

Master Thesis - Leiden University

The Past in the Present: On the Role of Cultural
Memory in the Rise of Radical Right Populist
Parties in Germany and Italy

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S1494023
11 June 2018



Word count: 9994

Abstract

This project investigates the link between memory studies and radical right populist party studies. It argues that the governments of Germany and Italy portray a certain image of the Second World war in the present, which affects the social acceptability of ideas associated with radical right populist parties, thereby influencing their political success. The main expectation is that a less penitent memory of the Second World war increases the social acceptability of these ideas. The project uses a mixed-methods approach that summarises and contrasts qualitative data from the academic literature, political speeches and opinion polls. It finds that Germany and Italy differ in the memory of their war experience. Moreover, it finds that this approach continues in mainstream narratives today and influences public opinion in line with the theory.

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“Germany’s young people have great expectations of Europe
because they remember their country’s history.”

-Macron, 2018

I/ Introduction

The rise of Radical Right Populist Parties (RRPPs) has been argued to be the most dramatic development in recent European politics (Art, 2006). From the 2002 election in France where the far right party Front National unexpectedly reached the second round of the presidential elections, the populist parties have been dividing our societies politically. Given the impact of these parties, political scientists have been studying the variations in popularity and by extension, the chances of electoral success in different countries (Mudde, 2013, 2016). Particularly, the importance of sociological and historical (institutionalist) explanations has been emphasised (Mudde, 2007). However the field of memory studies, which deals with the representation of history in the present, has been largely ignored as a potential source of explanations. Scholars from this field argue that historical narratives generate normative and causal claims about certain topics in politics (Booth, 1999; Art, 2006; Lebow, 2006). From this perspective, memory is less concerned about historical accuracy and more about the political values and ideas that arise from a certain interpretation of the past. Given the resurgence of certain extremist ideas within some RRPPs that mirror popular discourses before and during the Second World War, I will look at the memory of the war and the possible influences it exerts over the present acceptability of those ideas. This research is guided by the following question:

To what extent and in what way(s) does the manner in which the Second World War is remembered in countries influence the social acceptability of ideas linked to radical right-wing populist parties?

I argue that governments portray a certain image of the Second World war in the present which affects the social acceptability of ideas that RRPPs try to appeal to, thereby influencing their political success. I differentiate the type of memory based on the extent to which the narrative portrays the country as having resisted the oppressor and the recognition of a (negative) role of the country or an admittance of guilt. I will first review the literature on the rise of RRPPs and memory studies to identify a gap in the understanding of the cultural context in which RRPPs operate. I argue that memory studies helps us address this gap. After the literature review, I develop my theoretical argument. This is followed by a section covering research design. Herein I talk about the case-selection, operationalisation and data-selection. I analyse academic work, political elite speeches and opinion polls in order to answer my research question. The final section concludes and discusses the implications of this thesis on future research.

II/ Literature Review and Relevance

This section provides an overview of the academic literature related to the topics of the cultural context of rise for RRPPs and the relevance of memory studies. I argue that memory studies can help us understand the context in which RRPP thrive.

A. The Radical Right Populist Parties

RRPPs as defined by Mudde (2007) have three defining features. First, a specific form of nationalism (which excludes elitism but includes xenophobia). Second, an opposition to fundamental democratic values such as the protection of minorities or the centrality of individual rights, that does not violate the democratic state. Third, an ideological base consisting of values from the broader radical right (e.g. strong leadership, nativism, unemployment, immigration and authoritarianism (Givens, 2005; Frohen, 2006)). These ideas will be referred to as RRPP-ideas.

Mudde (2016) identifies three waves of studying RRPPs. First, the rise of these parties (1950s-1980s) (Von Beyme, 1988; Betz, 1994). Second, the differences in success (1980s-2000s) (Knigge, 1998; Golder, 2003). Third, the effects that these parties have on politics and society (2000s-) (Rydgren, 2003). However, as evidenced by the rising number of papers on the topic, the explanations for the success of these parties are still a contested area (Mudde, 2016). Different factors contributing to the rise of RRPPs have been identified. First, the demand-side which focuses on “the perfect breeding ground” (Mudde, 2007, p. 202) and emphasises the importance of voters (Husbands, 2002; Art, 2006). Second, the supply

side which I will develop in more detail below. Third, the internal supply-side which emphasises the qualities of the parties themselves (Cole, 2005; Betz, 1998). My research fits closest with the work done on supply.

1) The Supply Side

The supply side highlights the role of political opportunity structure in the success of RRPPs. Mudde (2007) distinguishes three contexts that influence this success: the institutional, the political and the cultural. The institutional context emphasises the political and electoral structures (plurality, majority or proportional representation) in which parties evolve which help or hinder their electoral successes (Hainsworth, 2004; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006). Second, the political context adds the dimension of saliency of issues (such as immigration or environmental) that some “old” parties may not have adequately taken up which would result in the successes of “new” parties (Linz, 1976).

Finally, the cultural context deals with the “political culture” or the political *mores*. While this context is challenging to measure, it fits into this research by studying the influence of cultural factors on the success of RRPPs, which can explain different outcomes in very similar systems. A large topic of discussion has been on ‘the new right’ (Mudde, 2007). This theory suggests that only a true cultural revolution allows a country to implement far-reaching changes such as those offered by RRPPs (De Benoist, 1985). In practice however, there are few examples of this happening. Another potential explanation is the effect of a certain intellectual climate (Markotich, 2000). While Mudde (2007) discusses hostile intellectual climates, I argue that favourable intellectual or cultural contexts play a key role. Hostile climates are characterised by the stigmatisation (amongst others) that such parties face, which consequently diminish their popularity. Some authors argue that countries

where the Second World war (WWII) and The Holocaust have been “key points of reference for the distinction between good and evil” (Mudde, 2007, p. 245), the RRPPs are subject to larger amounts of stigmatisation which reduces their influence (Decker, 2003; Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). Moreover, it has been argued that RRPPs are more successful in Western countries where the collaboration with Germany had been mostly administrative, since they can distance themselves from the ideals of nazism (Coffé, Heyndels and Vermeir, 2007). Mudde (2007) argues that the relationship between a fascist past and the electoral successes of RRPPs is quite convincing, considering that eighteen of thirty-two European countries fit this hypothesis (*see table 10.1, Ibid.*, p. 246). This project aims to contribute to our understanding of this link, and to thereby address existing theoretical weaknesses.

B. The Politics of Memory

The field of memory studies covers a large spectrum of perspectives. I employ the sociological approach to memory that was first identified by Halbwachs. He defines memory and associated frameworks as: “instruments used to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord in each epoch with the predominant thoughts of the society” (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 39).

1) Definitions

Memory is the collection of the images, ideas and representations one has of the past, it “establishes life’s continuity, [and] gives meaning to the present as each moment is constituted by, and referred to, the past” (Sturken, 1997, p. 1). It can be a coping mechanism for past experiences and a reference for people’s opinions (Thompson and Madigan, 2005).

Consequently, the social approach of memory studies is divided into categories that study these different dynamics (Halbwachs, 1980). I am interested in the historical memory, an approach that was popularised by Assman (2008) as cultural memory. I will consequently use Assmann's framework defined as: "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

Cultural memory therefore constitutes a collection of narratives that are created, articulated and popularised. He develops six other overlapping characteristics that help us understand how cultural memory shapes what is acceptable. These characteristics build on one another in the following manner: first, "the concretion of identity" defines storage of knowledge that serves to distinguish an in- and out-group. Second, the "capacity to reconstruct" uses this identity to (re)construct a common past. Third, "formation" creates a group of common narratives and knowledge to be shared within society. Fourth, the "organisation" takes this group to arrange and frame them. Fifth, "obligation" dictates the relationship between the self-image of an individual and the values of the group. The importance given by the group to certain symbols will influence the representation and reproduction of this self-image. Sixth, "reflexivity" refers to the three ways in which cultural memory is 'reflexive': a) it is practice-reflective, as it interprets common practices through rituals, b) it is self-reflexive as it self-referential when explaining certain behaviours, and c) by projecting its own image that reflects that of the group, the two are mutually reinforcing. In this research, the cultural memory surrounding WWII is analysed as a strong influencer of the value of certain (political) ideas. Noticeably, this concept leads to a focus on the bias and selectiveness of cultural memory, which distinguishes it from history. This means that, while the historical data is important, what ultimately matters is the narrative adopted. I emphasise that, while

talking about cultural memory, the focus remains on the basic political values that arise in societies when these reflect on the past.

2) The Role of Memory

Many researchers have found memory to be a powerful explanatory tool in various contexts (economy: Booth, 1999; migration studies: Fortier, 2000; international relations: Langenbacher and Shain, 2010). Many political scientists have also discussed memory and agreed on its importance (Müller, 2002). However, only a few consider it a substantial factor contributing to the rise of RRPPs (Katzenstein, 1997; Berger, 1998; Banchoff, 1999). Indeed, the field of memory studies has not been explored as a potential explanatory cause of the rise of RRPPs. I posit that the main reasons for this neglect could relate to the apparent vagueness of the concept; the difficulty of causal claims, and the fact that the subject and approach traditionally belong to different academic fields. Indeed, underlying reasons are harder to understand and explain, which can limit our insight into their effects. While I agree that a causal link between memory of the WWII and the rise of RRPPs is difficult to establish, I will argue that memory has an impact on the social acceptability which can provide a (intellectual) favourable context for RRPP-ideas. It therefore contributes to, but does not trump, the other explanations.

III/ Theory

In this section, I make a link between the cultural memory of WWII and the social acceptability of RRPP-ideas nowadays. I argue that, while discussing (traumatic) past events, political elites actually debate the values and ideas linked to that event.

A. Concepts

After having discussed *cultural memory* in the section above, I will now define the concept of *social acceptability*. The social acceptability of an idea relates to the extent to which an idea is neutrally or positively perceived by voters. It can be seen as a subset of social norms, and a component of the political culture. Social acceptability mainly operates at the level of the individual: when confronted with political ideas, individuals use various factors to evaluate the relative merit of these ideas. While personal preference or self-interest play an important role (Dalton, 2000), social norms, peer-behaviour and institutional factors are also main contributors (Clapp and McDonell, 2000).

Social acceptability relies on different processes. First, at a personal level, individuals use their conception of peer norms to judge their own behaviour, and tend to overestimate the prevalence of undesirable behaviour in their peers (Prentice and Miller, 1993). Second, at a group level, the sources of the perceptions of social acceptability may be reinforced amongst individuals: by sharing education, being raised in similar cultures, or member of the same political party (*Ibid.*). Third, at a cultural level, those norms of behaviour are reinforced by normative injunctions (i.e. what is commonly approved in the culture) (Reno, Cialdini, and Kallgren, 1993).

B. Theoretical Argument

My theoretical argument can be summarised as follows: governments portray a certain image of WWII in the present that affects the social acceptability of ideas that RRPPs try to appeal to, thereby influencing their political success.

Cultural memory influences social acceptability in the following ways. After WWII, European countries were faced with destruction and leaders believed the unity of the people needed to be restored (Lebow, 2006). Within a general trend of amnesia, most of the politicians, intellectuals and citizens constructed and accepted myths about their (positive) role during the war (Art, 2006). The narrative is primarily (but not exclusively) picked and diffused by the government (*Ibid.*), and is reproduced through cultural artefacts (Thomson and Madigan, 2005). It follows that how and whether ideas are enshrined in cultural memory influences their social acceptability, since the way a country deals with its past creates a set of ideas and normative judgments. The memory of WWII became a frame of reference to which political actors look for justification or critique of RRPP-ideas. In some countries, these ideas were not exposed as inherently wrong and were therefore enshrined as “acceptable” or left unaddressed in the cultural memory (Lebow, 2006). The manipulation of the past creates the illusion that the population is resistant to the specific ideas, thereby decreasing their opposition. The references to WWII nowadays convey the lessons learned from this period and reiterate the position of a country towards those ideas. As such, the way in which WWII is remembered today strengthens or weakens the appeal of those ideas.

In turn, social acceptability influences the success of RRPPs in six ways. The three first first at a societal level and three at a political level. First, true supporters of RRPPs may now more easily engage in additional activities or talk about their beliefs due to the reduced stigmatisation (Betz, 1994). Second, the increase in acceptability may also bring in support from individuals who might previously consider the RRPP-ideas to be undesirable (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). Third, some individuals want to vote for RRPP due to their non-radical policy-positions, but refrain due to the presence of the radical positions, an increased social acceptability influences this (Van Donselaar, 2003). Fourth, the increased acceptability of ideas forces political opponents to change strategies to oppose these views (*Ibid.*). Fifth, due to a general increase in acceptability, a group of fierce political opponents will take this as an incentive to double down in their opposition towards the ideas (Meguid, 2008). Finally, this increased acceptability may lead other political parties to consider joining coalition governments with RRPPs to further their political interests, without fearing backlash from their own voters (*Ibid.*).

On the basis of my theory, I expect that the less negative the memory of WWII, the less critically it treats certain political ideas, thereby increasing their social acceptability. This would mean that nations with an “uncritical” cultural memory would be more likely to see RRPPs success, holding other factors constant. Moreover, considering the above, I expect to find that the mainstream parties will conform to the post-war narratives in their discourse, while the RRPPs will try to change and influence the narrative in order to bend the social acceptability.

IV/ Research Design

My research can be characterised as a dual-case comparative qualitative study as it allows in-depth analysis and the necessary proximity to the data under study (Mudde, 2007).

A. Case Selection

I analyse two cases: Germany and Italy. In order to select these cases, I examined Western European countries and removed those under the former influence of the USSR, since the totalitarian nature and subsequent collapse of these regimes provides us with fundamentally different cultural memory (Lebow, 2006). Subsequently, I selected allied countries during the war; the alternative providing too great a counter variable. To reduce more common counter variables (Lagrou, 2003; Art, 2006; Lebow, 2006), I also ensure that the two final cases are picked on a most similar system design. As summarised in table 1, Germany and Italy formed the only proper pair where the IV and DV show the relationship I theorise, with all other factors holding constant. In addition, Germany and Italy share a number of features: first, their dictatorships ended at similar points in time. Second, their governments collaborated closely during WWII. Third, their authoritarian regime came from within the country (unlike Austria that was considered as a case).

	Outcome of war	(Im) penitent	Fascist past	Multi-party System	Saliency of Nativist issues	Historical Resistance
France	Winning	Impenitent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small
Germany	Losing	Penitent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small
Italy	Losing	Impenitent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small
Netherlands	Winning	Impenitent	No	Yes	Yes	Small
Austria	Losing	Impenitent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small

Table 1: Case Selection

Before continuing, I will clarify the concept of '(im)penitence'. It goes without saying that any relationship a nation has towards its WWII past is complex and nuanced. However, by looking at two factors in particular, I can identify categorical differences between the way in countries handled their (cultural) memory of WWII. First, the extent to which the narrative portrays the majority of the nation as essentially being in a state of resistance towards an oppressor (also in light of historical evidence) and second, the recognition of a (negative) role of the country or an admittance of guilt. The concept therefore refers to the extent to which Italy and Germany portray their resistance and to what extent they accept the blame. I will develop both cases in the first part of my results section.

B. Operationalisation

In order to perform my analysis, I use academic work to identify the main post-war narrative adopted by Germany and Italy. I then analyse the influence of post-war narratives employed in political speeches (independent variable) onto public opinion (dependent variable). The analysis of political speeches serves two goals. First, to see how the memory of WWII is represented and used by political actors; and second to investigate which type of party uses which approach to memory to see how mainstream these ideas are. I analyse (written) statements by political elites that a) link past events to current political norms (Art, 2006) and/or b) strategically look to influence the cultural memory on WWII (Rothstein, 2000). Step A shows how references to this period are used to influence the public. Step B helps us analyse to what extent politicians are forced to adapt their narrative to the cultural memory of the war and/or to what extent they can manipulate it. In order to understand the relationship between memory and valuation, I look at speeches given by politicians from mainstream

parties and RRPPs. The analysis of opinion polls serves two goals: first, to see how the population positions itself regarding the issues related to WWII; and second to investigate trends noticed in the academic work and speeches to see if they are reflected.

As mentioned, I will look particularly at the social acceptability of RRPP-ideas that are linked to WWII memory (strong leadership, nativist issues, nationalism, anti-immigration, unemployment and anti-EU sentiment (Givens, 2005; Art, 2006; Lebow, 2006)). These topics are the specific components of RRPP-ideas that are linked to the salient topics of the WWII. Indeed, the first three are at the core of fascism and nazism and are main components of contemporary radical right parties. The next three are a core of populist movements claiming that unemployment is the result of globalist, capitalist forces and helps divide between ‘the own people’ and outsiders which combines with the type of nationalism that was popular in WWII. Finally, while the EU is not directly part of WWII’s discourses, the organisation does influence the rate of immigration and unemployment, and is framed as being part of these so-called elites; thus directly relating it to the sentiments present in WWII.

The work of Paxton (1998) helps us further identify markers of fascism that I look for in the speeches and the opinion polls; “1. The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether universal or individual. 2. The belief that one’s group is a victim, a sentiment which justifies any action against the group’s enemies, internal as well as external. 3. Dread of the group’s decadence under the corrosive effect of individualistic and cosmopolitan liberalism” (*Ibid.*, p. 6-7).

C. Data Selection

1) Political Speeches

For each country, ten speeches are selected and the analysis is grouped in two topics of analysis: 1) the memory of the Second World war; and 2) the ideal relationship to the broader community. The speeches have been selected on the basis of availability and their relevance to this topic (e.g. commemoration days; speeches about the EU). I selected speeches from the last four years to ensure continuity in the governments that gave them. Where the context or occasion for a speech is particularly relevant, (e.g. after a meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu, current Prime Minister of Israel), a speech might be less recent.

For Germany, the speeches selected for the mainstream were given by *Bundeskanzlerin* Angela Merkel, as she has spoken most extensively on the subject and as the representative of her government for the last thirteen years. For the RRPPs, the speeches were given by different members of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party for the sake of representativeness. For Italy, the qualification is somewhat different. Indeed, some radical parties such as Forza Italia have already been in government and some more radical populist parties such as Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5*) are seen as mainstream. As such I will look at the equivalent of mainstream for Germany and call it moderate and the equivalent of RRPPs and call it radical. The speeches from the moderate parties are those given by Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and Italian President Sergio Mattarella, as together they represent the current moderate government. For the radical, several political movements in Italy appeal to voters through RRPP-ideas: Lega Nord, Forza Italia and, to some extent, M5*. Indeed, M5* is not directly considered radical, but a number of their political stances such as on immigration law, anti-EU sentiment or nationalistic policies (M5*, 2018) belong in this

category. This may support my argument by showing that a party with RRPP-ideas can be seen as mainstream.

2) Opinion Polls

When possible, the polls that were applied to both Germany and Italy were selected to ensure that the concepts were measured in the same way and that other variables held constant as much as possible. When this type data was not available, I paid special attention to the formulation of the question to reduce bias in the answers. The analysis of the polls focuses on the topics at stake: 1) position on strong leadership; 2) immigration and xenophobia; and 3) the perception of the EU.

V/ Results

This section will analyse the impact of the messages in political speeches onto public opinion to examine the link between contemporary memory of WWII and the social acceptability of the values associated with it. The context for this dynamic is provided by looking at academic work.

A. Academic Work

1) Italy

During WWII, Mussolini's desire to gather the Italian people under his leadership led him to develop an image of Italians as "good people" or "Brava Gente" (Favero, 2010). After the war, events that took place during the war were reshaped in order to make the fascist crimes look small compared to those of the Nazis and the resistance was glorified and amplified (Oliva, 2006). The myth of "Brava Gente" gained in popularity and, according to this narrative, Italy came out of the war victorious (Lagrou, 2003). Fascist Italy was set to be remembered as an unfortunate parenthesis in history (Curigliano, Mininni and Leone, 2003; Lebow, 2006). This disassociation with guilt is representative of what the literature identified as a context that can be conducive to RRPPs. It also corresponds to the second point of Paxton (1998) about self-victimisation. Nowadays, this myth of "good people" has served as an excuse for several events, such as attacks on migrants, the participation in the War on Terror and the reemergence of fascist ideas in the public sphere (Favero, 2010). According to this narrative, as Italians are fundamentally good people with good intentions, their actions are justifiable: they do not mean any wrong and must have an alternative reason to perpetuate

these crimes (*Ibid.*). This notion holds particular significance for this study, because it entails that the fascism of the past is not considered a danger anymore (Del Boca, 2005; Favero, 2010).

2) Germany

In contrast, Germany has acknowledged the role it has played in the war and has not created a myth of resistance as their post-war narrative (Lebow, 2006). A mix of lived experiences, memories, repressions, official historiography and narratives emerged as conflicting accounts into Germany and the world. This process forced the country into greater exposure of its past, until all involved were satisfied that no stone had been left unturned (Hartman, 1986). Germany represents one of the only cases where the international community was involved in setting its post-war narrative. They were, and to some extent, still are, weighed down by collective shame, and the feeling to have to pay for what happened (Dresler-Hawke and Liu, 2006). For example, the “culture of welcoming” towards (non-European) refugees is considered by the media to be part of this repayment (Bennhold, 2015). This shame has also been found to correlate with a lower attachment to the national unit which results in reduced nationalism (Dresler-Hawke and Liu, 2006). This has also led many Germans to seek a higher (European) or lower (regional) level of identification, in order to deny culpability through history or by claiming a family’s history of resistance (*Ibid.*).

B. Political Speeches

This section analyses the political speeches on the basis of two topics. The memory of the second world war is identified as a triple approach. The second topic, the relation to the broader community, is mainly represented in reference to the European Union.

1) The Memory of the Second World War

A triple approach to the relationship of both countries to their past is used to display the trends set by political elites towards their WWII memory. First, the extent to which WWII is the point of reference for the worst possible (political) outcomes. Second, the importance of remembrance and careful reflection on the past. Third, the notion of ownership and responsibility. I will begin by analysing the moderate parties in Germany and Italy will be examined, and then compare them the radical parties.

Germany brings up WWII as the example of the worst possible outcomes, including in contexts where it is not directly relevant. This is exemplified when looking at the speech given by Merkel at the World Economic Forum when she refers to “the return of the failures of the twentieth century, in any form” as the worst possible outcomes of current changing economic and political trends (Merkel, 2018a). This idea is strengthened in her speech in front of the Israeli Knesset (2008) which devotes much attention to the fault and shame of the Germans for the acts ‘they’ committed. Moreover, Merkel (2008) argues that Germany has not done enough: “(...) it took more than forty years before Germany as a whole acknowledged and embraced both its historical responsibility and the State of Israel”. While the subject and amount of time dedicated to it make sense in the context of the speech (the

German head of state in front of the Israeli Parliament); the gravity and relevance of the subject are core of the German (political) identity.

The second part is the importance of remembering and carefully reflecting on WWII. At a commemoration event in the former concentration camp of Dachau, Merkel (2015a) explained that memory must constantly be recalled because what happened during WWII “exceeds imagination, particularly of young people”. She made a similar point during the Roosevelt address (Merkel, 2016), stating that the destruction of Middelburg was “hardly imaginable” (as the landscape showed no trace of it), therefore needing to be remembered. Apart from serving as a political point of reference, commemoration is seen as the basis of fundamental values and shared understanding between people. These references by Merkel create the idea that Germany absolutely needs its memory to face ‘the current challenges’.

The final part is the importance of guilt: in most speeches, ‘Germany’, as opposed to the ‘nazi-regime’ is identified as the culprit. In her speech before the Knesset, Merkel (2008) made the construction of a better world conditional upon Germany accepting its role in WWII: “I most firmly believe that only if Germany accepts its enduring responsibility for the moral disaster in its history will we be able to build a humane future. Or, to put it another way, respect for our common humanity is rooted in our responsibility for the past”. The importance of Germany accepting responsibility is particularly emphasised in the context of discussions on the German youth: during her Dachau address, Merkel (2015a) used the metaphor of the pied piper of Hamelin to express her fears about what might happen if the youth did not realise the dangers arising from RRPP-ideas. This was reinforced by Tauber who expressed that “we need to raise the youth awareness so that they can spot racism and totalitarianism from the very beginning” (Merkel, 2015b). This statement emphasises the need for training on spotting radical ideas mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, Italy has a different approach to WWII. The war is generally not represented as the worst possible outcome, but instead more as a lesson learned. The analysis of speeches show that WWII is only mentioned when directly relevant (e.g. commemoration days). While Merkel (2018b) brought up the example explicitly during her speech at the World Economic Forum, Gentiloni (2018) did not mention anything about WWII. Moreover, on a topic as relevant as the EU, during the state of the union in 2018, Mattarella (2018a) only referred to the importance of remembering both world wars to highlight the importance of the European model, with no special attention given to WWII.

Second, the importance of commemoration is also discussed regularly, particularly in the context of anniversaries or when appealing to the long arc of European history. However, vastly different approaches can be observed to those that characterise mainstream German politics. During the ceremony marking the 73rd anniversary of the liberation, Mattarella (2018b) stated that the Italian people had “(...) an innate recognition of the common belonging to mankind, which also constituted the absolute rejection of any ideology based on oppression, violence and racial superiority”. Moreover, this corroborates the previously stated notion that Italian people are said to be “trained” to pick up on extremist ideas, which they do not see in RRPPs and therefore do not fear to vote for them. This corresponds to the notion that individuals in countries with an impenitent cultural memory, are less sensitive toward the possible resurfacing of WWII ideas in RRPP. Furthermore, this echoes the point that when collaboration with the regime is only seen as administrative, this creates a more conducive environment for RRPP. As such, in their commemorations, Italy emphasises its automatic ability to fight totalitarianism and underlines former resistance, whereas Germany reinforces the need for cooperation and constant reflection as a means to avoid previous catastrophes.

Third, the moderate Italian parties refer to the country's role in the war in different terms than their German counterparts. For instance, Mattarella (2018b) consistently refers to the 'problem' coming from "nazi-fascism" instead of from within Italy itself, thereby portraying the Italians as victims rather than perpetrators, which is a marker of fascism according to Paxton (1988). Tellingly, he refers to the soldiers of Mussolini as German (Mattarella 2018b). During the 71st anniversary of the liberation, Mattarella (2016b) stated that: "The Italian people as a whole knew how to react to barbarism". This again shows how the Italian's moderate approach places much less blame on the country than the German mainstream approach. The myth of "Brava Gente" is still very much alive: the country as a whole was resistant. In another speech given to editors of Micromega magazine, Mattarella (2015) argued that the resistance, before taking political form can be understood as a moral revolt, passed down from "father to son" and which must always remain part of the collective memory. This is in stark contrast to the speech given by Merkel (2008), in which she stated that Germany had eventually rightly accepted the blame (and the shame) for the crimes committed. Finally, Mattarella (2016a), also urged everyone to commemorate the fate of the Jewish population, citing the example of a 1943 raid on the Roman Jews in a speech given after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. However, he stated that the Shoah is a constitutive element for many nations, including Italy, but not particularly Italy, even though the country had a considerable role in the deportation.

In Germany, the RRPPs have a very different approach to WWII than the mainstream. For instance, the question of whether Germany fulfilled its obligation is a topic of contention as the AfD (Gauland, 2017) states that "no other people have dealt as clearly with their past wrongs as the Germans", thereby implying that they had done enough. Moreover, Gauland

(2017) contends that Germans should have the right to be proud of their military achievements during the World Wars. The AfD stated that the current way in which Germany commemorates its past is a crippling approach that benefits the political establishment (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, he criticises that by only acknowledging the German perpetrators, we forgot the German victims (*Ibid.*). This is a clear example of a political actor trying to influence the cultural memory to achieve a certain political goal. In particular, it echoes the second and third point of Paxton (1998), by portraying Germany as a victim to its mainstream politics and European elites due to placing disproportionate blame on Germany.

For Italy, the radical parties barely mention WWII. For example, when asked about it during an interview, Salvini (2018), remained vague and stated that fascism had also done a “lot of good things”, but that the persecution of the Jewish population was “crazy”. Di Maio (2018) stated that he did not want to get into the subject when asked to comment on the statement by Salvini. Finally, Berlusconi (2013) praised Mussolini by stating that the ‘anti-semitic race laws’ were the only real blemish on an otherwise good record.

The marked difference in statements and speeches on the example of WWII and the role of commemoration between the Italian and German RRPPs are worth reflecting on. It is possible that in Italy, due to the moderate parties approach being somewhat similar to the one expected from the radical parties, the radical parties do not have to worry about defending their positions, as it is much less used as an argument to criticise them than in the German context. It may also be possible that, due to the way in which the Italian government has created the cultural memory, the majority of Italians simply do not see the link between RRPP-ideas and the example of WWII. This would also why the M5*, which appeal to many radical ideas, is seen by many Italians as a mainstream party. Another explanation could be that this event is much more salient in everyday politics in Germany and as such more present

in the minds of politicians and the population, who are thus more likely to bring it up. Accordingly, this lends support to my theoretical argument, where such a difference on the treatment of the memory was expected.

2) The Relationship to the Broader Community

Germany's mainstream approach to cooperation both in Europe and globally is that their futures are inextricably linked. In fact, Merkel (2018b) refers to the German motto for the G7 ("shaping an interconnected world") as one that is appropriate for the world while facing the current challenges. In speeches Merkel constantly refers to "our" values, history, and "us Europeans". This is done to such an extent that these statements become affirmations: "the cooperation of tomorrow will work". Merkel (2018b) only addresses the challenges raised by the process of globalisation by emphasising the benefits which globalisation brings.

In Italy, the moderate parties also emphasise the importance of European cooperation. They see the EU as a pragmatic solution to address many challenges, and justify its legitimacy in terms of shared history and values (Gentiloni, 2018). However, Italian political elites are quicker to emphasise the need to protect their nation and interests than the German mainstream is (Mattarella, 2018a). Moreover, from the statements analysed, it becomes clear that Italian moderate politicians emphasise Italy's own role in and contributions to the union. As an example, Mattarella (2018a) emphasises how proud Italy is to host the European University Institute. Gentiloni, when discussing the subject of migration at the World Economic Forum (2018), stated that "Italy saves lives at sea, even if it is costly" and praised how Italy had managed to curb migration without external assistance. This shows to some extent the glorification of one nation over others (strong nationalism), and the (possible) legitimisation of the protection of such a nation (Paxton's (1998) first point) .

The AfD argues the opposite position from Merkel. Weidel (2018) of the AfD stated at the parliament that more Europe meant more money and diluted sovereignty at the expense of the German people. In the view of the AfD, Brussels is attempting to extract crucially needed funding from the German people, in order to continue the callous overpaying of their own bureaucrats, who, according to the AfD, lack democratic legitimacy. This approach to international cooperation also reflects Paxton's (1998) first point on the primacy of one group, the feeling of victimhood and the decadence of the group under cosmopolitanism.

In Italy, the position of radical parties on the EU is similarly profoundly negative. The M5* and Lega Nord are strongly against the European Union, with Forza Italia expressing less forceful, yet still critical positions. It should be noted that the precise reasons for the opposition varies between the parties: M5* identifies as an alter-globalist movement with strong support for direct democracy, which is incompatible with the bureaucracy of the European Union (M5*, 2018). On the other hand, Lega Nord opposes the EU on the grounds that they wish to maximise their own control over political power and resources. In both cases, the parties distance the need for cooperation and reinforce the supremacy of the group; both markers of fascism according to Paxton (1998).

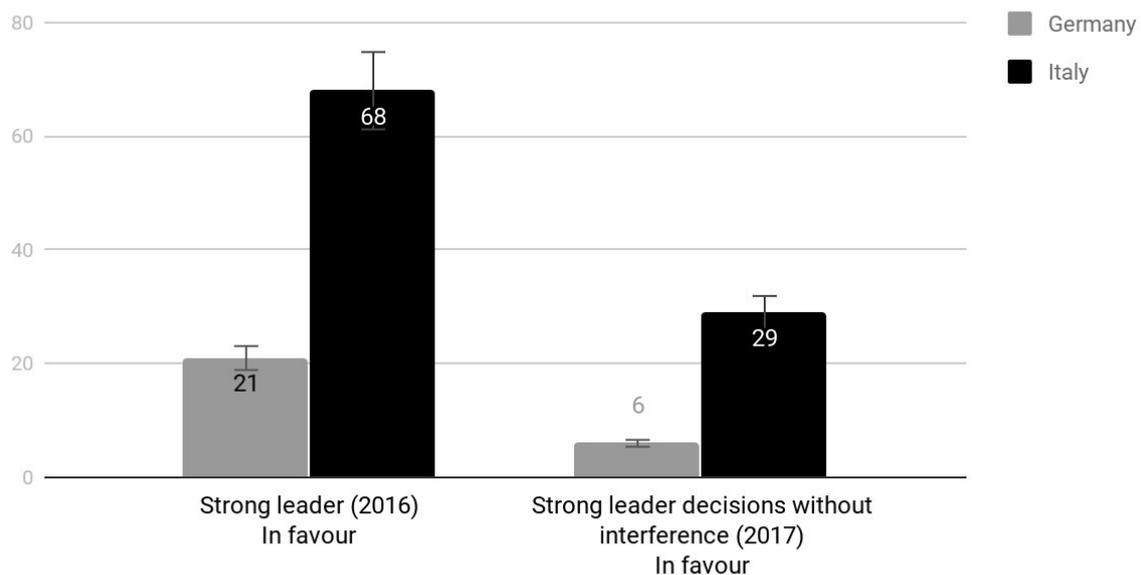
C. Opinion Polls

1) Strong Leadership and Authoritarianism

The notion of the need for a strong leader is a key component of both Nazism and Fascism, and RRPPs commonly appeal to this value. The main results are summarised in chart 1. We see a large disparity between the acceptability of key values associated with RRPP-ideas..

Especially the lack of interference in decision-making is five times more acceptable to Italians than to Germans. In Italy, despite the fact that the majority still clearly rejects both fascism and the example of Mussolini, up to a super-minority of 40% sees fascism as an idea that can be communicated or supported (Termometro Politico, 2018). Overall, it can be seen that Germany is more resistant to RRPP-ideas than Italy, a trend that is also apparent in the speeches and academic work, since the German mainstream and the narrative make a point of rejecting and exposing these ideas.

Column chart 1: Opinion on Strong Leader (in %)

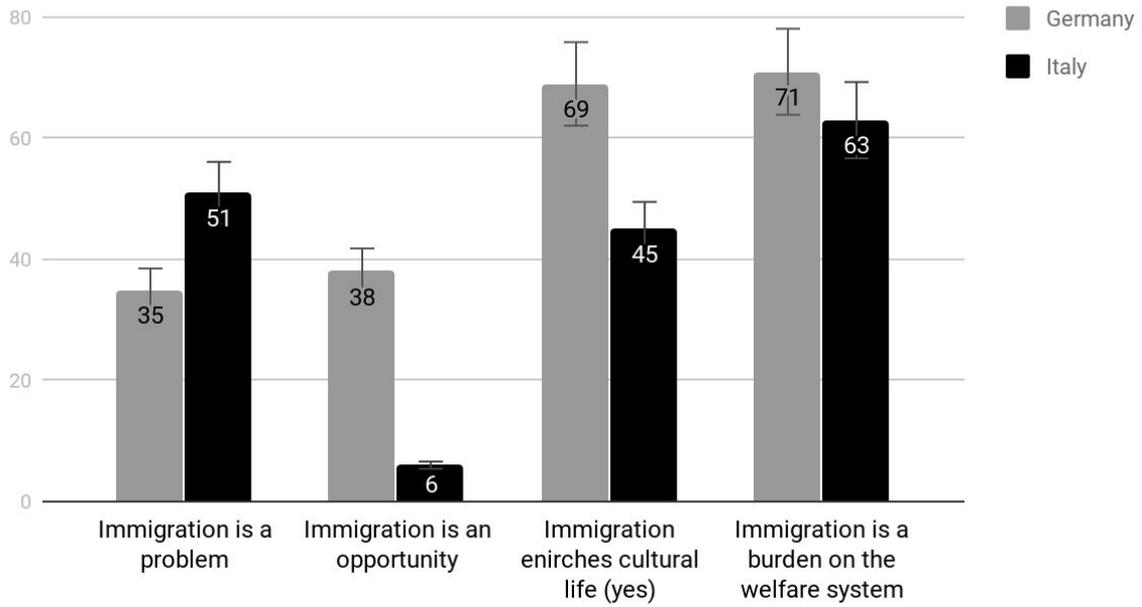


2) Immigration and Xenophobia

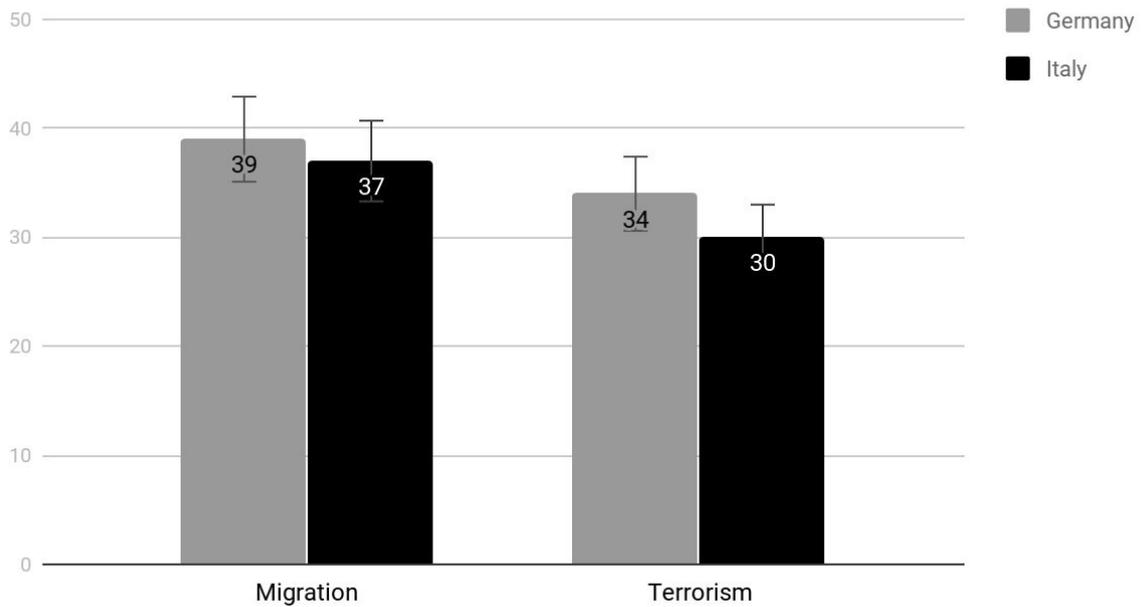
Given the common values of (ultra)nationalism and nativism found in RRPPs and the constant attention the topic is given in the speeches, the topic looks at immigration. The most important results are summarised in charts two and three. Overall, Italians are much more afraid of migrants and immigration than the Germans. In fact, Germans identify social inequality as their main fear, whereas Italians refer to immigration (Tagesschau, 2017). This

result could suggest that the German identity is still profoundly affected by the example of racial and social segregation during WWII. It also emphasises the trends identified in academic work and political speeches: Italy is seen more as a nation to protect and take pride in, making it inaccessible to foreigners, while Germany is open and welcoming. In fact, only 6% of the Italians polled believe that immigration is an opportunity, a noticeable difference with the Germans (38%). However, these differences can lie in the origin of the migration, its qualitative difference, the extent to which there is already a community of the group present in the country and what infrastructure a country has available to process incoming migrants. The Eurobarometer (2017b) disentangles the relationships between the variables to some extent. The greatest differences between Italy and Germany are on whether immigration enriches cultural life (45% favour Italy v. 69% favour Germany); whether they are a burden on the welfare system (63% favour Italy v. 71% favour Germany); and the largest difference on whether immigration takes jobs away from the country (58% favour Italy v. 21% favour Germany). In addition, the views on the necessity of acquiring nationality is considered part of a successful integration show a striking nationalism (69% of Italians agree, against 52% of Germans). Overall, the opinion polls show that the level of nationalism in Italy is higher and exerts influence over people's views on immigration as noticed in the academic work and speeches.

Column chart 2: Opinion towards Immigration (in %)



Column chart 3: Main fears (in %)



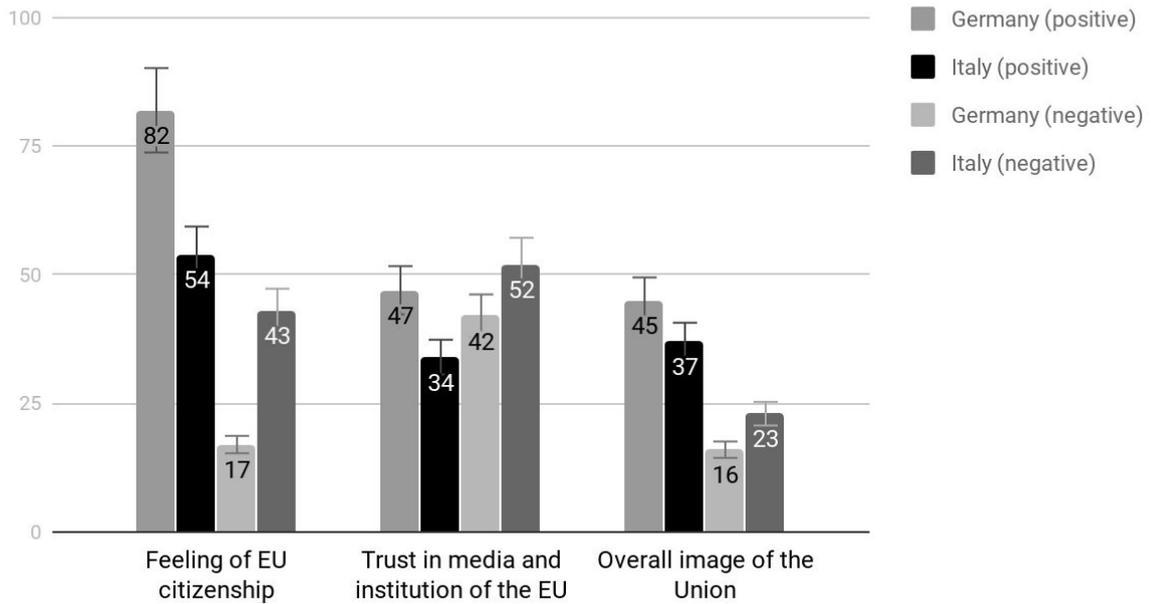
3) Perception of the European Union

This section covers the national perceptions of the European Union. The main results are presented in charts four and five (Eurobarometer, 2017a). The Germans are vastly more supportive of the EU on specific points (such as trust, and feeling of EU citizenship). This clearly reflects the trends found in the political speeches, during which Germany expressed greater support for the European Union and the necessity for EU-cooperation. The more held back approach in the Italian speeches can also be witnessed here, with the majority of Italians not expressing overtly negative sentiments but clearly having a more reserved position. Interestingly, when asked about the image of the EU, both countries are close to one another. Secondly, both nations identify freedom of movement as one of the most positive things to come out of the EU (Italy 51%; Germany 61%), but Germany attributes peace as a result of the EU at 72%. Meanwhile, only 36% of Italians expressed a similar sentiment. Both countries deviate substantially in both directions from the EU-average (56%). This reflects the ongoing preoccupation in German society with WWII leading to a high preference for continental peace and the changes that the EU has brought in that regard. Interestingly, polled citizens from both countries identify terrorism and immigration as the most important issues facing the EU, which are also issues that RRPPs appeal to. In this case, it is not possible to assess whether it being the main challenge should be understood as a criticism of the EU (which would be in line with RRPPs) or as something that respondents believe the EU is in the process of addressing. Moreover, during the last Eurobarometer (2017a), it became clear that Italians are losing trust in the EU, and at a faster rate than the European average¹. Finally, the Italians polled did not feel like EU citizens, reflecting the high levels of nationalism as

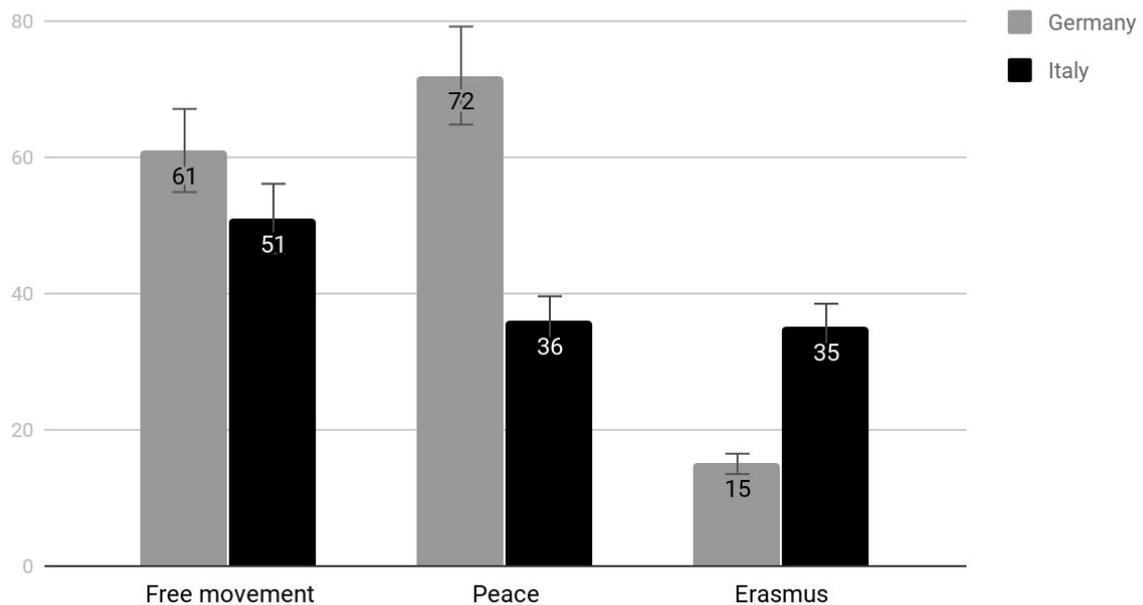
¹ Compared to the previous barometer, 34% now trust the EU (down 2 percentage points); 52% do not trust (up 4 percentage points) and 14% do not know (down 2 percentage points).

opposed to the Germans, 82% of who identified as European. This overwhelmingly supports the academic theory that Germans prefer to identify with a higher or lower identity.

Column chart 4: Opinion on the Union (in %)



Column chart 5: Most positive result of EU (in %)



VI/ Conclusion and Implications

This thesis has explored the relationship between the cultural memory of Second World war and the social acceptability of radical right populist party-ideas by investigating: *to what extent and in what way(s) does the manner in which the Second World War is remembered in countries influence the social acceptability of ideas linked to radical right-wing populist parties?* It has provided an overview of literature on the factors that influence the success of radical right populist parties and on the added value of memory studies. It then presented an argument on how to integrate memory studies into radical right populist party studies through the intervening step of social acceptability. Subsequently, through the examination of academic, political- and polling-sources, it was possible to research the difference in the effect that the memory of the Second World war has in Italy and Germany. The analysis was guided by two main expectations. First, that the less critical the memory of the Second World war, the less critical it treats certain political ideas, thereby increasing their social acceptability. Second, that the mainstream parties conform to the post-war narrative(s) in their discourse while radical right populist parties try to change and influence the narrative. Through an in-depth analysis of two countries, the first expectation was fully supported by the evidence. The second expectation was only partially supported.

A number of findings are worth emphasising. First, all three sources supported the theoretical argument. The academic work emphasised that the memory of the role of countries in the Second World war constitutes a major pillar in the construction of both the German and Italian identities. Second, the political speeches showed that the mainstream parties abide by the narrative. Interestingly, while the German radical right populist party contested the mainstream narrative (as was expected in the theory), the Italian radical parties hardly

commented on it. Three reasons for this were presented: moderate parties already do not provide a critical perspective on the example; voters do not see the link between the ideas of the Second World war and those presented by radical right populist parties; and the topic is much more salient in Germany than in Italy. Furthermore, a positive relationship was established between the criticality of the memory and support for the European Union. Finally, in the opinion polls, the trends highlighted in academic work and political speeches were convincingly reinforced.

A number of limitations are worth mentioning. First, the concept of memory remains relatively vague compared to certain other concepts in political science, which can make it difficult to make strong claims about its effects. Memory is also deeply intertwined with language which is more subtle to analyse. In this case, due to the use of translations of speeches and poll questions, some subtleties may escape the observer. Secondly, cultural memory is often referred to implicitly as a common knowledge. This makes research challenging for researchers that lack a direct relationship with the culture. Generally, radical right populist parties are a complex subject of study with many possible factors of explanation which could limit the comparative power of this theory.

Given the implications of the influence of memory on social acceptability, several avenues for future research should be mentioned. First, while this study has shown the promise of the fields interacting, more future work is needed to investigate possible overlap between the fields. By examining similarities in the subjects and theory, insights from both fields can be further combined. Second, It is equally important to establish where and how the fields are incompatible, as failure to do so this may lead to inconsistent or even incoherent theoretical frameworks. In order to facilitate this consolidation, in-depth qualitative work on relatively small groups and on topics of limited size is recommended. Examples of such research may

take the general analysis of this thesis and then apply it to a particular region, radical right populist party or election. Third, research into different periods in the past can show how a difference in the narratives at the time influence(d) the social acceptability of radical right populist party-ideas at that time. Fourth, large-n work that seeks to establish to what extent the argument is generally supported will indicate the most interesting cases for future research. As such, political scientists should search for those factors which are held in common, but not explicitly shared between individuals. The national post-war narratives, with their strong reinforcement through education, social norms and references by political actors, should therefore be treated as one of the potential, and possibly overlooked, influencers of social acceptability.

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