaganda and pictures of Flemish nationalist heroes. It was established in honor of Herman Van Den Reeck, a Flemish martyr who was shot by the police during a July 11<sup>th</sup> protest in 1920. It is presently used as a headquarters for the NSV-Antwerp, which routinely holds meetings and initiations there. The fraternal aspects of NSV-Antwerp are key to perpetuating member loyalty to the Flemish nationalist movement and to Vlaams Belang in particular. One observer described it thus:

The drunken kids we saw that night were the same people manning tables, collecting forms, serving food, and doing the grunt work at the Day of the Right Wing Youth. Within a few years, they will be running conferences and winning public office. No youth political organization in America comes close to their dedication, activism, or enthusiasm....The VB keenly understands the importance of the subculture. Political movements are built on volunteer politics: Every minute spent for the cause is a minute taken away from work, family, or friends. It is therefore extremely important that political work be combined as much as possible with fun and friendship. As one party member confided to me, "The movement would not be where it is if it were not for drinking."<sup>32</sup>

The night I was in attendance, young supporters of the Vlaams Belang were manning a booth in the alley, distributing stickers, key chains, and party publications, including a newly published comic book detailing the many ways in which immigrants are destroying the city of Antwerp (robbing banks, urinating on the streets, etc.) I was told by one of the members not to carry the bag of paraphernalia down the street because it would not be safe. I had several casual conversations with members of NSV-Antwerp, who felt some solidarity with me when they learned I was an American because "immigrants are destroying America too." Throughout the evening, Filip de Winter was surrounded by members of Voorpost-some of the more visually identifiable neo-fascists due to their skinhead aesthetic-who acted as a security during the main event and at the bar afterwards.

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<sup>32</sup> For those interested in the role of youth movements and bars in the Flemish radical network, the full text of this observation of the Leeuw van Vlaanderen is available at "A Visit to the De Leeuw van Vlaanderen, 29 August, 2014. Available at <http://shittyguide.org/visit-de-leeuw-van-vlaanderen/>.

Interpersonal ties in social networks tend to be the stronger than ties that are forged online. In addition, ties become stronger with greater frequency of contact and the development of friendship (Granovetter 1973). Bars like the De Leeuwe van Vlaanderen and student organizations like the NSV provide a venue for frequent contact and – aided by the alcohol – the opportunity for friendships to develop. One representative of the student organization, KVHV, noted that the organization does not really use social media to recruit to a significant degree saying that “we barely use that” and that most members join because a friend invited them to a bar during a recruitment week.<sup>33</sup> The bonds forged in youth, through student organizations like the NSV tend to have lasting power. Vlaams Belang party leader Tom Van Grieken himself came up through the NSV and was president of the organization prior to serving as an official for the Vlaams Belang. It is evident that he feels a strong sense of loyalty to the party and, despite being courted by the N-VA—the most powerful party in the country—he chose to stay with the Vlaams Belang. Van Grieken fondly recounted his initial entry into the party:

My first membership card was VB...I was raised in a multicultural neighborhood, multicultural schools...around 15 I started looking for my identity...and identified myself as Flemish and there are only so many parties who believe in Flemish independence and I believe in Flemish independence.<sup>34</sup>

### **5.2.7 *The Swingers***

The strong degree of niche overlap between N-VA and VB makes it easy for members to switch from one to the other. One can change parties without disengaging from their existing social networks or abandoning their commitment to Flemish nationalism. For example, former Vlaams Belang official Francis Van den Eynde announced that he was planning on voting for some N-VA candidates in 2014, particularly Gertrude Vercaemer, the daughter of one of his friends and colleagues. He made it clear that his departure from the VB was amicable and that he is “still

<sup>33</sup> Interview with member of far-right student organization 4, June 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Tom Van Grieken, June 2014.

faithful to [his] Flemish nationalist conviction” (Van den Eynde 2012). Similarly, one young N-VA supporter came from a family that was friends with Filip de Winter and typically voted for Vlaams Belang. However, he noted that he voted for N-VA because it is the smarter option since it was less extreme in its posture towards immigration and Flemish independence. Specifically he noted that, while he wants an independent Flanders, “a revolution is not the good way...it’s probably easier to try confederalism.”<sup>35</sup>

One of the oldest and most well established organizations in the Flemish nationalist network is the VVB, and while it is officially nonpartisan, there is some evidence to suggest that the organization has stronger ties to the N-VA than it ever did to the Vlaams Belang. Key party leaders like Jan Jambon and Geert Bourgeois were members of the VVB prior to joining N-VA. One member noted, “in the past, we had difficulties with the Vlaams Belang. And now with the N-VA, they are moderate with some issues and that opens some doors.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, another member noted, while the Vlaams Belang did a lot to popularize the Flemish nationalist agenda, the movement is presently in better hands with the N-VA in power:

For many years the VVB was considered a marginal element in society...since N-VA is so big, it is impossible for the media not to acknowledge them. It makes also, our point of view to be considered more important than it was 10 years ago. And of course, well, the party grows and the media are more open to our points of view and more people can be reached and the message can be integrated by more people.<sup>37</sup>

The Flemish nationalist student organizations, Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond (*Catholic Flemish Student’s Union*, KVHV) and NSV, are also officially nonpartisan; however the former has a tendency to be more moderate while the latter is more radical. The Vlaams Belang has an official youth branch, the Vlaams Belang Jongeren (*Flemish Interest Youth*, VBJ)

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with member of far-right student organization 6, June 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with member of Flemish separatist organization 1, June 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with member of Flemish separatist organization 2, June 2014.

yet the NSV has also acted as an unofficial feeder organization for the party. Several party officials including Tom Van Grieken, Karim van Overmier, Frank Vanhecke, and Philip Claeys, were members of the NSV during university. Van Grieken notes that the NSV are “close to us,” but “really independent” and noted that his present involvement with the organization did not really go beyond paying the tab for their beer.<sup>38</sup> The strength of the ties between the Vlaams Belang and the NSV seem to vary geographically. The NSV Antwerp chapter, while smaller than when the VB was in its heyday, remains fairly loyal to the party, while the chapters in other cities have shifted their loyalties to the N-VA. Johan Deckman, representative of the VB in Ghent, noted that it was increasingly difficult to get support for VB events from the local NSV chapter. The organization did not host any representatives from the Vlaams Belang from 2012 to 2014 apart from Francis Van den Eynde, who left the Vlaams Belang and presently supports the N-VA. However, the organization did host an event with Tom Van Grieken with 30 NSV members in attendance, so the loyalty of the organization may again shift back to VB.

### **5.3 The Vlaams Belang is not Dead Yet**

Many are quick to proclaim the death of a political party, however, any pronouncements of a funeral for the Vlaams Belang are premature. Sometimes when a party appears dead, it is merely dormant, and poising itself for a resurgence years down the road. It may be particularly appealing for the media to portray a far-right party as dead because it suggests that democracy has triumphed. I suggest that the Vlaams Belang will follow a trajectory similar to France’s Front National, a party everyone thought had died when Jean-Marie Le Pen stepped down as a leader, only to experience a resurgence under the leadership of his daughter, Marine. Marine Le

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Tom Van Grieken, July 2014.

Pen was well aware of the fact that the FN has been written off by the public and, in particular, the media:

For the last two years we have been buried. The media and political analysts have overseen a burial ceremony. They have laid out the wreaths and said, we're done with the National Front, and I must say that many of them added 'good riddance.' (Le Pen 2010).

Marine Le Pen promised that the Front National was not dead, but evolving, and she was right.

The party toned down some of its racist rhetoric-just like the Vlaams Belang is trying to do-and performed well in the 2012 elections, earning 13.6% of the vote in the National Assembly, while Le Pen earned nearly 18% of the votes in the first round of the Presidential Election.

Many have claimed that the Vlaams Belang is a dying party and that the election of 2014 was the nail in its coffin. Right now the N-VA is the most popular party in the country and it has a competitive edge over the Vlaams Belang; however this is subject to change. The fact that many current voters of the N-VA once supported Vlaams Belang suggests their party loyalty is not deep rooted and they could easily make the switch back if circumstances change. One Vlaams Belang party member noted that, the entire Flemish Movement vacillates over time in its political leanings. He noted that, while the Flemish Movement (VVB) is a nonpartisan movement, the dominant factions within it can change over time from moderate to radical. He predicted that many members of the VVB would “get more radical again because they see that the N-VA is not working.”<sup>39</sup>

The primary advantage the N-VA has over the VB is not appearing racist, but if, with the passing of the torch from De Winter to Van Grieken, the VB can downplay its racist image, it may regain a competitive edge over the N-VA. This new and improved Vlaams Belang could be appealing to those who feel that the N-VA has made too many compromises regarding the

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with far-right party member 3, June 2014.



Flemish nationalist agenda. Jan Beyers, Professor of Political Science at the University of Antwerp predicted that, by hijacking the agenda of the Vlaams Belang and occupying the same competitive niche, the N-VA was putting itself in a risk position, saying:

There is no doubt about that. In the long run, I think this will be a problem for the party. Right now, all is going well. They will have to make compromises, make unpopular policies, so on so forth...and then that will be the critical defining moment. Winning elections is fun, but surviving a crisis is a bit more salient. Their problem is that they have become more conservative, more right wing, but it has not become a radical right wing party or anti-immigrant party, but they have a constituency that has been socialized in this way of thinking. How will they serve them? <sup>40</sup>

There is some evidence to suggest that some who voted for the N-VA in 2014 are disappointed with the party's performance. A representative from the VVB noted that organization was happy a Flemish nationalist party was governing, but that they were "deeply disappointed" that there were not more pro-Flemish policies on the agenda. <sup>41</sup> Polls conducted in a year after the party's victory in 2014 reveal that, while N-VA is still the largest party in Flanders, its popularity is decreasing by roughly 4% while the Vlaams Belang's popularity is increasing by 2.2%.<sup>42</sup> While it is too soon to say that the Vlaams Belang is making a comeback, it is fair to say that, with 8% of the public saying they would vote for the party in the next election, the party is not dead. Ultimately, this suggests that, contrary to conventional wisdom, it can be positive for a far-right political party to have strong support from extremist movements. These extremists can provide a loyal support base that makes the party less vulnerable to niche competition. When faced with a viable niche competitor, like the N-VA, the moderates in the organization may shift their support, however the loyalists will remain and prevent the death of the party.

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Jan Beyers, June 23, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> The full text of the interview with the representative is available at "Vlaamse Volksbeweging ontgoocheld wegens te weinig 'Vlaams.'" 24 July, 2014. Available at <http://www.hln.be/hln/nl/17781/Regeringsvorming/article/detail/1956350/2014/07/24/Vlaamse-Volksbeweging-ontgoocheld-wegens-te-weinig-Vlaams.dhtml>.

<sup>42</sup>For the full results of the poll, see "NVA Verliest in Peiling, maar blijft Grootste Partij." *Gazet van Antwerpen*, 29 April, 2015.

#### 5.4 Competition in the Walloon Far-Right Network

In contrast to the Vlaams Belang and the N-VA, the Belgian FN does not occupy a central position within the Belgian far right network. In addition, unlike the Flemish nationalist party, it was not built on the foundations of a strong nationalist subculture. In contrast to Flanders, there is not a strong tradition of nationalism in Walloon, which made it relatively difficult for the FN to build a large support base from the outset. While there were far right organizations that predated the FN, like the anti-immigrant Front de la Jeunesse (*Youth Front – FJ*) these movements faded out and were never electorally successful (Delwitt 2006:144-145).

The FN is isolated in the broader Belgian far right network and fails to occupy a central position within the Francophone far right network. The Walloon far right network is decentralized, with no actor occupying a central position and a multitude of organizations competing with one another including the Jeunes Populaires (Popular Youth,UMP), and Democratie National (National Democrats, DNN). Many of these groups are a flash in the pan, do not have a strong on or offline presence, and do not regularly contest elections. However, their existence prevents the FN from becoming a more powerful actor within the network. Since its foundation, the Belgian FN has always had to deal with factionalism and competition with other actors in the Walloon far right community.

## Les quatre piliers de l'extrême droite belge francophone

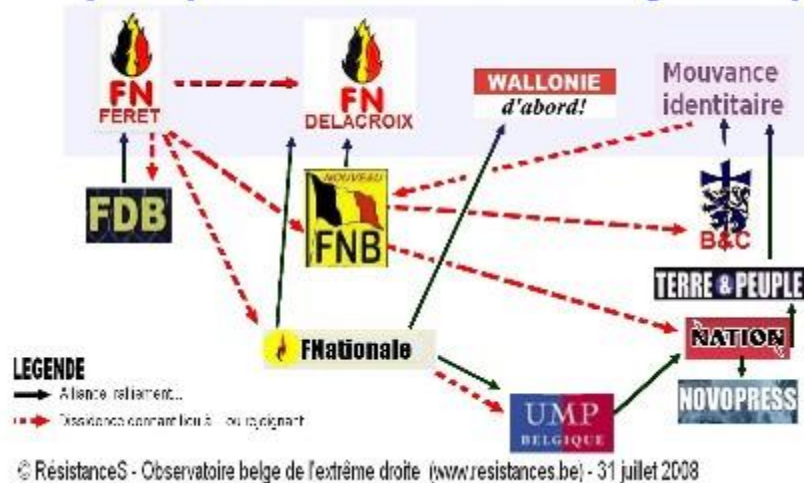


Figure 5.4 The Four Pillars of the Extreme Right in Belgium

The National Front has proven unable to occupy a central position within the network in part because of its inability to sustain significant relationships with other actors in the Walloon far right. The Belgian National Front emerged in the 1980s under the leadership of Daniel Féret. The party has been plagued with factionalism from the outset and many blame Féret for the inability of the FN to build the relationships necessary to sustain the party. For example, one former FN party member noted “He wants to run the whole show...he continues to block the expansion of the FN by keeping alive perpetual disputes with deputies” (Delwit 2006: 148).

Similarly, former FN member Gilsain Dubois blames Féret for FN’s failures:

I think that Mr. Féret is now paying the consequences of his actions...his policy was to surround himself with mediocre [people] to better hold his control...Because he is more of a guru than a party leader...and to eject the men and women of quality for fear that they will make him pale in comparison (DuBois 2007).

While there have been temporary efforts to unify the Walloon far right around a central actor, these efforts have never enjoyed any long term success. Denault notes:

The far right in Wallonia, while significant has never enjoyed the same success as its cousins in Flanders. This is in part because the party is split into factions: FN, Le Front Nouveau de Belgique (*The New Belgian Front*, ETF), and the Front Démocratique Belge (Belgian Democratic Front) (Denault 2001: 205-208).

The New Belgian Front or ETF sees itself as the true National Front and claims a relationship with the original National Front founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen. On its website it states:

To our regret, we are obliged to attack directly and openly Daniel Féret...who has arbitrarily appropriated the name and logo of a major French party founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen...There is no alternative other than to attack and denounce the false FN in order to differentiate ourselves...It is important [to]...make the difference between the FN and the ETF. This is a risky and dangerous operation, but we have no choice (ETF 2003).

Another faction that emerged was created by former FN member Dutraux Francis, Wallonie D'Abord (Wallonia First), who wanted to distance himself from the more extremist actors in the FN (Rocour 2012). There is not a significant overlap in followers of Wallonie D'Abord and the FN, suggesting that the problem is not niche competition, but factionalism.

The inability for the FN to become a central actor in the Walloon cannot be blamed solely on Féret, because the factionalism has continued even with the emergence of a new party leader. The FN presently operates under the name *Democratie Nationale* (National Democrats, DN) because the French FN no longer wants the party to use its name. The party is presently under the leadership of Marco Santi, who has also found it difficult to build a unified movement. Santi, finding it difficult to build relationships with the Walloon far right, has made efforts to boost the party's relationship with Flemish and international far right organizations. For example, Santi met with Filip Dewinter of the *Vlaams Belang* and President Bashar-al Assad of Syria to discuss the defense of Christians against Muslim extremism" (Santi 2015).

It is difficult to make a concrete evaluation of the Walloon far right network due to the temporary nature of their organizations, a lack of a strong on and offline presence, and an inability to conduct systematic interviews with party members. However, the evidence in this study and the limited scholarly and journalistic work on the Belgian Francophone far right

suggest that no single Francophone far right party occupies a central position on the national or regional level.

## **5.5 Chapter Summary**

An analysis of the Flemish far-right network suggests that, while the Vlaams Belang does occupy a central position within the network, the N-VA has emerged as a niche competitor, coopting many former supporters of the Vlaams Belang. As a consequence, the Vlaams Belang, which once occupied a more peripheral position in the network ideologically due to its overtly Islamophobic discourse, is now moderating its rhetoric to match that of the N-VA in an effort to move towards the ideological center and increase its support base. While some have predicted the death of the Vlaams Belang, it is possible that, with the moderation of its rhetoric, the Vlaams Belang could recapture some of the support it lost to the N-VA.

While it is difficult to make conclusions about the far right in Wallonia due to the limited available information about these organizations, the evidence suggests that there is no actor in the Walloon far right that occupies a central position in the network, on a national or a regional level. As a consequence, Francophone far right parties, like the FN, have always had to deal with rival factions and none has been able to sustain any long-term electoral success.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Significant Findings**

In order to truly understand far-right parties, it is important to understand the families they come from. Far-right parties do not exist in isolation. They are built from and sustained by the relationships they have with other extremist actors. When a far-right party occupies a central position in the broader extremist network, it has a greater ability to recruit members, publicize events, and spread its ideological message. Belgium is an ideal case study for trying to

understand the role networks play in party building as it has three far-right parties operating under the same macroeconomic conditions and electoral system. The findings suggest that a party's position within the broader far-right network shapes the trajectory it takes. The Belgian Vlaams Belang has benefitted from the dense ties it has with other organizations in the Flemish Nationalist network. Similarly, the French Front National and UKIP in the UK are the most central actors and most sustainable parties in their respective far-right networks, suggesting there is a positive relationship between network centrality and party sustainability.

The findings in regards to ideological centrality and party sustainability are less conclusive. Overall, nationalist discourse appears to be dominant in the Belgian network and Islamophobic discourse is relatively on the fringe. The methods used to identify dominant discursive patterns in the network as a whole are imperfect and further research, including the construction of a corpus that is representative of the entirety of far-right discourse is necessary in order to more accurately identify discursive trends. However, corpus analyses of the individual Belgian far-right parties do reveal some important trends. The FN is the party that is most likely to use Islamophobic discourse and it is also the weakest party in the network. Similarly, the evidence suggests that parties, like the N-VA, that focus on immigration restriction and improving law and order without incorporating racist or Islamophobic rhetoric, are more sustainable. In addition, there is evidence that the ideological platforms of the Vlaams Belang and the N-VA are converging, with the former using less Islamophobic rhetoric in an effort to move closer towards the ideological center.

The findings from this study suggest that far-right parties can be undermined by competition from within. In Belgium, the N-VA emerged from within the Flemish nationalist network as a niche competitor of the Vlaams Belang, mimicking its ideological platform and

capturing many of its voters. Similarly, in the UK, UKIP has emerged as a niche competitor for the BNP in the British far-right network. These findings suggest that, in countries with multiple far-right parties, scholars should pay attention not only to the ways in which center right parties compete with the far-right for votes, but also the ways in which far-right parties compete amongst themselves.

## **6.2 Implications**

### ***6.2.1 Countering Extremism***

Far-right parties and their affiliate organizations pose a significant threat to public safety. In the United States, the Police Executive Research Forum reported that 74% of terrorist threats were from far-right extremists relative to 39% from Islamic fundamentalist groups like Al Qaeda (Kurzman and Schanzer 2015). In Greece, members of the Golden Dawn conduct raids in immigrant neighborhoods, beating up immigrants with impunity. In Hungary, the paramilitary organization, the Hungarian Guard, systematically engages in acts of violence against the Roma community. In Sweden in January 2016, there was an upsurge in far-right violence as the neo-fascist Swedish Resistance Movement called for attacks on immigrants to avenge the death of a social worker at a refugee center. The Belgian paramilitary organization, Voorpost, has witnessed an increase in support in the aftermath of the 2016 Brussels attacks, and is currently being monitored by Belgian security organizations as a threat to domestic security.

Despite the security risk posed by far-right extremist organizations, much of the attention of the public, scholars, and law enforcement has been focused on the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism. This lack of understanding and resources devoted to the far-right makes it difficult to counter the threat they pose effectively. In addition, exclusively focusing on Islamic fundamentalist networks neglects the environment in which Islamic fundamentalists are living.

Islamic fundamentalists in Belgium, like those involved in the Paris and Brussels attacks in 2015 and 2016, are interacting with and responding to, the legislation, rhetoric, and policies of the Belgian far-right. In order to understand and counter terrorism, whether it be far-right or Islamic fundamentalist, it is important to understand the organizational structure of the far-right in the region.

Both states and non-governmental organizations that are interested in countering extremist violence need surveillance tools that provide them with information about broader tactical and ideological trends within extremist networks. This data could be useful in helping to identify individuals or groups who pose a security threat. In addition, network analysis is important to helping law enforcement and policymakers understand the radicalization process. For example, through network analysis, it becomes clear that individuals who engage in terrorist attacks as “lone wolves” are frequently not operating in isolation, and have often become radicalized through engagement with other extremist actors, both on and offline (Deland 2014).

Similarly, if one wants to limit the threat posed to the quality of democracy by far-right parties, it is important to appreciate that far-right parties do not exist in isolation. Policies like party bans and *cordon sanitaires* that focus on excluding one single party from their political process may not be effective as a mechanism of countering extremism if the broader far-right network is still intact. Far-right parties, like the Vlaams Blok, that are part of a vibrant network can survive despite a ban because of the dense connections they have with other actors in the network. In the case of the Vlaams Blok, the party merely reconstituted itself as the Vlaams Belang, relying on organizations like Voorpost for recruitment. Similarly, when the Czech Worker’s Party was banned, it relied on hooligan sites to organize its meetings covertly.



### ***6.2.2 The Sustainability of the Vlaams Belang and the French National Front***

The Belgian Vlaams Belang and the French National Front occupy a central position in their respective far-right networks. As a consequence, they have been two of the most successful far-right parties in Europe. While the National Front has publicly sought to distance itself from the radical fringe in an effort to boost its popularity, the group is defended by the Department for Protection and Security (DPS), which draws many of its members from the violent neo-fascist student organization Groupe Union Defense. This is parallel to the role Voorpost has played in providing “security” for the Vlaams Belang. Regardless of whether or not a party publicly acknowledges its ties to actors on the radical fringe, these ties exist and help to sustain the party.

Just as people predicted the death of the French National Front, they predicted the death of the Vlaams Belang. However, both parties, because of their strong relationships with other far-right organizations, have proven that they are capable of rebuilding after a loss. The National Front performed well in first round of the 2015 general elections, earning 30% of the overall national vote (Werly 2015). Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2016 Brussels attacks, support for the Vlaams Belang has surged and its Facebook likes have increased 3,000%. Party leader Tom Van Grieken reported that the party gained 10,000 new likes overnight.

### ***6.2.3 Trump, the Tea Party, and the Far-Right in the US***

According to the American Values Survey, the number of Americans who identify as part of the Tea Party has declined from 11 in 2010 to 6 percent in 2015 (Wilkinson 2015). It is possible that, just as the N-VA was able to mimic aspects of the Vlaams Belang’s ideological platform to capture votes, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump was able to mimic aspects of the Tea Party platform to capture votes. Conservative commentator Glenn Beck noted that those

Tea Partiers who abandoned Tea Party candidates to support Trump did so because of his use of racist rhetoric:

I don't think these are Tea Party people who are following [Trump]," Beck said. "Some of them may be, but I think these — I mean, you can't — if you were a Tea Party person, then you were lying. You were lying. It was about Barack Obama being black. It was about him being a Democrat, because this guy is offering you many of the same things, as shallow as the same way (Beck 2015).

In addition, Donald Trump has attracted the support of far-right white supremacist groups including the Ku Klux Klan and the American Freedom Party. Jared Taylor and members of the white supremacist New Century Foundations have made robocalls on Trump's behalf (Mahler 2016). While Trump has (belatedly) distanced himself from these organizations and has no official ties with white supremacist organizations, by attending Trump's rallies and diffusing his policy platforms through social media, white supremacist groups are proving to be an asset to Trump's campaign. While one might assume that any affiliation with white supremacist groups would be political suicide, this is based on a naïve assumption that white supremacy is pathological in liberal democracies. In reality, in Belgium and in the United States, the belief in white supremacy is more prevalent than people care to admit. As Cas Mudde has noted, "far from being an aberration, the attitudes and ideological features of the radical right are fairly widespread," in contemporary liberal democracies (2010: 1167). Therefore, it is possible for far-right politicians to perform well, even if they have ties to white supremacist or neo-fascist organizations.'

## **6.3 Limitations**

### ***6.3.1 Temporal Dimension***

This study mapped the Belgian far-right social network at a moment in time and this map provided key insights into patterns of cooperation and contestation in the network. However,

social networks are dynamic. While many acknowledge the dynamism of networks as “individuals join, participate, attract, compete, cooperate, and disappear,” this study and many others fail to capture this dynamism (Santoro et al.: 1). While a structural analysis is valuable, the value would be enhanced if one were able to see how the organizational structure of the far-right changes over time. This temporal analysis would also help to establish a causal mechanism behind the theory advanced in this study. For instance, while it is clear that the N-VA emerged as a niche competitor of the Vlaams Belang in the far-right network, it is unclear what sequence of events enabled it to occupy this position. Did the N-VA’s capture of Vlaams Belang’s ideology help it occupy a more central position within the network? Why did the N-VA emerge as a niche competitor when it did? These questions, while not addressed by this study, would be easier to address with a dynamic rather than a static analysis of social networks.

### ***6.3.2 Explaining the Emergence of Niche Competitors***

While this study provides substantial evidence that far-right parties can become vulnerable to niche competitors, it does not explain why niche competitors emerge. It is possible that a niche competitor emerges when a party becomes either more or less extreme than its support base. For example, the Vlaams Belang was arguably more radical than many in the broader Flemish nationalist movement, making it vulnerable to the rise of niche competitor with slightly less radical ideology. Yet, the Vlaams Belang had performed well, despite the overly racist rhetoric of its party leader until 2010. In fact, one could argue that the N-VA would never have been able to be successful without Vlaams Belang paving the way for public acceptance of its ideological platform. A dynamic analysis of social networks would illuminate factors that lead to the emergence of a niche competitor, as one could observe the structure of the network before, during, and after the competitor’s emergence.

## **6.4 Avenues for Further Research**

### ***6.4.1 The Far-Left***

Scholars and policymakers are beginning to appreciate the use of social network analysis to enhance our understanding of the far-right; however little attention has been paid to the social networks of the far-left. Far-left organizations, like far-right organizations, can pose a threat to security. Frequently far left and far-right organizations will antagonize one another, which leads to altercations that sometimes become violent. While it is counterintuitive, anecdotal evidence suggests that a vibrant far-left network may strengthen far-right organizations. For example, in Germany, the members of militant far-left organizations have engaged in acts of violence at far-right rallies and set cars of neo-Nazis on fire. Yet their attendance at far-right rallies seems to add fuel to the fire and helps perpetuates the far-right's sense of purpose. Similarly, the presence of Black Lives Matter Protestors at a Trump rally, may strengthen, rather than weaken Trump's appeal amongst his support base (Robbins 2016). Viola Neu, an expert on political extremism, notes that the far-left and far-right "legitimize each other" (Wroe 2010). A social network analysis that incorporated both far-left and far-right parties would help to establish whether or not it is beneficial or detrimental to the far-right to interact with far left organizations.

### ***6.4.2 Islamic Fundamentalist Networks***

Much of the scholarly and policymaking emphasis in the study of online extremism has focused on Islamic extremist networks; however little attention has been paid to the ways in which Islamic extremist groups and far-right groups interact with one another. In the aftermath of 9/11, the London bombing of 2005, the November 2015 Paris attacks, the 2016 attack in Brussels, governmental organizations, police forces, and academics have sought to enhance their

understanding of terrorist networks in order to more effectively counter extremism. However, many of these studies focus solely on the terrorist organizations and fail to appreciate the ways in which these organizations interact with and respond to the environment in which they are embedded (Klausen 2015; Koschade 2006; Ressler 2006). Specifically, far-right organizations can antagonize Muslim immigrant communities and advocate for policies that exacerbate their sense of exclusion. Having lived in a predominantly immigrant neighborhood during my field research in Antwerp, I witnessed firsthand the ways in which far-right organizations established their offices in the heart of immigrant neighborhoods. I witnessed firsthand members of the paramilitary organization physically intimidating young men of color when they tried to walk past the local Flemish nationalist bar. In addition, I watched neighborhood vandalize the signs and offices of far-right parties. Based on these observations, it appeared to me that the interactions between the far-right and immigrant communities could provide insight into the radicalization process. Rather than looking at the far-right or Islamic fundamentalist networks in isolation, it may be helpful to examine the ways in which these networks interact both on and offline.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear [*insert name*],

We are writing to invite you to participate in our research study about the social networks of nationalist organizations in Belgium. The purpose of the study is to understand how relationships between these organizations impact their longevity. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a member of [*insert name of organization*]. Your contact information was obtained from your organization's website.

If you are interested in participating in this research, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time and will take place in a location of your choice.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me at [sjones104@student.gsu.edu](mailto:sjones104@student.gsu.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jelena Subotic  
Associate Professor  
Department of Political Science  
Georgia State University  
Email: [jsubotic@gsu.edu](mailto:jsubotic@gsu.edu)  
Mobile: +1 404-413-6173

Shannon Jones  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Political Science  
Georgia State University  
Email: [sjones104@student.gsu.edu](mailto:sjones104@student.gsu.edu)  
Mobile: +1 770-634-3156

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent**

Georgia State University  
Department of Political Science  
Informed Consent

Title: Mapping Extremism: Network Politics and the Far-right in Europe  
Principal Investigator: Shannon Jones

### Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the organizational structure of nationalist networks. You are invited to participate because you are a member of one of the organizations within this network. Participation will require 30 to 40 minutes of your time.

### II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, the principal investigator will conduct an interview with you, posing a series of questions that will last approximately 30 to 40 minutes. I would like to make a tape recording of our discussion, so that I can have an accurate record of the information that you provide to me. I will transcribe that recording by hand, and will keep the transcripts confidential and securely in my possession. I will erase the tape after I transcribe it.

### III. Risks:

There is a small risk of a breach of confidentiality, but all efforts will be made to keep everything that you tell me in the strictest confidentiality. Your name will not be linked to anything you say in the text of my dissertation or any other publications. If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your participation in it, please feel free to contact me, my dissertation supervisor or our university research office at any time.

### IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. The information you share with me will be of great value in helping me to complete this research project, the results of which could significantly enhance our understanding of nationalist mobilization.

### V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.



VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. My dissertation supervisor, Dr. Jelena Subotic, will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly, including GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a study number rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a password and firewall-protected computer. The code sheet that will be used to identify research participants will be stored separately from the data in order to protect privacy. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. The audio tapes of the recording will be kept in a lockbox prior to transcription, after which they will be erased.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Jelena Subotic at or jsubotic@gsu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____	_____
Participant	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent	Date

**Appendix C: Informed Consent Script (French)**

Georgia State University  
Département des sciences politiques  
Accord de participation à une étude

Titre : Cartographie de l'extrémisme : politique en réseau et l'extrême droite en Belgique

Chercheur principal : D<sup>r</sup> Jelena Subotic

Chercheur-étudiant principal : Shannon Jones

Objet :

Vous êtes invité à participer à une étude. L'objet de l'étude est de comprendre les raisons pour lesquelles certains partis politiques survivent tandis que d'autres s'éteignent. L'étude est axée sur les relations entre ces partis et les organisations qui ne sont associées à aucun parti. Vous êtes invité à participer à l'étude en raison de vos connaissances dans ce domaine. Un total de 40 participants seront recrutés pour cette étude. La participation vous demandera une heure de votre temps.

II. Procédures :

Si vous acceptez de participer à l'étude, vous serez invité à prendre part à un entretien. Ce dernier se tiendra où vous le souhaitez. L'entretien vous demandera environ une heure de votre temps.

III. Risques :

Cette étude n'engendrera aucun risque supplémentaire que lors d'une journée ordinaire.

IV. Avantages :

La participation à cette étude ne vous offre aucun avantage direct. Toutefois, votre participation pourrait aider d'autres personnes à l'avenir grâce au savoir acquis via l'étude sur l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur la survie des partis.

V. Participation volontaire et rétraction :

La participation à l'étude est volontaire. Vous n'êtes pas obligé de participer à cette étude. Si vous décidez de participer à l'étude et changez d'avis, vous aurez le droit de vous retirer à tout moment. Vous pourrez passer certaines questions ou mettre fin à votre participation à tout moment. Quelle que soit votre décision, vous ne perdrez aucun avantage auquel vous avez droit.

#### VI. Confidentialité :

Nous conserverons le caractère privé de votre dossier, dans la mesure permise par la loi. Le Dr Jelena Subotic et Shannon Jones auront accès aux données que vous fournirez. Ces données pourront également être partagées avec les personnes qui garantissent la bonne conduite de l'étude (Georgia State University Institutional Review Board, l'Office for Human Research Protection des États-Unis). Les données que vous fournirez seront conservées dans des armoires verrouillées et dans des fichiers informatiques sécurisés. Les dossiers écrits seront détruits dans les cinq ans suivant leur collecte.

#### VII. Personnes de contact :

Si vous avez la moindre question, inquiétude ou plainte au sujet de l'étude, veuillez contacter Dr Jelena Subotic au +1 404-413-6173 ou via l'adresse [jsubotic@gsu.edu](mailto:jsubotic@gsu.edu) ou Shannon Jones au +1 770-634-3156 ou via l'adresse [sjones104@student.gsu.edu](mailto:sjones104@student.gsu.edu). Si vous souhaitez parler à quelqu'un qui ne fait pas partie de l'équipe de recherche, veuillez contacter Susan Vogtner du Bureau d'intégrité de recherche de la Georgia State University au +1 404-413-3513 ou via l'adresse [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu). Vous pourrez discuter de vos questions, inquiétudes, donner votre avis et vos suggestions, obtenir des informations au sujet de l'étude. Vous pouvez également contacter Susan Vogtner si vous avez la moindre question ou inquiétude concernant vos droits quant à cette étude.

#### VIII. Accord oral :

Si vous acceptez de participer à cette étude, veuillez dire « Oui ».

### **Appendix D: Informed Consent Script (Dutch)**

Georgia State University  
Afdeling Politicologie  
Toestemming om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek

Titel: Het in kaart brengen van extremisme: netwerkpolitiek en extreem rechts in België

Hoofdonderzoeker: Dr. Jelena Subotic  
Student hoofdonderzoeker: Shannon Jones

### Doel:

U wordt uitgenodigd om aan een onderzoek deel te nemen. Het doel van het onderzoek is te begrijpen waarom sommige politieke partijen overleven en andere niet. Het onderzoek richt zich op de banden die deze partijen hebben met niet-partijorganisaties. Wij nodigen u uit om deel te nemen vanwege uw kennis op dit gebied. Voor dit onderzoek worden in totaal 40 deelnemers uitgenodigd. De deelname zal ongeveer één uur van uw tijd vragen.

### II. Procedures:

Als u akkoord gaat met de deelname aan het onderzoek, zult u gevraagd worden om deel te nemen aan een interview. Dit zal plaats vinden op een locatie van uw keuze. Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren.

### III. Risico's:

Tijdens dit onderzoek loopt u niet meer risico dan in een normale dag van uw leven.

### IV. Voordelen:

Deelname aan het onderzoek levert niet direct voordelen voor u op. Maar uw deelname kan in de toekomst anderen helpen als gevolg van verkregen kennis over de impact van sociale netwerken op het overleven van partijen.

### V. Vrijwillige deelname en opzegging:

Deelname aan het onderzoek is vrijwillig. U hoeft niet aan het onderzoek deel te nemen. Als u besluit om aan het onderzoek deel te nemen en van gedachten verandert, dan kunt u op elk gewenst moment besluiten om te stoppen. U kunt vragen overslaan of de deelname op elk gewenst moment stoppen. U zult geen voordelen verliezen waarop u anders recht had gehad, wat u ook besluit.

### VI. Vertrouwelijkheid:

Wij zullen uw gegevens privé houden, voor zover dit door de wet wordt toegestaan. Dr. Jelena

Subotic en Shannon Jones zullen toegang hebben tot de informatie die u verstrekt. Informatie kan ook gedeeld worden met degenen die ervoor zorgen dat het onderzoek juist wordt uitgevoerd (Georgia State University Institutional Review Board, de “Office for Human Research Protection”, Verenigde Staten). De door u verstrekte informatie zal worden opgeslagen in afgesloten kasten en veilige computerbestanden. Geschreven verslagen zullen binnen vijf jaar nadat de gegevens zijn verzameld, worden vernietigd.

#### VII. Contactpersonen:

Neem contact op met Dr. Jelena Subotic op 404-413-6173 of [jsubotic@gsu.edu](mailto:jsubotic@gsu.edu) of met Shannon Jones op 770-634-3156 of [sjones104@student.gsu.edu](mailto:sjones104@student.gsu.edu) als u vragen, bezwaren of klachten heeft over dit onderzoek. Bel met Susan Vogtner in de Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity op 404-413-3513 of [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu) als u met iemand wilt spreken die geen deel van het onderzoeksteam uitmaakt. U kunt spreken over vragen, bezwaren, input geven, informatie verkrijgen of suggesties geven over het onderzoek. U kunt ook bellen met Susan Vogtner als u vragen of bezwaren heeft over uw rechten in dit onderzoek.

#### VIII. Mondelinge instemming

Als u besluit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek, zeg dan “Ja”.

### **Appendix E: Interview Protocol**

My name is Shannon Jones and I am a PhD candidate in the Political Science Department at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. I am researching the social networks of nationalist organizations in Belgium. The purpose of this interview is to understand how relationships between these organizations impact their longevity. Your participation will require approximately an hour of your time.

This interview will take place with your informed consent. You have the right to confidentiality. Your name and any other identifying characteristics will be withheld when I write up the results of this study.

1. How long have you been a member of this organization? What motivated you to join?

2. What is the purpose of your organization? How was it developed and by whom? Has the purpose of the organization changed over time?
3. How does your organization attract new members? Does your organization use the internet for communication and recruitment?
4. What are some of the strengths your organization?
5. Do you think your organization has been successful? If so, to what do you attribute your organization's success?
6. What are some of the weaknesses of your organization?
7. Are there factions and divisions within your movement? If so, why?
8. What other organizations are you active in?
9. Have the thwarted terrorist attack in Belgium and the Paris terrorist attacks of 2015 had an impact on you or your organization?
10. Have these attacks strengthened or weakened the Flemish nationalist movement as a whole?
11. What do you feel is the most effective way to counter Islamic radicalization and terrorism? Which organizations do you feel are the most effective at countering Islamic radicalization?

## Appendix F: Centrality and Sustainability of Far-Right Parties

Country	Party	Centrality	Vote	Duration	Threshold	Modality
Austria	Freedom Party	50	17.54	56	4	20
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	185	7.76	8	5	7
Belgium	Belgian National Front	44	1.97	27	5	0
Belgium	New Flemish Alliance (N-VA)	181	20.32	15	5	4
Bosnia	Serbian Democratic Party	19	9.7	2	3	7
Bulgaria	Ataka	101	9.4	7	4	2
Cyprus	Greek Popular Front	0	1.08	4	1.8	0
Denmark	Danish People's Party	50	12.3	17	2	5
Estonia	Estonian Independence Party	0	0.2	13	5	0

Finland	True Finns	277	19.04	17	0	14
France	National Front	374	13.6	40	37.5	4
France	Mouvement National Republicain	115	2.25	17	37.5	0
Greece	Golden Dawn	75	6.9	19	3	2
Hungary	Jobbik	47	16.7	9	2.83	1
Italy	Northern League	50	8.3	21	1.72	6
Italy	National Alliance	49	12.3	14	1.72	4
Latvia	National Alliance	22	13.9	2	5	2
Lithuania	Young Lithuania	4	0	3	5	0
Netherlands	Freedom Party	50	10.1	6	0	3
Norway	Progress Party	49	22.9	39	4	6
Norway	Norwegian People's Party	1	0.1	13	4	0
Poland	League of Polish Families	55	1.3	11	4	1
Portugal	National Renovator	120	0.31	12	0	0
Serbia	Serbian Radical Party	100	4.6	21	5	7
Slovak Republic	Slovak National Party	74	4.6	23	5	5
Slovenia	Slovenian National Party	70	1.8	21	4	
Spain	Platform for Catalonia	137	0.29	10	9.7	0
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	50	28.92	24	4	1
Switzerland	Swiss People's Party	50	1.9	41	8.6	10
Ukraine	All Ukranaiian Union	70	10.4	21	5	4
UK	British National Party	59	1.9	30	37.5	1
UK	National Front	50	0	45	37.5	0
UK	UK Independence Party	50	12.6	25	37.5	1

Source: The VOSON Analysis System was used to identify the indegree centrality of each party within its broader network. Electoral thresholds and electoral results are from the Global Elections Database.