Combatting Wokeness Beyond Borders: Diffusion of Ideas and Tactics from the American to French Far Right

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***Abstract*:**
Despite long being viewed as parochial and insular, far-right actors' increasingly exhibit transnational interdependence. They appear to learn from one another, they emulate one another's strategies, and they engage in transnational networking. Their fates are interlinked. To provide concrete evidence for this interdependence thesis, we examine a "least likely" case of transnational diffusion, one that occurred from the American to French far right during the 2022 French presidential and legislative elections. During this election cycle, the French adapted several themes from the American context, including combatting *wokisme*, leveling allegations of "rigged" elections, offering exhortations to "stop the steal," as well as adopting distinctly American COVID-19 misinformation narratives. Our findings have implications for efforts to conceptualize the far right as a global movement and a more critical understanding of America's contemporary "soft power."

Introduction

The right-wing campaign against "wokeness" now constitutes the most prominent theme of America's culture war. In a recent appearance in South Carolina, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis used the word "woke" seven times in under twenty seconds, saying:

> …so because the Woke represents a war on truth, we have no other recourse but to wage a war on Woke. We fight the Woke in the schools, we fight the Woke in the legislature, we fight the Woke in the corporations, we will never ever surrender to the Woke mob, Florida is where Woke goes to die.[1]

While DeSantis is an extreme example, he is not alone. Displayed in large text behind the main stage, the slogan of CPAC 2022 was "Awake Not Woke." In a recent *Wall Street Journal* poll, fifty-five percent of likely 2024 GOP voters responded that "fighting woke ideology in our schools and businesses" was more personally important than "protecting Social Security and Medicare benefits from cuts."[2] Following in the tradition of terms like "political correctness," "cancel

[1] Rupar, Aaron. 2023. Twitter. April 19, 2023. https://twitter.com/atrupar/status/1648837843932856321?s=20
[2] https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/WSJ_Poll_April_2023_redacted.pdf

culture," and "cultural Marxism," "woke" now stands in for a range of socially progressive attitudes, increasingly stretching the meaning of the term beyond recognition.

But this intensification and proliferation of anti-wokeness among American actors has been accompanied by a far more interesting and unexpected trend–the diffusion of the discourse to parallel conservative and far-right movements abroad. During a 2021 interview, Viktor Orbán noted the growth of the "woke movement" in the west, connected the movement to Marxism, and then said "we, in central Europe, are vaccinated against Marxism."[3] During the 2022 Italian general election campaign, Brothers of Italy leader Giorgia Meloni railed against "woke ideologies."[4] At the 2021 conference of the British Conservative party, co-chair Oliver Dowden decried both "woke aggression" and "cancel culture," before asserting that the British Labour party "has got woke running through it like a stick of Brighton rock."[5] During his campaign for the Conservative Party leadership, Rishi Sunak vowed to stop the "woke nonsense…permeat[ing] public life."[6]

Most interesting has been the importation of anti-woke discourse into France. Fully absent from French political vocabulary until late 2020, *wokisme* has since become the basis of entire think tanks (L'Observatoire du Wokisme, Le Laboratoire de la République), parliamentary hearings (Senat Publique 2022), and conferences (Magal 2023). During the months leading up to the 2022 French Presidential elections, both Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour frequently

[3] *About Hungary*. 2021. "PM Orbán: The 'Woke Movement' in the West is Increasing in Popularity." October 4, 2021. https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/pm-orban-the-woke-movement-in-the-west-is-increasing-in-popularity
[4] Dodman, Benjamin. 2022. "'Mother, Italian, Christian': Giorgia Meloni, Italy's far-right leader on the cusp of power." *France 24*. September 24, 2002. https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220924-mother-italian-christian-giorgia-meloni-italy-s-far-right-leader-on-the-cusp-of-power
[5] Mason, Rowena, Jessica Elgot and Aubrey Allegretti. 2021. "Conservatives Take Aim at Cancel Culture and 'Woke Aggression.'" *The Guardian*. October 3, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/oct/03/conservatives-take-aim-at-cancel-culture-and-woke-aggression
[6] *Sky News*. 2022. "Tory Leadership Race: Rishi Sunak Vows to Stop 'Woke Nonsense and Left-Wing Agitators' in Latest Pledge." July 30, 2022. https://news.sky.com/story/tory-leadership-race-rishi-sunak-vows-to-stop-woke-nonsense-and-left-wing-agitators-in-latest-pledge-12661643

emphasized the threat *wokisme* posed to French culture; even as the Russian invasion of Ukraine sparked fears over national security and energy reserves, far-right candidates continued to invoke the less tangible dangers of *wokisme*.

This increasingly international trajectory of wokeness raises a series of questions that are critical for understanding the dynamics of the contemporary global far right, international diffusion processes between political parties and activists, and the increasingly globalized cultural war more generally. Why has this term, so steeped in the particulars of American race relations and contemporary domestic protest movements, spread to countries with vastly dissimilar histories and demographics? Why would the French, long innovators and exporters in the field of far-right ideas, look to the Americans for an effective message? Why is the American far right exercising sudden influence abroad?

In this paper, we offer an in-depth case study tracing the diffusion of wokeness from the American to French far right. Though the concept of wokeness already existed in France for a number of years, it was only *after* the American right began to position themselves as an "anti-woke" party in mid- to late-2020 that the French right imitated the same language. The imported moral panic surrounding *wokisme* became one of the most dominant themes of the 2022 French presidential elections, allowing far-right candidates to capitalize on an existential, “globalist” threat to the survival of the nation. We also provide two additional "shadow" cases of diffusion: the first, regarding the adoption of "Stop the Steal" conspiracy theories during the 2022 French presidential and legislative elections; and second, the establishment of a French truckers convoy (*Convoi de la Liberté)*. Though these latter incidents were less widespread than anti-*wokisme* discourse, they also illustrate cases of diffusion where the adopted strategy had no logical application in France—they only *became* logical in the context of a broader transnational movement.

While the US-French dyad is a least-likely case for a number of reasons, the specific discourse of anti-wokeness was well-suited to French conditions, not just among the far right, but across the political spectrum. Within France, anti-wokeness (anti-*wokisme*) can be termed a resonant discourse (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988). Specifically it resonates with particular interpretations of *laïcité* (French constitutional secularism), Republican values, and universal citizenship that demand a color-blind, gender-blind, and religion-blind orientation. But as the historian and journalist James McAuley has pointed out, these lofty ideals do not map onto the actual exercise of state power by the French government, or to the lived realities of racial and sexual minorities within France.[7]

Additionally, in the case of wokeness, a mainstream priming dynamic occurred. In an influential article, Bale (2018) argued that the British Conservatives occupied a eurosceptic and populist position prior to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), thus helping prepare the ground for the latter's success. Even when David Cameron tried to lead the Tories toward a more moderate position, the popularization and validation of this political approach meant that the combination of euroscepticism and populism could not so easily be put back in the bottle. This created an opportunity for UKIP to wage a successful eurosceptic and nativist campaign. Likewise in this case, the initial thrust of anti-*wokisme* from the Macron government sent a strong signal, constituting a similar mainstream priming within France. Later, after Macron and his government walked back their position, a strong demand for anti-*wokisme* remained, to be capitalized on by Le Pen, Zemmour, and the French far right.

But, while frame resonance and mainstream priming go a long way toward explaining the trajectory of anti-*wokisme* in France, alone these factors fail to account for the more wide-ranging selection of themes that have spread from the US to France over the past few years. That trend

[7] McAuley, James. 2021. "Europe's War on Woke." *The Nation*. November 29, 2021. https://www.thenation.com/article/world/woke-europe-structural-racism/

requires something more than just the particular fit of wokeness within French culture, or the sequence in which particular actors took up opposition to it.

To explain this broader cycle of diffusion from the US to France, we argue that the election of Donald Trump produced an unprecedented *attribution of similarity* (McAdam and Rucht 1993) between the American and French radical rights, something that had not existed in the postwar period. After an initial period of tentative engagement, relational ties between the French and American far rights were built between the period of 2017 to 2022. While it is unclear whether diffusion occurred directly via these connections, relational ties help to cement attributions of similarity, which strengthens the propensity for diffusion. In other words, the established relationships helped the French far right to gain confidence that the American right was increasingly becoming a relevant peer worth paying attention to and emulating.

Our findings suggest three broad conclusions regarding the contemporary far right, considered as a transnational phenomenon. First, the diffusion of themes and discourse among far-right movements is likely more widespread than assumed. While we present only anecdotal evidence to support this conclusion, it follows logically from our "least-likely" research design. For reasons outlined in more detail below, the American-French dyad is an unlikely pair for transnational far-right diffusion. We encourage future research investigating the strength of diffusion across other relevant dyads, expecting confirmation of our results.

Second, our findings suggest an increasing influence of American actors and ideas among global far-right networks. This trend contrasts with nearly the entire postwar history of the movement.[8] While this newfound influence is most apparent in the increased global focus on wokeness, it can be observed in other examples. QAnon, a conspiracy theory with American origins, has spread to many parts of the world. The January 6th insurrection was influential in

[8] While Kaplan and Weinberg (1998) observe a similar shift happening in the 1990s, their study focuses on *extreme* right parties and groups, rather than *radical* right parties and groups.

inspiring two coup attempts, one in Brazil and another in Germany. The Danube Institute, which is closely tied to the Orban regime, recently brought Christopher Rufo for a month-long stay in Budapest.[9] Rufo was the architect of the American right's anti-Critical Race Theory campaigns, and his expertise is considered relevant by the Hungarian right, despite the fact that recent estimates put the country's black population below 10,000.[10]

Third, diffusion generally, and specifically the diffusion of American themes and practices has important practical significance, primarily in its potential for the spread of democratic erosion. The ideas and tactics we observe in this paper are neither random nor neutral, all involve some challenge to democratic legitimacy, trust in institutions, and minority rights. This suggests that, not only does the American far right have global influence, but that that influence is pernicious. This finding suggests a need to rethink the notion of American "soft power," which has long been associated with a beneficent, liberalizing influence abroad.

The paper proceeds in four parts. First, a literature review outlines the debate over whether to consider far-right parties and movements as "independent" or "interdependent" phenomena. While strong theoretical arguments exist in favor of the interdependence position (Rydgren 2005; van Hauwaert 2014), few empirical analyses (let alone detailed case studies) demonstrate interdependence in action. Our research offers a first step in this direction, using a "least-likely" dyad to maximize the theoretical import of our empirical evidence. Second, we describe the logic driving this case study methodology, justifying the classification of the US-French dyad as a least likely case for diffusion and identifying the "countervailing conditions" which make diffusion from the American to French far right unexpected. Third, we discuss the case in depth, identifying flows of discourse between the American and French far rights between

[9] Losonczi, Márton. 2023. "Illustrious Speakers Tackle Critical Race Theory, Wokeism at Danube Institute Event." *Hungarian Conservative*. March 28, 2023. https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/current/critical_race_theory_danube_institute_event/

[10] Kovacs, Kasia. 2020. "Hungary's African Immigrants Hope for #BLM Reckoning." *POLITICO*. August 6, 2020. https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-african-immigrants-hope-for-black-lives-matter-reckoning/

2017 and 2023. Finally, we conclude by considering the implications of our analysis for the nascent literature on the transnational far right and the need to grapple with the increasingly corrosive turn taken by American soft power.

Literature Review

In 1993, Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht wrote "current theory and research on social movements continue to treat these movements as discrete entities, rather than to focus on the ways in which activists in one struggle borrow elements from other similar groups" (McAdam and Rucht 1993, 56). What was true of the study of social movements in 1993 remains true of the study of the far right in 2023.

Despite being conceived as members of a "party family" (Mair and Mudde 1998), far-right parties are typically understood to represent independent cases developing in isolation from one another (Rydgren 2005). Both their characteristic features and their outcomes (whether electoral success or influence on policy) are explained by reference to international structural forces or discrete, national-level variables–not processes of interaction between the parties themselves. Although usually portrayed as diametrically opposed approaches, both "supply" and "demand" theories share this "independence hypothesis" (van Hauwaert 2014).

The demand-side approach accounts for similarities between these parties as the result of common reactions to international social forces, most commonly neoliberalism, post-industrialization, economic shocks of various kinds (Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995; Rodrik 2018), democratic deficits (Müller 2016; Berezin 2019), or the collapse of the left (Berman 2016; Piketty 2018). While the parties are held to interact with an international structure in a way that is determinative of their identity, salient characteristics, and level of success, they are assumed *not* to interact with each other in a way that meaningfully influences these outcomes. Doing so would

undermine the core causal logic at work in each of these structural accounts. While demand approaches are effective in explaining broad brush trends, they struggle to provide explanations for national-level deviations. In particular, two questions are difficult to explain from a demand perspective: 1) Why do parties that are similarly situated (vis-a-vis international, macro-level structures and national-level socio-economic variables) arrive at different outcomes? 2) Why do differently situated parties arrive at similar outcomes?

The turn toward the supply-side that occurred in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Carter 2005, de Lange 2007; Mudde 2010; Art 2011; de Lange and Art 2011; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015) sought to correct for the overly structural orientation of demand theories, focusing on the agential role of the far-right parties themselves. Yet, while the supply-side approach excels at explaining national outcomes on a case-by-case basis and filling in the gaps of the more structural demand-side approach, it lacks the ability to explain cross-national trends. Arguably, this is a critical shortcoming given the tendency of the populist far right to recur in a cross-national wave pattern (von Beyme 1988). Supply-side explanations are not inconsistent with the wave phenomenon, but–given their focus on the internal characteristics of parties and their leaders–they cannot explain cross-national patterns in supply without recourse to some ad-hoc set of supplementary factors. So, while the supply-side approach is often presented as an advance over the demand-side approach (Mudde 2010), it is even more committed to the independence hypothesis than the demand approach.

Given that the demand and supply approaches share this independence assumption, it is unsurprising that, for the most part, scholars of the far right either downplay or ignore the significance of transnational dynamics. In a famous chapter that painstakingly catalogs explanations for the success of populist far-right politics, Eatwell does not mention diffusion, emulation, or transnational networks (Eatwell 2003). In 2007, Mudde observed that

"international cooperation among populist radical right parties has thus far received little academic attention," lamenting that this neglect had led to a domination of the subject by "antifascists and freelance journalists" who engage in "grotesque misrepresentations" and "bizarre conspiracy theories" (Mudde 2007, 158). Zaslove (2008) argued for understanding the radical right as an "anti-globalization movement" claiming that opposition to globalization was central to these parties' platforms. Zaslove even linked European far-right resistance to globalization with the fear of hegemonic American influence.

To the extent a literature on the relations between far-right parties exists, with only a few exceptions (Macklin 2013, Mammone 2015; McDonnell and Werner 2019) it focuses on the difficulties they face in working together, not on tracing the contours of their successful cooperation. Due to the institutional structure of European politics, much of this work focuses on the European Parliament. Many studies of the far right's activities in the European Parliament reached relatively far-ranging conclusions on its inability to work together, repeatedly pointing to these parties' failed attempts at cooperation, at times viewing this as an inherent outcome of the far right's nationalist commitments (Fieschi 2000; Minkenberg and Perrineau 2007; Startin 2010).

This scholarly neglect has largely persisted, despite the widespread media attention given to far-right transnational network activity such as the establishment of the European Parliament's Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group in 2015, Trump's relationship with Nigel Farage, the 2017 Koblenz conference, Steve Bannon's attempt to establish "The Movement" as a vehicle for uniting the European far right in Brussels, the sympathy shown to European far-right leaders by Trump's State Department, and the increasing internationalization of CPAC. In a recent review of the literature on linkages and cooperation among the radical right, Caiani writes that "there are few empirical analyses on the topic" (2018, 394).[11] Mudde's most recent book largely upholds his

[11] This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that much of the literature cited in Caiani's review focuses on the extreme right rather than the radical right. The claim is even more true of the radical right.

earlier views, taking the position that "despite alarmist accusations by some anti-fascists, and sensationalist stories by journalists, international collaborations between far-right activists and organizations have never been particularly successful" (2019, 64). Still, despite this relatively firm dismissal, Mudde's book is replete with examples of far-right transnational activities of various kinds. This includes a discussion of the diffusion of Defence League and PEGIDA groups (87), the American media's role in platforming and normalizing European far-right leaders (109), the influence of the Front National's Fifty-Point anti-immigration program on Filip Dewinter and the Vlaams Belang (115), global far-right mobilization in defense of Apartheid South Africa (115), and Orban's illiberal regime as a "model" for far-right actors in Europe and beyond (119). The disconnect between theory and practice suggests a need to look beyond international cooperation in formal organizations as the only standard for assigning importance to far-right transnational dynamics.

For a small group of scholars, the increasingly undeniable presence of transnational far-right interactions has forced a reexamination of these issues. McDonnell and Werner provide a necessary corrective to work on the European Parliament that underplayed the far-right's potential for cooperation, attributing the historic lack of cooperation to a strategic divide between "respectable radicals" and "proud populists," rather than to fixed, essential attributes of the parties themselves. They conclude that "international connections between radical right populists are increasing both in quantity and in quality" (2019, 197).

In a significant step forward, one of the most visible scholars of the far right, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, wrote an entire article devoted to the "global dimensions of populist nationalism" (2019). While Miller-Idriss effectively laid out a set of distinctions highlighting several plausible angles by which scholars might address the topic, more telling was the relative dearth of existing research available to populate the various categories of research she outlined. The section most

relevant for our purposes, "cross-national imitation of populist tactics," relied on a single article (Hogan and Haltinner 2015). While operating as both a future-oriented articulation of a research agenda and a review essay, the prospective dimension of Miller-Idriss's article is much stronger than the retrospective.

Given this intellectual backdrop, how should researchers interested in transnational dynamics and an interdependent conception of far-right politics proceed? A small, dissident tradition exists, revealing a potential path forward. In 2005, Swedish sociologist Jens Rydgren asked whether the populist far right was "contagious" (Rydgren 2005). Arguing yes, Rydgren attributed the revival of the postwar European far right to a transformation of the movement's "master frame." In order to compete in the transformed landscape of European politics, the far right had abandoned its previous formula of biological racism and overtly anti-democratic appeals, opting for a new combination of populism and culturally-based xenophobia. According to Rydgren, this master frame originated with the French Front National (between 1983 and 1984) and gradually diffused throughout Europe via emulation and learning. While Rydgren's article became influential, it was more widely cited for its claims about the *content* of the far right's novel "master frame" rather than for its more radical claims about the *interdependent* nature of far-right politics.

Recently this more radical dimension has received attention. In a series of articles, Steven van Hauwaert advanced Rydgren's thesis, offering a more sustained theoretical statement of interdependence and its far-reaching implications (2014), providing an approximate timeline of master frame adoption for European radical right parties (2018), and developing a formal model of emulation and learning between parties (2019). Despite these contributions and the persuasiveness of van Hauwaert's theoretical arguments for interdependence, detailed empirical work tracing diffusion processes remains lacking. Moreover, both Rydgren and van Hauwaert

focus exclusively on master frame diffusion, leaving exchanges between parties that occur after master frame adoption unexamined.

Overall, it is not surprising that the study of the far right has resisted an understanding of the phenomenon that embraces the independence conceptualization championed by Rydgren and van Hauwaert. Despite its interdisciplinary character (Arzheimer 2018, 3), the study of the far right remains dominated by comparative political scientists, and even more particularly, specialists in the area of political parties and elections. At a fundamental level, the comparative study of elections requires treating outcomes as independent rather than interdependent. After all, the independence of observations is one of the requirements for linear regression per the Gauss-Markov assumptions. Treating the far right as interdependent, would derail a major tool of the quantitative comparative study of election outcomes and so it is reasonable that scholars working in this tradition would not want to hastily concede the interdependence of outcomes.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that a methodological concern about the study of elections would have such a profound influence on the study of the far right, but this is understandable given the field's tendency toward what Pietro Castelli Gattinara calls "electoralism," or "a limited focus on elections and campaigning" (Castelli Gattinara 2020, 322). Again, the dominance of the political parties and election studies subfield fixes and delimits the agenda of the field.

From this perspective, the increasing move toward the study of the "non-party sector" of the far right is a promising development (Veugelers and Menard 2018). However, overcoming electoralism is not simply a matter of conducting proportionately more research on movements of the far right. While this could tip the balance toward a more complete understanding of how far-right ideas and policies attain broader awareness and influence within society, it would leave key dynamics of far-right political parties unexamined. For this reason, a more thorough rejection

of electoralism requires not just the *study* of movements, but treating the far right (including far-right political parties) *as* a social movement (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018). This is particularly appropriate given the far right's tendency to take the form of movement parties (Kitschelt 2006; Pirro and Castelli Gattinara 2018).

Treating the far right as a social movement opens up the field more directly to the intellectual toolbox of social movement studies, which includes a robust tradition of thinking about the international and transnational components of protest and contentious politics (Klandermans 1992; McAdam and Rucht 1993; Soule 2004; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Tarrow 2005; Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010). Along these same lines, the slow but discernible move toward engagement with the far right and populism among some International Relations scholars (Drolet and Williams 2018; Stengel, MacDonald, and Nabers 2019; Subotic 2022) also creates an opportunity for moving beyond both electoralism and the methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller 2002; Adamson 2016) implied by the independence assumption.

Despite recent moves toward engagement with the far right as a transnational phenomenon it is still a subject we know little about, as well as one dramatically under-examined in proportion to the massive literature on the far right more generally. Our paper is meant to begin to redress this neglect. Our arguments provide several critical interventions into the body of literature described above. First, we build upon the turn toward treating the far right as a social movement (Gattinara and Pirro 2018), doing so is not a matter of taste or preference, but a critical move allowing access to the rich body of literature outlined in the previous paragraph. Of course, we move one step beyond the established position in treating the far right as a *transnational* social movement.

Second, we supplement the theoretical vision laid out by Rydgren and van Hauwaert, addressing the heretofore neglect of detailed empirical narratives in the articulation of an interdependent vision of far-right politics.

Third, although we choose a single case study approach as the most appropriate means of addressing this problem of sufficient empirical detail, by selecting a least-likely case, we maximize the salience of our results for broader discussions of far-right transnational activity and the interdependence thesis. In other words, a least-likely case is much more difficult to dismiss as an outlier, meaningless anomaly, or mere noise in the data.

Fourth, the typical move has been to think about transnationalism as a potentially important (if unproven) cause of the far right.[12] Instead, we provide a framework for thinking about how transnationalism can also be important for the *consequences* produced by the far right–specifically, how the spread of ideas and tactics that threaten democracy can diffuse. While the majority of our analysis is an exercise in hypothesis-testing based on the logic of crucial cases, this particular point about consequences and the threat to democracy should be thought of more as providing a "plausibility probe" of the phenomenon (Eckstein 1975; Levy 2008).

America → France as a "Least Likely" Case

While political science methodologists are divided on the value of single case studies for theory-testing, an enduring methodological tradition has held that particular types of cases are "crucial" for theory-testing (Eckstein 1992 [1975]; Levy 2008; Rapport 2015). There are two different ways for cases to be crucial. First, a case can be crucial because it is seen as a "most-likely" case for a theory to apply. A theory's failure to survive a test on a most-likely case

[12] Caiani (2018, 394) writes: "internationalization processes are an important explanation for the recent dynamism of right-wing extremism in many West European democracies." Implicit in Rydgren's (2005) analysis seems to be the claim that master frame diffusion helped spur the revival of far-right political parties in Europe beginning in the 1980s.

provides *strong discrediting* evidence against the theory. Second, a case can be crucial because it is a "least-likely" site for a theory's application. If a theory survives a test on a least-likely case, this presents *strong confirmatory* evidence for a theory's validity and generalizability. Our paper relies on this tradition of "crucial case" case study methodology, classifying the US-France dyad as a least-likely case for interdependence.

The origins of our methodological approach lie in Eckstein's famous chapter on case study methodology (1992 [1975]), in which he introduced the category of "crucial cases" and outlined the analytical leverage provided by both least-likely and most-likely cases.[13] Although Eckstein's views evolved over the course of his career, leading toward more interest in case-matching comparative approaches, as of the 1992 republication of his famous chapter, he still stood by his earlier view that single case studies "can have powerful, even conclusive, theoretical results" (1992 [1975], 118). In particular, the least-likely case was, according to Eckstein, "especially tailored to confirmation" (1992 [1975], 158).

More recently, Jack S. Levy (2008) provided an especially clear articulation of least-likely case study methodology:

> If one's theoretical priors suggest that a particular case is unlikely to be consistent with a theory's predictions—either because the theory's assumptions and scope conditions are not fully satisfied or because the values of many of the theory's key variables point in the other direction—and if the data supports the theory, then the evidence from the case provides a great deal of leverage for increasing our confidence in the validity of the theory. (Levy 2008, 12).

Levy memorably characterizes this logic of inquiry as "Sinatra inference," based on the Chairman of the Board's lyrics in "New York, New York" – "if I can make it there I can make it anywhere." Our least-likely classification operates on two levels. If far-right interdependence can "make it" in the

[13] Lijphart's (1971, 691) discussion of "theory-confirming" case studies also represents an early attempt to articulate this logic of inquiry.

American-French dyad, then it can make it anywhere; if American influence can "make it" in France, then it can make it anywhere.[14]

While the potential inferential power of a least-likely case study method is great, there is also a great burden on the researcher to justify the least-likely status of the case. The evidentiary strength attributed to the findings rises in direct proportion to the strength of the argument for its least-likely status. The primary means of establishing the least-likely status of a case is through the identification of "countervailing conditions," any variables present which would decrease "the probability the researcher will observe the outcome posited by the theory being tested" (Rapport 2015, 434).

In the rest of this section, we identify a broad array of countervailing conditions establishing the US-France dyad as a least-likely case for interdependence. We divide our countervailing conditions into three categories: "why France is an unlikely receiver," "why the US is an unlikely sender," and "why the two are an unlikely pair." Jointly, the conditions identified across these three bins present a strong argument *against* the US-France dyad as a likely case of interdependence. On the basis of this least-likely classification, our empirical findings (robust diffusion from the US to France) provide strong evidence for the interdependence thesis, suggesting more thorough investigation of other cases will turn up additional examples of diffusion and emulation among the far right.

Why France is an unlikely receiver

[14] "Anywhere" as well as our least-likely classification should not be misinterpreted in overly global terms. To clarify, our universe of cases is limited to relatively wealthy democracies with a modern populist far-right movement. Within this delimited set, Greece, with its consistently low favorability toward the US and similarly low levels of English proficiency, might rival France for least-likely status. Still, most and least likely cases are always subject to qualification and contention (Rapport 2015). More importantly, our logic of inquiry is not based on France being the absolutely least-likely case possible, just on the notion that it poses an extraordinarily hard "test" for the interdependence thesis and that most relevant cases would pose substantially less severe tests.

For several reasons, France is an unlikely receiver. At least since the revolution of 1789, France has been seen as a *source* of radical, potentially dangerous and destabilizing ideas. In some cases, this has even been true. Republican ideals did spread across Europe, undermining the strength of monarchism and diffusing support for natural rights and democracy. Later, Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras were all important (and underappreciated) influences in the development of fascism.

In terms of more narrowly intellectual ideas, which are nonetheless important for discussing *wokisme* and its discontents, France has also been a prolific exporter. Structuralism, a necessary precursor for the development of *structural* racism, is a tradition of primarily French vintage. Of the major pioneers of structuralism, only Ferdinand de Saussure was not French, although he was Swiss francophone. The American "racialist" views now seen to threaten France claim as influences several black Francophone thinkers, including Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Of course, while Critical Race Theory and Wokism are now presented as the intellectual trends threatening to undermine objectivity and corrupt the youth, postmodernism and poststructuralism performed a similar role in right-wing anti-intellectual and anti-education discourses not long ago, and those traditions were almost exclusively French in origin.

Pioneering theorists and practitioners of contemporary populist radical right politics were French. The Nouvelle Droite performed some of the most significant intellectual work in the transition from the "old" prewar right to the new right that continues to operate today (Bar-On 2008). This remains true even if much of today's populist right is unfamiliar with the ideas and work of Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye.

While the Nouvelle Droite did not have any immediate impact on politically-relevant conservative actors in the United States, its ideas now exert a large influence on American far-right politics. Many ideas of not only the Nouvelle Droite but its successor movements, the identitarians and the grand replacement, now enjoy broad purchase in American culture. This is

true on both the extreme and the radical right. European identitarianism was a primary influence on the American "alt-right," particularly Richard Spencer. Andrew Breitbart's famous dictum that "politics is downstream from culture" echoes the right-wing Gramscianism of Benoist and the Nouvelle Droite.

Specific French ideas have spread to become a major part of global far-right discourse. "Ethnopluralism" was a major influence on the American "alt-right" and increasingly forms a core of ethnonationalist, xenophobic political movements around the world. In offering a culturally-based justification for the separation of "the races" it lends plausibility against accusations of racism while enabling the promotion of policies dramatically limiting immigration.

A related idea, "*le grand remplacement*," asserts that elites in western countries are seeking to replace their native populations with immigrants who will be more receptive to left-wing ideas and more docile in the face of government tyranny. The conspiracy theory has spread among the far-right across Europe as well as in the United States. The Great Replacement has reached beyond American extremist circles into the mainstream of the Republican establishment. Iowa Congressman Steve King tweeted "we can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies," and later endorsed the Great Replacement in an interview with a far-right magazine in Austria. The Great Replacement has repeatedly been given a sympathetic hearing by the most popular cable news host in America–Tucker Carlson. Steven Miller and Steve Bannon demonstrated familiarity with *The Camp of the Saints*, a French dystopian novel predating, but consonant with Camus's Great Replacement.[15] Bannon also claimed to be deeply influenced by Charles

[15] Garcia-Navarro, Lulu. 2019. "Stephen Miller And 'The Camp Of The Saints,' A White Nationalist Reference." *NPR*. November 19, 2019. https://www.npr.org/2019/11/19/780552636/stephen-miller-and-the-camp-of-the-saints-a-white-nationalist-reference

Maurras–the early twentieth century French ultra-nationalist and key intellectual influence in the development of fascism.[16]

Scholarship on the party family of the populist radical right generally shares a view that the French Front National holds a special preeminence as an innovator and influence on other parties. In one of the most influential works on the topic, Kitschelt and McGann (1995) described the FN as the "prototype" of Europe's new populist far right. Several scholars have acknowledged the party's role as a *pater familias* (Backes 1996; Ignazi 1997). The only two authors to seriously investigate the significance of diffusion among far-right parties have both held that the French Front National was the originator of a novel "master frame" and that that frame gradually diffused from France to the other populist far-right parties of Europe (Rydgren 2005; van Hauwaert 2018). It is even generally acknowledged that some policy positions have diffused from the Front National to other far-right parties. For example, Vlaams Belang's "70-point program" is seen as an imitation of Jean-Marie Le Pen's "Fifty Measures to Help Manage the Problem of Immigrants" (Coffé 2005; Mudde 2019). All of this suggests that the French far right party-sector is more accustomed to spreading its ideas, not adopting them from abroad.

The past few examples, demonstrating the longstanding influence of French actors (especially the Nouvelle Droite and the Front National) on the broader international radical right movement, provide only indirect evidence for France's status as an "unlikely receiver." They rest on the implicit assumption that because France is a longtime prolific "sender" it therefore has little need to "receive." But couldn't this be interpreted in the opposite way? If the French far right is so central to the global network, then perhaps it has an unusual propensity to learn from parties and movements in other countries as well. Network science distinguishes between incoming and

[16] France-Amérique. 2017. "La source française du Trumpisme." February 16, 2017. https://france-amerique.com/the-french-source-of-trumpism/

outgoing hubs.[17] There are no *a priori* reasons for thinking that an outgoing hub would *ipso facto* be an incoming hub. While this poses a potential weakness in the design when considered in isolation, we think that the full range of countervailing conditions assembled here provide a clear picture of the French far right as a quintessential outgoing hub, with no evidence of widespread incoming ties (sources of outside influence).

Finally, given the persistent stigmatization of old-fashioned forms of biological racism and direct interpersonal racial discrimination during the postwar period, among even the most racist Americans, few are willing to openly identify as racist. Consequently, one of the functions served by the anti-woke discursive frame is the ability to express an anti-anti-racist view without conceding open racism. This is evident in the fact that American anti-woke and closely related anti-"Critical Race Theory" initiatives have resulted in the bans of books about the civil rights movement, the novels of Toni Morrison, a children's book about Ruby Bridges, and some children's fiction with racially-diverse casts of characters. Anti-woke campaigners frame these efforts as necessary defenses against a liberal indoctrination of youth, while opponents of the restrictive measures see them as cynical attempts to enforce a vision of American history that centers white voices and downplays narratives that recognize racial injustice.

Importantly, this far-right understanding of education is not an American innovation. The broad contours of this same critique of anti-racist education have been present in France for decades, with the French far right being even more explicit about their understanding of the problem and the rationale behind combating it. This raises questions as to why the French far right would look abroad for a similar idea. In 1998, Bruno Gollnisch (then Jean-Marie Le Pen's chief lieutenant in the FN) gave an interview to the white nationalist magazine *American*

[17] Nykamp, Duane Q. N.D. "The degree distribution of a network." *Math Insight*. Accessed April 21, 2023. https://mathinsight.org/degree_distribution

Renaissance. In it, he outlined a view of French education that should sound familiar to contemporary American observers:

> But to return to the hostility we face, given that 97 percent of the media in this country are in the hands of the groups I have described [communists], this hostility is pounded into people's heads with all the power of propaganda. I would say that for children from the very youngest age, they get courses in history that are truncated or falsified, they have obligatory courses in anti-racism. There are even exhibitions on the Second World War that show concentration camps and then end with photographs of Le Pen! That was the case with the Anne Frank exhibition. It's just incredible.[18]

More so than the other examples, this one illustrates directly that the French far right had been alert to a threat posed by organized anti-racism for an extended period, and that it connected this threat directly to education and the vilification of its own ideas and personalities. Armed with both general and specific ideas relevant to anti-*wokisme*, why would France follow the Americans lead in determining when and how they talked about this issue?

Why America is an unlikely sender

Just as there are strong reasons to view France as an unlikely receiver of far-right ideas, there are equally strong reasons to view the United States as an unlikely sender. First, as a whole, Americans are relative newcomers to the world of far-right political networkers, at least of the specific milieu occupied by Europe's populist radical right parties. Americans have been involved in extreme right networks with Europeans for the past few decades (Wright 2009), but even this was seen as an exceptionally novel phenomenon as late as the 1990s (Kaplan and Weinberg 1998). The only precedent for radical or mainstream Republican engagement with populist radical right Europeans was through the transnational "counter-jihad movement" (Pertwee 2017; 2020). Though the counter-jihad movement did not produce an exporting of American ideas, but rather a genuine transnational engagement between actors representing a diverse set of countries.

[18] AR Staff. "Bruno Gollnisch Fights for France." *American Renaissance.* November 1998. https://www.amren.com/news/2020/01/bruno-gollnisch-jean-marie-le-pen-national-front/

Second, the American right traditionally has operated in a tradition somewhat at odds with the European radical right. The Anglo-American emphasis on limited government has traditionally garnered negligible interest among the continental European right, which has always been more statist or openly authoritarian in orientation. In his influential study, political theorist Louis Hartz concluded that American political thought was characterized by a broad, shared Lockean consensus and that this reduced the range of possibilities available within the American context (Hartz 1991 [1955]). More recently neoconservative writer Matthew Continetti has asserted that the revolutionary origins of the United States produced an idiosyncratic trajectory for American conservatism, in the sense that the major traditional institutions that needed to be conserved (aristocracy, state religion) were absent in America, leading to a more anti-institutional and populist conservatism (Continetti 2022). In other words, both the intellectual resources of the Anglo-American tradition, and the sociological configuration of American society pushed the American right in the direction of an oppositional, anti-authority posture. This tendency was strengthened even more by the dominance of the Democratic Party from 1932 to 1980.

Even on the more extreme fringes of the American right, many of the movements that have flourished outside the Republican mainstream bear little resemblance to those that have long been more prevalent in Europe. The quintessential American far-right movement, the militia/patriot movement is difficult to extricate from the particulars of idiosyncratic American anti-government and pro-gun cultural traditions and finds little relevance or resonance in Europe

Finally, reporting on Steve Bannon's political activities in Europe from 2018 to 2019 suggested not just an isolated lack of reception to the individual initiative he was pitching ("The Movement"), but a more generalized resistance to American engagement with European far-right politics more generally. Marine Le Pen herself said Bannon "was playing no role in our

campaign."[19] Appearing at a joint press conference with Mateo Salvini, Le Pen elaborated further: "Bannon is not European. He is American…but it is us and only us who will shape the political force resulting from European elections."[20] The French in particular, and Europeans more generally, may harbor a resistance towards Americans becoming too involved in European politics.

Why the two are an unlikely pair

"Proximal models" of diffusion predict that "actors mimic others who are spatially or culturally relevant to them" (Soule 2004). From this perspective, the American-French dyad is unusual.

France has a long history of anti-Americanism. In a book-length study of the topic, Philippe Roger found anti-Americanism to be a deeply rooted cultural pillar of French society. Americans have long served as the "other" against which the French define themselves. For the French left, Americans were gauche and crudely consumerist, for the French right, Americans represented a sort of soulless decadence. Undoubtedly, this self-other relation was exacerbated in the aftermath of World War II as the United States rose to global military and cultural hegemony, while the French lost their colonies, for all intents and purposes lost their great power status, and lost much of their former linguistic and cultural influence and prestige. Traces of such sentiments still register in survey data. A 2022 study by the Pew Research Center found France to have the highest percentage of respondents (among European countries) reporting an "unfavorable" view of the United States.[21] Political scientist Sophie Meunier identified seven distinct forms of French anti-Americanism (2005). Even if we accept that French resistance to American cultural influence

[19] Hosenball, Mark. 2020. "Steve Bannon's Effort to Export His Fiery Popularism to Europe Is Failing." *Reuters*. September 2, 2020. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-bannon-europe/steve-bannons-effort-to-export-his-fiery-popularism-to-europe-is-failing-idUSKBN25T1NZ

[20] *RFI*. 2018."Le Pen, Salvini Reject Bannon's European Movement." September 10, 2018. https://www.rfi.fr/en/europe/20181009-le-pen-steve-bannon-mateo-salvini-europe-donald-trump-far-right

[21] It is worth noting that the French numbers have fluctuated greatly over the period of available data (2000-2022).

is driven more a defense of French national interests and culture rather than any deeper seated anti-American antipathy (Keohane and Katzenstein 2007; Meunier 2007), this does not weaken the case for treating the American-French dyad as a "least likely" case for far-right diffusion. What matters for classifying the case as least likely is the history of resistance to American influence. Strictly speaking, the motivations for that resistance are irrelevant for our purposes. Bottom line: the French are unusually prone to mobilizations to defend themselves against American influence.

Especially relevant for the topic of diffusion, a 2018 study found that France had the lowest English proficiency of any country in the European Union.[22] French resistance to English language. While we are not aware of any data definitively demonstrating that the French far right has an even lower level of English proficiency, it would be surprising for it to be otherwise. The French far right has a long history of anti-Americanism (Fennema and Pollmann 1998). As recently as 2017, Marine Le Pen referred to the increasing usage of English among European leaders as "cowardice of our own elites who enable this capitulation of our cultures."[23]

Finally, the foreign policy positions of the French far right have included views that make recent receptivity to American influence even more puzzling. The Front National opposed both US interventions in Iraq. During the first, Jean-Marie Le Pen actually traveled to Iraq to personally negotiate with Saddam Hussein for the release of French hostages. Marine Le Pen framed the party's opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the grounds that "we don't want America as gendarme of the world."[24] During the early 2000s a Front National party document expressed opposition to the Maastricht Treaty on the grounds that it would result in "an ultra-liberalist, globalized economy under the influence of the United States, an economy which only caters to the profit of anonymous financial powers…Europe is the result of submission to the Hollywood

[22] *Euronews.* "Which EU countries are the best and worst at speaking English?" May, 11 2018. https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/03/which-eu-countries-are-the-best-and-worst-at-speaking-english
[23] Englehart, Katie. 2017. "The Meaning of a Meeting of Europe's Leading Nationalist Minds." February 14, 2017. https://macleans.ca/news/world/inside-a-meeting-of-the-minds-of-europes-most-powerful-nationalists/
[24] Lawday, David. 2003. "Papa's girl sings a new kind of music." *New Statesman*. May 5, 2003. Nexis Uni.

culture" (cited in Minkenberg and Perrineau 2007). To be clear, it is not that opposition to US wars or critiques of American-led globalized neoliberal capitalism automatically make a party or political tradition anti-American, it is just that when the theme resurfaces repeatedly over a range of issue areas, it creates a more puzzling situation were that party or political tradition suddenly to start drawing explicitly on American themes and narratives.

Limitations

One limitation of this case study design, particularly the claim that the American-French dyad represents a least-likely case for interdependence, is that both countries (unlike most of Europe) contain significant black minority populations, and more generally, are highly multicultural societies. Despite all countervailing conditions operating in this dyad, perhaps this one socio-cultural similarity is strong enough to overcome all of them on its own. This possibility is lent credence by the fact that "woke" (in its positive connotation) originated within the American black community. We deal with this counterfactual in our empirical section, showing that the timing of anti-*wokisme* discourse in France does not align with an organic reaction to the spread of activist discourses or mobilization from American to French minority communities.

A second limitation is that, although our study can demonstrate interdependence between the United States and France it cannot isolate a firm numerical effect of this on the election outcome. Nevertheless, we can show that *wokisme* played a central role in the 2022 elections. Most importantly, we can provide evidence that the French far right perceived the rhetoric of anti-*wokisme* to be electorally useful. Here again, attention to timing and sequence is critical. The fact that anti-*wokisme* picked up during an election campaign and not directly following French Black Lives Matter protests, suggests that the discourse was strategically deployed for electoral gain, not an organic reactionary response to domestic racial justice mobilization.

Case Study: Combatting *Wokisme*

> "A whole generation has been caught between *wokisme* and islamism."
>
> - Éric Zemmour, far-right politician and pundit, 2023

From the moment the term was coined, it took just under eighteen months for *wokisme* to become one of the most dominant themes in French far-right political discourse. First trickling into the country's conservative media in late 2020 and early 2021, *wokisme* – or more specifically, assertions of the existential threat it poses to the French nation – became a lightning rod around which candidates positioned themselves on the 2022 presidential campaign trail. It also represents a major case study in the evolution of the transnational culture war. The French right's rapid adoption of *wokisme* is an indicator of strategic diffusion.

In the French context, *wokisme* is an umbrella term for "leftist ideologies'' that question existing power structures and forms of discrimination. It serves as a near-identical copy of the American right's use of "critical race theory": both equate social justice with a fundamental attack on national history, tradition, and identity, and have billowed past their original meanings to the point that they are almost too broad for their users to define. Antiracism, feminism, postcolonialism, environmentalism, and LGBTQ+ rights all fall under the category of *wokiste*; it is commonly described as a kind of "deconstruction" of existing societal norms, which then risks a literal deconstruction of society itself. Some of the "ideologies" ascribed to *wokisme* have equivalents in the United States, while others, like the push to add gender-neutral components to an otherwise-heavily-gendered Romance language (*l'écriture inclusive*) are distinctly French.

Which makes the narrative framing around *wokisme* all the more puzzling: despite being a tactic borrowed from the American right, blame for *wokisme* is placed squarely on "globalist" forces in the American left. Major far-right figures Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, each candidates in the 2022 presidential elections, have described *wokisme* as a progressive "American

hysteria" (Le Pen 2021a) - one that "infected" American higher education and risks "contaminating" French society (Toulouse 2022).

Wokisme indeed finds its roots across the Atlantic. Its importation into France, however, was more strategic than Le Pen suggests, and much closer to home. An essential part of that journey *does* begin with "woke," the African-American Vernacular English word from which *wokisme* was adapted. "Woke," in its most basic sense, describes a way of being "aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)" (BBC 2017). Though "woke" has a long history in Black American culture, it entered into more widespread vocabulary across the United States with the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the 2014 Black Lives Matter protests that followed. Its use continued to grow, particularly in activist circles, over the following years, and was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2017. During this time, conservative groups in the United States largely refrained from a direct response to "woke," "wokeness," and "wokism," drawing instead on older classifications like "political correctness."

The murder of George Floyd in late May 2020 marked a turning point. As antiracist ideas and activism surged into the national spotlight, so, too, did backlash against them. The GOP began to position itself as an explicitly "anti-woke" party; "wokeness" (and, at the same time, "critical race theory") were increasingly cited as central enemies in America's culture war throughout the remainder of 2020 and 2021. At the Republican National Convention in August 2020, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) warned about the dystopian future posed by "woketopians": "It's a horror film.... nightmares are becoming real. Cops killed, children shot. ... We must fight to save America now or we may lose her forever" (NBC 2020). This speech coincided with then-president Donald Trump's first tweets about the dangers of wokeness (Trump Twitter Archive).

Four months later, *wokisme* made one of its first appearances in the French press. The conservative-leaning *Le Figaro* newspaper published an article in December 2020 entitled "Cancel culture,' 'woke' - when the American left goes mad" (Mandeville and Bastié 2020). At the time, *wokisme* was still described as something far away, a frenzy on the other side of the Atlantic, yet to arrive on French shores: "on American college campuses, [the woke movement] practices aggressive censorship in the name of the right to not be offended" (ibid). The article featured an interview with Sam Abrams, a professor of political science at Sarah Lawrence College and self-proclaimed "target" of woke ideology for his classroom conduct. Abrams admits to being envious of the "French approach," proclaiming to *Le Figaro* that "it's so nice to know that in France, parents can still tell their children that they're "a little boy" or a "little girl." In the US, someone would tell you: how dare you assign them a gender?" The interviewer ends with ominous speculation that "is the difference as big as Sam thinks? … [Perhaps] in France, just the same as in the US, this ideological warfare is just beginning" (ibid).[25]

By the first few months of 2021, French news media no longer considered *wokisme* an "Anglo-Saxon" problem. When *Time* magazine named Assa Traoré - lead activist in the Black Lives Matter movement in France, and sister of Adama Traoré, a Black man who died in police custody in 2016 – one of their 100 "Guardians of the Year," *Le Figaro* more directly accused "American media [of] apply[ing] its racialist reading lists to France" (cite). *Wokisme* was now a compounding series of leftist "dogmas… [being] imposed" on France, evident in incidents of teachers and students being "canceled" at different universities throughout the country (Pétreault 2021). A full moral panic set in by summertime.

It must be noted that – while the French far-right has been the loudest and most ominous supporter of anti-*wokiste* discourse – some of its early adopters were actually in the mainstream.

[25] *Le Figaro* also interviewed former *New York Times* activist Bari Weiss in November 2021 to to "warn French intellectuals against [wokist] ideological censorship" (Bastié 2021).

Initial French-language press coverage of *wokisme* came from solidly conservative-to-center-right publications *Le Figaro* and *Le Point*. Some of the first major figures to speak out against this "American phenomenon" came from the ostensibly-centrist government of President Emmanuel Macron, or within its immediate orbit. Sylvain Fort, who served as Macron's strategic communications advisor and speechwriter from 2017 to 2019, decried in a January 2021 op-ed for *Le Point* that "how naive we were to think that France, by nature, would be spared! Wokisme is not only already present in France, but it has become a French phenomenon, and it is here to stay" (Fort 2021). Then-Minister for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equality Elisabeth Moreno stated in an interview to Bloomberg in May 2021 that "the 'woke' culture is something very dangerous, and we shouldn't bring it to France" (Nussbaum 2021); similarly, in July 2021, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer announced the creation of a think tank to "defend the values of the [French] Republic" and "fight against 'cancel culture'… [and] *wokisme*," which he officially launched later that October (Gratian 2021). Appearing tough on *wokisme* needs to be understood in the context of the Macron government's strategy to "redirect to the right" in advance of his 2022 reelection bid (Werly 2020); criticizing so-called "leftist" politics put his *La République en March !*[26] party in a position to capture a wider swath of undecided centrist voters (Caulcutt 2021), as well as play off France's own culture war that had grown since the Islamist beheading of school teacher Samuel Paty in October 2020 (John 2022). Regardless, anti-*wokiste* discourse from such mainstream voices laid an important foundation. Just as the Tories' eurosceptic and populist campaigns of the early 2000s helped to prime the British public for UKIP's later more intensely nativist campaigns (Bale 2018). Macron and his inner circle helped to create the demand for anti-*wokiste* messaging that the French far right continue to profit from, even after the French mainstream tried to back off.

[26] Emmanuel Macron's political party, *La République en Marche !*, was renamed *Renaissance* in September 2022.

An IFOP survey in February 2021 showed that only 6% of respondents could offer a definition of what *wokisme* meant (IFOP 2021). But on the 2022 campaign trail, *wokisme* became a nationally-recognized synonym for the existential crisis facing French patrimony, identity, and culture. Marine Le Pen, Éric Zemmour, and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan – each far-right candidates in the 2022 presidential elections, representing the *Rassemblement National*, *Reconquête*, and *Debout la France* parties, respectively – scrambled to position themselves as true leaders of the French "nationalist right" crusade against *wokisme*. In September 2021, Marine Le Pen asserted that *wokisme* had begun to "infiltrate respectable institutions, claiming to combat a 'lack of diversity' through anti-white racism" (Le Pen 2021b). Soon after, Dupont-Aignan drew direct parallels between the *wokiste* fight in the US and France: "The same day that FranceInfo claims that *wokisme* is just reactionary posturing, New York City removed a statue of #Jefferson, one of the Founding Fathers. Everywhere is having the same assault on history. In France, socialists want to sweep [statues of] Napoleon out of Rouen. We must let nothing slide" (cite). Éric Zemmour took to Twitter – on the precipice of officially launching his campaign for president – to claim that *wokisme* was "in service of the Islamization of the Western world" (cite). He went on to explicitly assert a line of continuity between *wokisme* and previous far-right dog whistles: “Ideology can take a thousand shapes. Socialism. Communism. Antifascism. Antiracism. Wokisme. But no matter what we call it, it’s always the same" (cite).

It is important to note the clear break in who engaged in this discourse, and how. As discussed above, *wokisme* was far from the exclusive property of the far right – Macron himself explicitly stated that he "hate[s] this thing. I'm against woke culture" in March 2022, just weeks before the first round of voting (*Valeurs Actuelles* 2022). Anne Hidalgo (*Parti Socialiste*) and Sandrine Rousseau (*Europe Ecologie les Verts*) each expressed their discomfort at being labeled *wokiste* candidates. The French Senate also debated, at the request of the mainstream conservative

Les Républicains party, the threats that *wokisme* may pose to higher education (Sénat Public 2022). Yet there was a vast gulf with which politicians discussed *wokisme*: to left-leaning candidates, it was irrelevant posturing; to centrist and mainstream conservatives, it threatened free speech; and to far-right candidates, it threatened the survival of the French nation itself, and was a core feature of their campaigns. It was an immediate danger against which they defined themselves. As Marine Le Pen asserted in February 2022, "Macron is the incarnation of *wokisme*" (Le Pen 2022). This discursive gap was perhaps most obvious when Valérie Péresse, head of *Les Républicains* and established conservative, made an attempt to appeal to far-right voters at the launch of her presidential campaign. In her first official speech as a candidate, Pécresse repeatedly invoked *wokisme* alongside other dog whistles like the Great Replacement theory: "I will fight against *wokiste* movements, and all movements that seek to "deconstruct" us. Wokisme is a war between the races, between the sexes, a war on grammar, a war on history. It's the opposite of the Republic" (Soun 2022). Fellow party members strongly condemned Pécresse's use of such terminology, demanding that she "stop flirting with Zemmour voters" (Le Baron 2022).

This phenomenon did not end with the elections. Although Marine Le Pen ultimately lost to Macron – having earned her place in the run-off on April 24, 2022 after the first round on April 10 – she set a historic record for far-right vote share. The 2022 elections represented only the third time in history that a far-right candidate advanced to the run-offs: in 2002, her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen lost to Jacques Chirac with 17.79% of the vote; in 2017, Marine herself earned 33.90% of the vote against Macron. By comparison, in 2022, the *Rassemblement National* candidate climbed to 41.45 % of voters. While it's difficult to prove the role that *wokisme* played on its own, Le Pen's strategies – *wokisme* included – clearly resonated with French voters. The fact that far-right politicians and media in France have only further amplified their anti-*wokisme* language over the course of 2022 and 2023 show that they, too, see its popularity. Far-right pundits and essayists

have published an increasing number of books about the "intolerance" of the "woke religion" (Braunstein 2022), wokism's "contamination" of France (Toulouse 2022), "woke capitalism" (De Guigné 2022), "the courage… [of the] French spirit against wokism" (Levet 2022), and whether *wokisme* will become "totalitarianism" (Heinich 2023). In July 2022, far-right magazine *Valeurs Actuelles* ran a dedicated issue on "The Invasion of Woke Propaganda." Set against a rainbow flag background, the cover calls it the "Combat of the Century: How American giants imposed LGBT, racialist, neofeminist, and 'cancel culture' ideology" (*Valeurs Actuelles* 2022). Articles in the special issue draw a direct line of solidarity between the French and American far right, particularly in terms of the "cancelation" of certain celebrities and the removal of memorials depicting problematic figures from each country's history (De Beketch, 19). They also expressed admiration for Florida governor Ron DeSantis in his fight against "wokists" at Disney: "Amidst this global battle between conservatives and progressives, Florida is proving that the war isn't yet lost" (ibid, 21).

Figure 1. *Wokisme* cover stories in *Valeurs Actuelles*

Three special issues on wokisme published in far-right magazine Valeurs Actuelles over the course of 6-7 months. Left to right: "The Invasion of Woke Propaganda" (July 2022), "The Anti-Woke Revolution Has Begun" (December 2022), and "Wokism, the New Tyranny" (January 2023).

On April 12, 2023, the *Rassemblement National* launched a new legislative group with the sole and explicit aim of fighting against the "*wokiste* monster"; on April 21, it held a conference alongside other far-right civil society groups on the theme of "leading the fight against wokist ideology" (TF1 2023). Among the early reactions to the conference were that it was copying Éric Zemmour (Le Gal 2023) - his *Reconquête* party held a near-identical event on "anti-wokism" two and a half weeks prior (Magal 2023). *Wokisme* isn't disappearing from the far-right playbook anytime soon.

Still, for as large as *wokisme* undeniably looms in French politics, the question may be raised of whether it truly represents a case of diffusion. #MeToo and Black Lives Matter each became broadly-adopted, large-scale social movements in France. Perhaps there was no communication and no strategic borrowing between the French and American far-right – perhaps the backlash against *wokisme* was just that: backlash, an organic reaction against foreign influence, and fears over France's ideological sovereignty.

But a few key pieces of evidence point to direct borrowing. First, the word "woke" had already been imported into France years prior, around the same time period that it exploded in popularity in the United States. It can be found as a positive colloquial term on Black French Twitter in particular dating back to 2014 and 2015. If foreign influence was the issue, there is little to no indication of it then. Furthermore, even when Black Lives Matter spread across France in June 2020, drawing tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of protesters to the streets, *wokisme* was remarkably absent from the conversation. Critics characterized the movement using other terms like *communautarisme*, or cultural separatism. It was only *after* the American right's alarms over "wokeness" and "critical race theory" reached a fever pitch that the French right began to use the same language. Prior to the arrival of *wokisme*, the French right also already had its own umbrella term that served much the same purpose: *islamo-gauchisme* (islamo-leftism). Coined in 2002 and

popularized in conservative discourse between 2012 and 2017, *islamo-gauchisme* suggested an alliance among leftist and Islamist political ideologies, including decolonization, "racialization," feminist, and LGBTQ movements, to damage traditional French values. *Wokisme* offered a smoother expansion – it required no explanations of how Islamist and leftist politics might fit together, and its etymology placed a clear emphasis on a globalizing enemy. An analysis of Google Trends data by French researcher Albin Wagener shows that by August 2021, *wokisme* had all but replaced *islamo-gauchisme* in internet searches (Wagener 2021).

The final - and perhaps the strongest - piece of evidence for borrowing is that the importation of *wokisme* was not an isolated incident. It took place across a backdrop of a much broader transnational spillover, from the development of a "French QAnon" to COVID conspiracies and open admiration of American figures and pundits in French far-right media.

Shadow Case 1: "Stop the Steal" in France

We focus on two recent "shadow cases" of strategic borrowing by the French far right to illustrate a broader phenomenon: first, allegations that the 2022 French presidential elections were "stolen," echoing the "Stop the Steal" movement in the United States; and second, the French "trucker convoy" (*Convoi de la liberté*) that converged from various cities to Paris in February 2022, replicating the anti-vaccine movement that began in Ottawa, Canada. While less widespread than the fight against *wokisme*, both of these cases are analytically useful in how they involved borrowing even when the context in France bore little to no resemblance to that of the sender. Transnational ideological solidarity took precedence over the reality on the ground.

Where *wokisme* could stand on the shoulders of its French *islamo-gauchiste* cousin – and point to "proof" in the form of concrete initiatives like the push for gender-inclusive writing – the idea of a stolen election had no such basis in France. Public trust in electoral institutions has rarely

been called into question over the last few decades. Incidents of voter fraud are few and far between, and any irregular results can be quickly and thoroughly investigated due to the small votes-to-counter ratio (Vie Publique 2019); with few exceptions made for larger cities, there is a limit of 1,000 voters per polling station.[27] Any hints of "fraud" have referred to potential misuses of campaign funds, rather than actual fraudulent results (Bryant 2017).

Nevertheless, a little over a year after the "Stop the Steal" movement gained momentum in the United States, fueled by then-President Donald Trump's months-long campaign to overturn the results of the 2020 election, rumors of a "stolen," "falsified," or "rigged" election began to appear in France. These theories fell into two categories: first, that the Macron administration and major media outlets were conspiring to make the campaign unfair and inaccessible for other candidates, particularly on the far-right (for example, by fabricating opinion polls to sway voters away from the margins); and second, in a direct echo of "Stop the Steal" rhetoric, that widespread voter fraud would change votes cast for Le Pen, Zemmour, and Dupont-Aignan to votes for Macron, changing the results of the election. The latter, more extreme theories remained largely confined to social media; unlike the United States, there was no push from party elites to invalidate results or calls to violence. Yet some conspiracies *were* openly acknowledged and endorsed by candidates.

Just weeks after launching his presidential bid, far-right candidate Éric Zemmour appeared on the France 5 television station in January 2022 to discuss his campaign (which was "inspired" by Trump's) and to express his "doubts" about the results of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, stating that a "stolen" election "wouldn't be anything new in American democracy" (Timsit 2022). Zemmour quickly went beyond applying the same "doubts" about the upcoming French election, telling a CNews reporter with certainty that "Emmanuel Macron wants to steal

[27] The average number of registered voters per polling location varies significantly across the United States; in Georgia in 2020, some counties reported more than 3,600 voters per polling station (Fowler 2020).

this election" (CNews 2022). These conspiracies – though vague on *how* the election would be stolen – became a regular theme at his campaign rallies, claiming that "today, they are trying to steal the election from you. They want to reinstate the Le Pen-Macron match … this wrestling match where everything is rigged" (France 24 2022). Nicolas Dupont-Aignan also engaged in "stolen election" rhetoric, repeatedly stating on the campaign trail that the election would be "rigged" and had been "manipulated by Emmanuel Macron from A to Z" (Sud Radio 2022).

Figure 2.

Translation: How far will Emmanuel Macron go to steal this election?

Second Tweet reads "#Scandal, for the first time, tens of thousands of #policeofficers working at 12:08 this sunday #April102022 won't be able to go vote. They were told to apply for proxy voting. Candidates preferred by #lawenforcement will be drowned out. #Zemmour #LePen and #DupontAignan

Mirroring her controversial references to *wokisme* (and the *grand remplacement*), erstwhile-mainstream-conservative candidate Valérie Pécresse also encouraged election conspiracies: "We're not going to let them steal this election. … We have to remember 2017,"

Pécresse asserted, referring to the investigation into the François Fillon campaign for misuse of funds. "That election was stolen from the right, and that's the truth…. I believe that Emmanuel Macron is stealing this election" (Albertini 2022).

Marine Le Pen stood out as an exception among the far-right in her hesitation to directly engage in "stolen election" discourse. She had good reason: suggestions that the results were predetermined could run the risk of her base deciding to stay home instead of turning out to vote, as well as run contrary to her years-long efforts to "mainstream" the extremist *Rassemblement National* party she inherited from her father. Le Pen promised before the election that she wouldn't "be Biden's Trump. I've never questioned the results of an election, and I won't do it" (cite), and true to her word, once Macron was declared the winner of the run-off, she quickly conceded via e-mail that "the ballot boxes have spoken and I respect their decision" (cite). Still, she toed the line by engaging in some of the same delegitimizing rhetoric as Zemmour, Dupont-Aignan and Pécresse: in her concession speech, Le Pen railed against the "unfair, brutal, and violent methods" she had been "subjected to" during her campaign (Le Pen 2022b), and broke norms by refraining to explicitly acknowledge Macron's victory by name (Dély 2022). She also may not have needed to endorse election conspiracies herself for her followers to get the message. At Le Pen's final rally before the April 24 run-off, one *Rassemblement National* organizer stated that "we know that Macron is going to be reelected. The elections are rigged. … I'm not necessarily talking about vote tampering, but the whole system is with Macron."

Online conspiracy theories more directly echoed their American counterparts. Curiously, a major narrative on French far-right social media was that voting machines operated by the U.S.- and Canada-based Dominion Voting Systems. Dominion became a focal point of the "Stop the Steal" movement in the wake of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, with allegations that votes cast for Trump were fraudulently, purposefully cast for Biden, or simply not registered at all.

"Dominion" became a top trending topic on French Twitter shortly before the first round of the election, with over 50,000 distinct posts in just two days (Nass 2022).

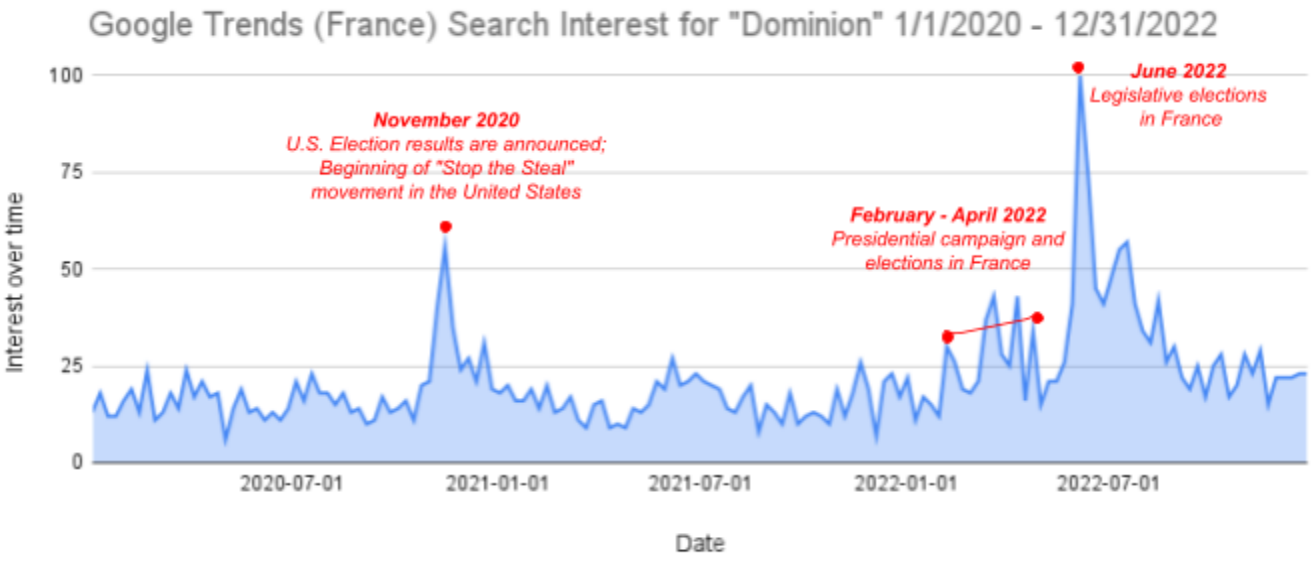
Figure 3.

Above: A Twitter meme that went viral just before the first round of voting in the 2022 French presidential elections. The meme depicts incumbent president Emmanuel Macron embracing what is meant to be a voting machine alongside logos for Dominion Voting Systems and the French Republic, and the words "Macron 2022 - I'm going to fuck you all over." The accompanying Tweet reads "The DOMINION corporation is going to take care of retallying the votes for the presidential election. Yes, the same crooks that took care of rigging the American election in 2020..." Source: Twitter, 20Minutes.fr (Le Dourneuf 2022).

Similarly, Google Trends data between January 2020 and December 2022 show three distinct spikes in searches for the keyword "Dominion": the first, in November 2020, when the "Stop the Steal" movement in the United States first cast suspicion on Dominion machines; second, in the run-up to and during the rounds of voting for the French presidential elections in the spring of

2022; and finally, during the legislative elections in France that followed shortly thereafter in June 2022. The final spike shows a comparatively high wave of interest in Dominion machines, coinciding with renewed anger over election results: although far-right candidates like Marine Le Pen earned historically high scores in the presidential election, they failed to see anywhere near the same momentum two months later. This gap in support threw fuel onto the fire that only a stolen election – and specifically, fraudulent Dominion voting machines – had to be responsible.

Figure 4.



Source: Google Trends

Unlike *wokisme*, France's "stolen election" conspiracies leave no room for arguments against transnational borrowing. Dominion does not operate in France in any capacity (Nass 2022). Indeed, voting machines are rarely used at all (Thimonnier 2022): due to the aforementioned strict regulations on the size of polling stations, most ballots are cast on paper, in writing (Ministère de l'Intérieur et de l'Outre mer, n.d.). Votes are then counted under the careful surveillance of delegates from each candidate, as well as other election monitors (ibid). It is

unclear why this theory gained so much traction when it is so easily disproved – whether the accounts that spread it were bots, trolls, or real people who were either so disengaged from the mainstream that they were not familiar with the process of voting, or were so entangled in conspiracy theories that they believed memes over experienced fact. Nevertheless, *neither* set of theories, from the ambiguous accusations that Macron manipulated the results by playing an unfair campaign to the assertions of Dominion-led fraud, have any precedent in France. The latter especially could only have been diffused from the American right; illogical in the French context, it only makes sense in the context of a broader transnational far-right identity.

Shadow Case 2: The Trucker Convoy Converges on Paris

Our second shadow case focuses on the *Convoi de la liberté* - France's version of the trucker convoy that began in Ottawa, Canada in January and February 2022. Though this case expands beyond the U.S. and France – involving a broader flow of the North American far right into France – some of the symbols and slogans displayed lend support to our interpretations.

Like the "Stop the Steal" rhetoric, the French trucker convoy, which set off from various cities before attempting to converge on Paris on February 12, 2022, does not make sense when considering France as an isolated social unit. The so-called "Freedom Convoy" began in Canada as a means to protest ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, and more specifically to protest vaccine mandates for truckers who regularly had to cross the U.S.-Canada border for work. The protests began on January 22, 2022 as a direct response to the end of exemptions for unvaccinated truck drivers between January 15 - 22, 2022, which had been allowed earlier in the pandemic in an effort to avoid supply chain disruptions.

No such regulations were in effect in France. Domestic travel had been unrestricted since the lifting of the country's third lockdown in May 2021. Truckers who had to cross the border had

long since retained the right to travel between other European countries and eat at restaurants without having to show proof of vaccination or testing, which would still be mandatory for the rest of the country until mid-March 2022. Some French truckers felt they had so little in common with the Canadian Freedom Convoy that they expressed annoyance at being affiliated with them, or with the *Convoi de la Liberté*-in-progress. Christophe Denizot, Secretary General of the Sud-Solidaires Truckers Federation, stated that "they're including us in a movement that doesn't concern us at all. They're playing around with the fantasy of the power of being part of a convoy to block I-don't-know-who or I-don't-know-what" (Audureau and Prati 2022). Put simply, there would be no French "truckers" convoy without a strong desire to imitate the North American right.

If actual truckers in France wanted nothing to do with the *Convoi de la Liberté*, an analysis of those who *did* participate lends even stronger evidence to theories of transnational solidarity. Investigative reporting by *Le Monde* journalists found that invitations to the French convoy were heavily shared among QAnon groups, as well as extremist far-right groups who wanted to protest the few COVID measures that did remain in France (ibid). Dedicated *Convoi de la Liberté* groups on Facebook and Telegram were also rife with COVID conspiracies touting hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin as alternative medical treatments and anti-government messages: "We must rise, us, the people of France, from all backgrounds, because they [the government] have gone too far. If we don't say stop, they'll never stop" (cite). Some of the more violent messages on the pages had a distinctly American flavor, encouraging participants to "*sortir les guns*" (a French-American mismash for "get out/take out the guns") (Audureau and Prati 2022).

Some initial observers speculated whether Canada's Freedom Convoy was actually a case of *French*-exported diffusion – specifically, whether the idea of truckers blocking the roads of Ottawa had been borrowed from the Gilets Jaunes movement in 2018-2019, where protesters

blocked traffic circles and highway tolls across France. But experts on the ground in both countries rejected the idea: according to McGill sociologist Daniel Beland, "while the Gilets Jaunes had wide support across the political spectrum, the trucker convoys were 'first and foremost about QAnon'" (Seibt 2022) and far-right identity.

Rather than French-to-Canadian diffusion, the trucker convoys illustrate such a high level of transnational interconnectedness that it is difficult to determine where one flow of norms, ideas, and strategies ends and the next one begins. In France, some participants in the *Convoi de Liberté* displayed Canadian flags as they drove towards Paris; in Canada, Confederate flags - several thousand miles and a whole international border away from any state that joined the Confederacy - flew alongside Trump memorabilia; and in the United States, a Canadian-inspired "People's Convoy" attempted to congest the Capitol Beltway surrounding Washington, D.C. throughout March and April 2022. Like the *Convoi de la Liberté* in France, participants were more focused on "sharing government conspiracy theories and false information on vaccines" than restrictions on U.S./Canada border crossing (Tanfani 2022). Neither the U.S. or French trucker convoys seem rational in isolation. Neither, for that matter, did many of the symbols and slogans displayed at the Canadian original. Rather, they can only be understood in the context of a broader diffusion of transnational far-right identity, and the overlapping ideas – from QAnon to *wokisme*, stolen elections, COVID conspiracies, and an anti-system sense of solidarity – that comprise them.

Why now?

One of the major remaining puzzles from our analysis is: why now? If France and the United States make such an unlikely couple, as we argue, then what has changed to cause such a cascade of strategic sharing? Though difficult to prove, two potential explanations could provide some

insight: the first, specific to far-right group strategy in France and the United States; and second, a broader set of conditions that may affect transnational far-right dynamics more generally.

The first explanation is *timing* – specifically, that the political climate and goals of far-right groups came into alignment at this particular moment in time, encouraging the French far right to sit up and take note of their American counterparts. In 2011, Marine Le Pen inherited control of the far-right *Rassemblement National* – then known under its original name, the *Front National* – from her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen.[28] It is widely understood that during this time, one of Marine's main goals was how to rebrand: she needed to distance the public's memory from the RN's leadership under her Holocaust-denying father, while maintaining legitimacy as France's foremost far-right party. Le Pen also attempted to spark her own culture wars – during her first presidential run in 2012, she turned national attention away from traditional campaign themes by pushing conspiracy theories about halal meat in France (*Le Parisien* 2012).

Then came the surprise victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. This event may have been the one that made Le Pen, and other far-right leaders in France, sit up and pay attention. With eyes on the upcoming 2017 French presidential elections, the United States provided a roadmap for how the far right could make its way to the highest office in the land. This possibility is bolstered by the fact that Marine was one of the first international leaders to publicly congratulate Trump on his win (Reuters 2016); in a November 2016 interview, Le Pen drew a direct parallel between the US and French elections, stating that "Donald Trump has made possible what was presented as completely impossible.... [hopefully it] makes the French realize that what the people want, they can get it, if they mobilize themselves" (Bell, Vandoorne and Jones 2016). Le Pen also tried and failed to visit the soon-to-be president at Trump Tower during a

[28] Though Marine Le Pen and her *Rassemblement National* party are far from the only "nationalist right" groups in France, they are one of the largest and electorally successful. They pave the way, in many ways, for other far-right candidates, and so it is analytically useful to focus on their strategic evolution in this context.

trip to New York in January 2017 (Kearney 2017), although Trump publicly referred to her as the "strongest candidate" in the French election in April 2017 (Jacobs 2017).

It should be noted that the domestic political situation in France at the time already began to favor far-right ideology – that is to say, Le Pen didn't *need* Trump's endorsement to boost her electoral strategy. Racist and xenophobic rhetoric already flared in response to the 2015 European Migrant Crisis, as well as Islamist terror attacks in Paris (2015) and Nice (2016). Parties like the *Rassemblement National* were already poised with their existing platforms to capitalize on those fears. Nevertheless, the French and American far right seemed to openly acknowledge that they shared the same set of goals, and might benefit from sharing how to achieve them.

The next few years were punctuated by continued exchange[29]: in 2018, Marine Le Pen's niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen – then considered to be her potential successor – was invited to speak at CPAC in Washington, D.C., just after Vice President Mike Pence. Maréchal-Le Pen expressed support for Trump's "America First" policies and suggested that France might benefit from the same, citing the "the development of an Islamic counter-society in France" (Schecter 2018). Interestingly, Maréchal-Le Pen's attendance was viewed unfavorably by mainstream American conservatives and lauded by figures in the alt-right (Jacobs 2018). The next year, Maréchal-Le Pen took a card out of the American playbook by organizing what could arguably be understood as a French version of CPAC, the *Convention de la droite*, in September 2019. American far right pundit Candace Owens was invited as a guest of honor (De Montalivet 2019).

A little over a year later, the French right began its transition from *islamo-gauchisme* to *wokisme*.

The second explanation is less elite-led, and suggests a shift in dynamics and how identities are constructed across borders. The French right and American right may be borrowing from each other more because they're *communicating* more, not through party leaders, but to each

[29] The French far-right also indicated a degree of openness to other international far-right groups: Jordan Bardella, Le Pen's second-in-command, spoke at CPAC in Hungary in May 2022; Marine also chose to kick off the first rally of her 2022 presidential campaign with a series of video endorsements from far-right leaders across Europe.

other on social media, on sites like Discord, Facebook, Twitter, Parler, or Telegram. Meme- and image-based communication – which, by nature, has little text, if any – could allow users in different countries to bypass language barriers. Previous research has speculated on the extent to which technological innovations are redrawing the borders of the international state system, or at least our conceptions of what borders are (Korkmaz 2021). In this case, the development (and spread) of a common, transnational far-right identity would be no different.

Why these sets of themes and not others?

Our findings fit with other examples within the study of the far right demonstrating that the mainstream can "prime" the public by engaging in far-right discourse. Just as Bale (2018) showed that the British Conservatives embrace of a eurosceptic and populism helped prepare the way for UKIP successful use of this strategy, the French establishment's widespread embrace of anti-woke positions helped create an opportunity for the national front. This also accords with literature that warns against the importance of "issue salience" and advises against raising the salience of issues over which the far right exercises "ownership" (Mudde 2010).

"Woke" resonates (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) with influential components of French culture, specifically laïcité and right-wing interpretation of "Republican" values. France does not collect demographic information on race, ethnicity, or religion. Purports to be a color-blind, gender-blind, religion-blind society.

Conclusions

Since the events analyzed in this paper "wokism"/"wokeness" seems to have become even more central to far-right discourse in France, in the United States, and increasingly in other countries.

Previous research has found that the messages most likely to diffuse transnationally among the far right were those addressing Islamophobia or "economic populism" (Froio and Ganesh 2018). Notably, this work was limited to online social media diffusion. Our research contributes by broadening the universe of messages that diffuse–potentially suggesting that strictly online, versus more holistic approaches to diffusion may be observing different processes.

The growing American influence among the French far right cannot be read to imply a necessary reduction in French anti-Americanism. This is most clear where the fight against *wokisme* is framed as combatting a pernicious American influence. The French far right may now be thinking in terms of "good Americans" and "bad Americans."

Diffusion processes might not always be linear, but that does not mean it is not occurring or that it is not important. In the case of *wokisme* especially, we saw that the path did not run directly from the American right.

If diffusion can occur between the American far right and French far right, it can happen anywhere. The caveat here is the increasing contacts between French and American far-right figures in the years leading up to the election may have helped to produce an "attribution of similarity" between the French and American rights, which gradually lessened the "least-likely" nature of the case.

Finally, the United States is emerging as a more influential node in the far right network–a major historical shift that could have even greater consequences down the road. If true, this provides a major corrective to the urge within European far-right studies to dismiss the relevance of Trump, Bannon, and other Americans for the European far right.[30]

[30] For examples see Ahmed, Akbar Shahid. 2018. "Steve Bannon's Big Plan For Europe Has Some Big Flaws." *HuffPost*. August 6, 2018. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/steve-bannons-big-plan-for-europe-has-some-big-flaws_n_5b64e519e4b0b15abaa35523 and Mudde, Cas. 2018. "Europe Shouldn't Fear Steve Bannon. It Should Fear the Hype that Surrounds Him." *The Guardian*. July 30, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/30/steve-bannon-trump-us-election-europe-far-right?CMP=share_btn_tw

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