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Research Article

From Baking Competitions To Forced Repatriations: Patriotic Alternative And The Hybridity Of The Radical Right

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Today, Patriotic Alternative is Britain's largest and fastest growing radical right group. This article presents evidence in support of Patriotic Alternative being a highly original and innovative radical right group that is demarcated by its hybridity: one that brings together both authentic and inauthentic forms and ideologies of traditional nationalism. Having set out the research design, this article begins with an exploration of the origins, formation and leadership of Patriotic Alternative. From here, it does the same in relation to its ideology and activism. Next, Patriotic Alternative's hybridity is considered in an attempt to better understand how, as a radical-right group, it combines authentic forms of traditional nationalism with newer, wholly contemporary – and thereby inauthentic – forms. Lastly, a number of conclusions are drawn about the potential future trajectory of Patriotic Alternative as also the British radical right and extreme right-wing more generally. Given Patriotic Alternative has been subjected to little if indeed any scholarly inquiry to date, this article makes a timely and much needed scholarly contribution.

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Introduction

Prior to the British Government's proscription of the extreme right-wing group *National Action* in 2016, the group's founders – Alex Davies and Ben Raymond – had undertaken the task of categorising its peers on the right of the political mainstream as either 'good' or 'bad': 'good' being used to identify those perceived to be authentic to the ideologies of traditional nationalism; 'bad' used to identify those who do not (Jackson, 2014; Macklin, 2018; Allen, 2019). The reason for doing so was to identify those *National Action* would need to derogate, de-stabilise and ultimately destroy if it was to be successful in bringing authentic nationalism to the masses (Allen, 2017). While both have since been imprisoned for being members of a proscribed organisation, it is difficult to comprehend the pair categorising a group that sells its own brand of 'British Tea' and organises baking competitions as anything but 'bad'. If at the same time that group combined supported certain tenets of authentic nationalism – for example the forced repatriation of Britain's non-white population as a means of defending the country's 'indigenous people' – might they have considered categorising it as 'good'?

That hybrid of authentic and inauthentic nationalism is evident in Patriotic Alternative, currently Britain's largest and fastest growing radical right group (Briggs & Mann, 2021; Pope, 2021; Buarque & Zavershinskaia, 2022). Combining elements of both 'good' and 'bad' nationalism, Patriotic Alternative has the potential to be as misunderstood as it is misconstrued. Accordingly, this article posits that Patriotic Alternative is highly original and innovative radical right group that is demarcated by its hybrid adherence to both authentic and inauthentic forms and ideologies nationalism. To date, Patriotic Alternative has been subjected to little if indeed any scholarly inquiry. As such, this article is not only the first of its kind but so too does it make a timely and much needed scholarly contribution. To do so, this article begins by setting out the research design. From here, it explores the origins, formation and leadership of Patriotic Alternative before investigating its ideology and activism. Next, Patriotic Alternative's hybridity is considered to better understand how, as a radical-right organisation, it combines authentic forms of traditional nationalism with newer, wholly contemporary - and thereby inauthentic - forms in an attempt to reach and engage new and established audiences alike. Lastly, conclusions are drawn about the potential future trajectory of Patriotic Alternative and the British radical right more generally.

Research Design

As Blee (2007) notes, research into far right, radical right and extreme right-wing groups and movements is as complex and as it is problematic. As she goes on, this is because those active in the political spaces to the right of the mainstream typically perceive academics as untrustworthy and hostile. Goodwin (2006) concurs, noting how those seeking to undertake research into such groups and movements are necessarily required to employ externalist methodological approaches: those that are overly reliant on materials and resources freely available in the public and political spaces. This applies to researching Patriotic Alternative. As such, much of this article is based upon the findings from content analyses of resources and materials available online and offline specific to Patriotic Alternative and its public-facing activities. This included a full content analysis of the group's website content and all of the resources made available to download. Examples of the latter include the group's manifesto, its 'roadmap' to success, and various campaign materials made available to use by its supporters. So too were all news reportage and non-specialist op-ed type commentaries relating to Patriotic Alternative analysed as

were a small number of reports and resources. For context, reviews of existing scholarly literature relevant to the task in hand were also completed.

Noting the limitations of externalist approaches, Allen (2019) posits the need to go further: to supplement them with other more innovative methodological approaches that afford greater 'additionality'. Here, this is achieved with the addition of two participatory-type methods. The first draws on the knowledge gathered from reviewing resources gathered by the author over the past decade from first-hand encounters with frontline and specialist practitioners working in policing, counter-extremism and counter-terrorism. Such resources comprise a broad array of both published and unpublished documents, various newsletters and in-group communications. So too certain visual resources. The second draws on the knowledge gathered from extensive research notes collected during those same first-hand encounters with frontline and specialist practitioners and from taking on a number of 'independent expert' roles at the local, regional and national levels. These encounters included extensive verbal interactions while affording the author access to certain information and materials unavailable in the public domain. The knowledge gathered from these two encounters has helped shape and inform this article, in turn affording it greater additionality.

From the outset, it is necessary to appropriately frame and contextualise the terminologies preferred (Boräng, 2014). This is especially important here given the interchangeability of terminologies and descriptors regularly and routinely used in public and political parlance when seeking to name and subsequently explain those positioned to the right of the political mainstream. For the purpose of this article, it is necessary to focus on 'far-right', 'radical right' and 'extreme right-wing'. As Copsey (2008) puts it, this is because there is an unquestioned interchangeability in how each are used and understood in the scholarly setting due to the clear lack of agreement that exists about how they are defined and when they are best applied. According to Mudde (2007), far-right is the term that is most commonly used. As he explains, this is because it serves to encompass a wide spectrum of different ideologies and associated activities that range from casual xenophobia through to pernicious fascism. Describing it as an umbrella term, Mudde (2017) noes how in recent years that spectrum has widened even further: nowadays being used to refer to anti-establishment populism as also the rejection of certain 'liberal values' including pluralism and minority rights.

Despite its widespread usage, the problem with far right is that it lacks differentiation. For Bjørgo and Ravndal (2019), most problematic is how it fails to differentiate between those who have a willingness or propensity to use violence to achieve its goals from those who do not. For them, this is a necessary demarcation. More appropriate they go on, is to differentiate between the radical right and extreme right-wing: the former referring those who seek to achieve their stated goals within a framework of democracy; the latter those who seek to achieve their stated goals within a framework of violence. As they go on, this differentiation is made all the more necessary on the basis it is typical for the extreme right-wing to reject democracy and democratic processes in order to rationalise and subsequently legitimise the use of violence and other forms of criminality. Violence and criminality can be seen to not only serve to differentiate and demarcate the extreme right-wing from the radical-right but so too does it provide a basis upon which to appropriately and more accurately define - and thereby locate - certain individuals, organisations and movements. Given Patriotic Alternative neither deploys nor publicly advocates the use of violence to achieve its goals, this article both defines and describes the group as a radical right group, one that also sits within the broader far right spectrum.

Patriotic Alternative: Origins and Histories

Of the various organisations to have emerged from the British radical right milieu in the past decade and a half, most are a genus of the *British National Party* (BNP). While it is commonplace nowadays for commentators to express derision towards the *BNP* (Harris, 2016), those who do not only seriously miscast the significance of the *BNP* itself but so too the significance of its legacy. Under the tutelage of its former leader Nick Griffin, that legacy is readily apparent across the entirety of the contemporary British radical right: from the *English Defence League* (EDL) (Allen, 2011; Oaten, 2014; Allchorn, 2019) and *Britain First* (Allen, 2014; Brindle & Macmillan, 2017) through the short-lived Yellow Vests to the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) and its later offshoot, the *Democratic Football Lads Alliance* (DFLA) (Allen, 2019) among others. The *BNP's* legacy goes further however. *Davies and Raymond* – the aforementioned founders of *National Action* – were former members of its youth wing, evidence that the BNP's legacy has also permeated Britain's extreme rightwing.

That legacy is also evident with *Patriotic Alternative*: its founder and current leader, Mark Collett was a high-profile former member. Joining the *BNP* in the early 2000s, Collett formed a close relationship with Griffin that saw him rise rapidly through its ranks eventually taking on the role of Chair of its youth wing, the *Young BNP* (YBNP). The appointment was short-lived however due to Collett being forced to stand down after making derogatory comments about AIDs, black people, drug users and LGBTQ+ communities during an appearance in a Channel 4 documentary titled, *Young, Nazi and Proud*' aired in 2002 (Briggs & Mann, 2021). Two years later, Collett again did similar during an appearance in a BBC documentary. This time, both he and Griffin were arrested for inciting racial hatred. When the charges were subsequently dropped, Griffin duly appointed Collett as the *BNP*'s director of publicity. A half decade later in 2010, Collett severed all ties with the *BNP* after being questioned by the police following claims made by Griffin that he was involved in a plot to kill him (Morris & Peck, 2010).

At that time, the anti-fascist organisation Hope Not Hate suggest that Collett as "the most unpopular figure on the entire British far-right" (p.11, Davis & Lawrence 2021). Nonetheless, Collett remained active and at different times in the intervening years found himself being associated with certain radical-right and extreme rightwing groups including the English Democrats, National Action and the London Forum among others (Davis & Lawrence, 2021). Collett was also active on YouTube for which the benefit was twofold: first, it helped him affirm his credentials from interviewing high profile global figures such as David Duke, former leader of the Ku Klux Klan; second, by attracting and growing a new and much younger following many of whom were unlikely to have been aware of his former divisiveness. It was a talk at Denmark's Scandza Forum however that Collett later claimed gave him the motivation to create Patriotic Alternative (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). Reinvigorated, Collett launched Patriotic Alternative in the autumn of 2019 at a conference attended by around 200 supporters (Davis & Lawrence, 2021). For Collett, Patriotic Alternative was very much a personal victory: one that served to reestablish him as an important figure within the British radical right.

Within months, Collett appointed Laura Towler (real name Laura Melia nee Tyrie) as his deputy. At the time, Towler was a relatively well-known figure due to her online activism that saw her appear as a guest on different vlogs and podcasts. So too was she the editor of the white nationalist Defend Europa website where she was the author of a series of articles about 'White Genocide' (Allchorn, 2021). A former British army cadet and politics graduate, the reason for Towler's appointment is likely to have been twofold: first, with the intention of bringing a 'softer' side to the public face of Patriotic Alternative; second, with the intention of encouraging more women to join the organisation. Towler's other contribution came in the form of Grandma Towler's, a 'British tea' company she established that is used to help raise funds for Patriotic Alternative. In some ways, Patriotic Alternative's hybridity is foreshadowed in Grandma Towler's: at once combining the authentic with the inauthentic, the traditional with the contemporary. In this way, the Grandma Towler's website is designed to evoke a nostalgic view of Britain that is as familiar as it is mythic and which can be seen to be lamented by some. A hybrid of the old and the new, the website combines notions of a Britain that has been 'lost' to history with various contemporary statements that make reference to taking 'the knee' or certain 'non-British organisations such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) (Grandma Towler's, nd). Grandma Towler's therefore serves to simultaneously remind customers that we should love what 'we' have lost and hate what 'we' have gained. A hybrid of the traditional with the contemporary, the authentic with the inauthentic.

Good Nationalism: Authenticity Repackaged

Around the turn of the century, the *BNP* oversaw an ideological re-alignment that broke with many of the historical and authentic traditions of British nationalism (Allen, 2010). Integral to the *BNP's* modernisation and mainstreaming agenda, its ideological re-alignment resulted in a shift away from 'race', Judaism and Jewish people as also the threats each were perceived to pose to immigration, Islam and Muslim communities and by consequence, the threats they were also seen to pose. As Griffin put it at the time, both the *BNP* and radical right more generally "should be positioning [itself] to take advantage for our own political ends the growing wave of public hostility to Islam" (p.283, Allen 2011). Far from confining the authentic traditions of nationalism to the annals of history however, Griffin's realignment was opportunistic and far from enduring. Nonetheless, the unprecedented success it afforded the *BNP* in local and European elections on the back of overtly Islamophobic campaigns saw many of the radical right groups that emerged in the wake of its demise adopting a similar ideological focus. Sometimes referred to as 'counter-jihadi', those doing so included groups such as the previously mentioned *EDL* and *Britain First* both of which were categorised as 'bad' by *National Action*'s founders (Allen, 2019).

While the ideological re-alignment helped the BNP to present a more socially acceptable public face, its private face remained squarely focused on the authentic traditions of British nationalism (Goodwin, 2014). The same may also be true of Patriotic Alternative. Like its BNP predecessor, Patriotic Alternative would seem to be acutely aware of the need to appropriately 'package' aspects of its ideology in an attempt to appeal to a broad range of audiences including those not normally attracted to or affiliated with the radical right (Davis, & Lawrence, 2021). A review of Patriotic Alternative's website illustrates how the group does this. Key to this is its focus on immigration and what is argues is the detrimental impact the ensuing demographic change is - and indeed will -have on Britain's 'indigenous' (white) population. As the group put it, "demographic trends forecast that the indigenous people of the UK will be a minority by 2060" (Patriotic Alternative, nd). By focusing on demographic change and its impact, encounters with practitioners suggest that Patriotic Alternative hope to capitalise on the problematisation of immigration that was deployed so successfully by Leave campaigners prior to the Brexit referendum (Research Notes). In this way, Patriotic Alternative stress how ongoing immigration and the ensuing demographic change will be the catalyst for a broad array of sociopolitical 'problems'. In support of this, Patriotic Alternative highlight the detrimental impact of greater numbers of 'illegal immigrants' arriving in dinghies having crossed the English Channel, the defacement of historical statues by BLM demonstrators and their wish to change who 'we' are, and the murder of the Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Southend West, David Amess in 2021. Regarding the latter, Patriotic Alternative are keen to stress that as Amess' killer was 'non-indigenous' he was "killed by the policies he supported" (p.6, Davis & Lawrence 2021).

While Patriotic Alternative's problematisation of immigration and demographic change is clearly intended to instil fear, so too does it serve another function. This function is readily apparent in the group's 'solution' to the 'problem'. As Patriotic Alternative explain on its website, once it acquires the necessary power it will ensure that all "those of immigrant descent who have obtained British passports" will be offered incentives "to return to their ancestral homelands" Patriotic Alternative, nd). Far from offering anything new, Patriotic Alternative's 'solution' to the 'problem' is to be found in the authentic traditions of British nationalism. Regurgitating the ideologies of historical groups such as the British Union of Fascists and the National Front, Patriotic Alternative is advocating forced repatriation (Hanna, 1974). Similar is evident in how Patriotic Alternative affords credence to and subsequently deploys 'White Genocide' theory. Popular among today's radical right, the theory confers legitimacy on the idea that demographic change is a deliberate and systematic process designed to reduce the size and collective strength of white populations in Europe in order to make it easier for an already powerful Jewish elite to exert full control over all white people (Perry, 2004). Here again, Patriotic Alternative is drawing on the authentic nationalist ideological tropes. Irrespective of time and place, the message remains the same: Jews are conspiring to 'take over'.

Bad Nationalism: Inauthentic Innovations

Despite Patriotic Alternative's adherence to certain aspects of authentic - namely 'good' - nationalism, so too is there significant evidence of contemporary innovation: a broad array of new and potentially inauthentic activities and approaches that serve to differentiate it from its peers that in turn affords it distinctivity. Breaking with the norms of 'post-organisational' radical right groups like the EDL and DFLA (Tynan, 2023) - in particular the rejection of any formal membership structures of note (Allchorn, 2023) - Patriotic Alternative prefers a semi-formal network of local branches through which activists can regularly meet and participate in activities such as stickering, litter picking and feeding the homeless. Another important function of the branch network is how it helps foster a sense of belonging and community. For Collett, fostering a sense of community is vital to the success of Patriotic Alternative specifically and nationalism generally. For him, that success will only be achieved when like-minded people come together as a community bound by a shared identity centred around the nationalist cause (Davis & Lawrence, 2021). According to some practitioners, so too do the branches cleverly address the relative isolation many of those who have more recently come to the radical right and nationalism online spaces are prone to feel. In this respect, Patriotic Alternative provides supporters with a 'home' (Research Notes). For Collett, the benefits are clear: as he puts it, "when the storm breaks, our people can stand together and form a shield wall" (Davis & Lawrence, 2021).

When considered through the lens of community building, other innovative activities begin to make more sense. Take for instance the 'British Baking Competition' *Patriotic Alternative* ran in conjunction with *Grandma Towler's*. Likely

hoping to capitalise on the success of the popular British television series *The Great British Bake Off*, the competition was likely conceived to not only reinforce that *Patriotic Alternative* is different from its peers but so too reach and engage audiences new to nationalism. While the focus on 'traditional British recipes' would appear to be vague enough to neither prompt suspicion nor immediately put off those new to *Patriotic Alternative*, 'traditional British' would likely have been enough to placate those already aligned with the group and the nationalist cause. Similar too its 'Alternative Curriculum', a vast array of freely available learning resources made available to use by those who choose to home-school their children. While some of the resources' content is surprising – for example, those relevant to the Roman festival of Saturnalia and learning Latin – making them available when most children were being taught from home due to COVID-19 lockdowns is likely to have seen more people not only finding the educational resources but so too *Patriotic Alternative*. As with the baking competition, the educational resources had the potential to reach and engage new audiences.

So too has Patriotic Alternative been successful in borrowing and subsequently deploying contemporary innovations popularised by other radical right groups. One example is the 'banner drop': a simple form of activism that includes unfurling a banner typically emblazoned with a provocative message or slogan in a prominent location. Sharing photos of the banner drop across multiple social media platforms, the intention is to attract political and mainstream media attention (Daniëls & Veilleux-Lepage, 2024). Patriotic Alternative exploited the effectiveness in the aftermath of the BLM protests, dropping 'White Lives Matter' banners at various natural landmarks including Ben Nevis in Scotland, Mam Tor in Yorkshire and Bodmin Moor in Cornwall. The group do the same every year to mark Indigenous People's Day. While some dismiss the 'White Lives Matter' campaign as being merely opportunistic (Research Notes), the campaign is rather more significant in that it served to subtly re-introduce 'race' into the public-facing remit of Britain's radical right. This is significant given the extent to which 'race' has been conspicuous by its absence since the BNP's ideological turn. Whether Patriotic Alternative sought to take advantage of the growing wave of public hostility to shown towards BLM - evident in the sharp increase in racially motivated hate crimes in the weeks and months that followed the demonstrations (Allen, 2021) - is unclear.

Picking and Mixing: Patriotic Alternative's Hybridity

There can be no doubt about the transformation Britain's radical right has undergone since the turn of the century (Allen, 2023). As well as shifting the ideological focus from 'race' to religion - Islam specifically - so too has there been shifts from electoral politics to street-based activism, from hierarchical structures to loose-knit networks, and from in-person to online forms of recruitment and engagement. So too has the British radical right been influenced by the rise of populism and an ever more antagonistic political mainstream (Oaten, 2017). This has resulted in a radical right that as Allen (2019) puts it, is ever more prone to 'picking and mixing': individuals and groups asymmetrically choosing - and at the same time, rejecting - the aspects of nationalism that fit with a given individual or groups own conception of what nationalism is. Such an approach should not be too surprising given that similar is occurring in others areas of contemporary British society. Davie (1990) suggests that much the same is evident in how Britain contemporarily 'consumes' religion where increasing numbers of people pick and mix beliefs and practices from a global 'market' of religious traditions which are then used to construct a highly individualised and undeniably hybrid belief system. That hybridity is evident in the activities - and importantly, the ideologies that underpin them - preferred by Patriotic Alternative. Not only does Patriotic Alternative's hybridity demarcate it as different and distinct from its radical right peers but so too does it harder to position the group within the aforementioned 'good' or 'bad' dichotomy. As such, it is unclear whether Patriotic Alternative is new and inauthentic or traditional and authentic. Irrespective, Patriotic Alternative's hybridity is thoroughly modern.

That hybridity might also explain the news that Patriotic Alternative is pondering whether to venture into electoral politics (Research Notes). While electoral politics brought the BNP unprecedented albeit short-term success, that almost every radical right group to have emerged since have rejected electoral politics is telling. Nonetheless, it is further evidence of the group's hybridity: a wholly contemporary group pondering a wholly traditional route to acquiring power. Only time will tell if the group does go down this route. If it does, one might question the extent to which it will be a success especially if Hope Not Hate claims about the group are valid. According to them, Patriotic Alternative has already reached its zenith and is unlikely to grow any bigger (Davis & Lawrence, 2021). A number of factors are cited in support of such claims. These include the continued unpopularity of Collett, the lack of a long-term vision, a growing sense of dissatisfaction among activists, and the desire among its core support for a return to more authentic forms of nationalism. Some have also left Patriotic Alternative to join groups such as the Independent Nationalist Network and Homeland (Childs, 2023). Others fear that Patriotic Alternative will lurch towards the extreme right-wing given some activists are known to have links with groups such as Blood and Honour and have been using private message groups to share ever more virulent racism, Holocaust denial and the veneration of Hitler (Briggs & Mann, 2021).

While those leaving the group has the potential to confer legitimacy on there being dissatisfaction with the group, its leadership and current trajectory, some positives can be taken from the fact that the dissatisfaction would not appear to be endemic. There are a number of other positives. The first is how Patriotic Alternative's hybridity has the very real potential to appeal to new audiences in ways predecessors and peers do not. Such audiences are not limited to those who might want to participate in baking competitions and buy British tea. So too are there likely to be audiences in post-Brexit Britain who share the concerns of Patriotic Alternative about ongoing immigration and demographic change but who are unlikely to take to streets to angrily protest outside a newly built mosque or participate in a march alongside multiple football hooligan firms. The second emanates from this latter point. Given the current lack of any credible alternative to Patriotic Alternative, for now at least the group may be the only option for traditional radical right audiences. Far from a ringing endorsement, it is nonetheless an important factor. Irrespective of the group's future trajectory, the strength of its hybridity is likely to determine the extent to which Patriotic Alternative either succeeds or fails.

Britain's Radical Right: Where Next?

In terms of the British radical right more broadly, the re-emergence of 'race' would appear to be the most significant. While it is unclear the extent to which the reemergence of 'race' might reset or re-align the radical right's ideological compass similar to how the BNP ideological turn did around the turn of the century, there are signs already that others within Britain's radical right milieu are prepared to follow Patriotic Alternative's lead. Among others these include the Hundred Handers which recently adopted the slogan "Western civilisation is white civilisation" and the Pie and Mash Squad doing similar with "It's OK to be Aryan" (Allen, 2023). While both groups are extremely small in terms of numbers of activists, the mere prominence of 'race' should not be underestimated. Also worthy of note is the allusion to 'race' in the language of the organisers of the radical right-led 'Save our Statues' demonstrations in response to the defacement of statues and monuments by BLM protesters (Sabbagh, 2020). For Allen (2023), not only did the allusions to 'race' serve to justify and legitimise the demonstrations but so too did it serve as a clarion call to the wider radical-right: confirming in the process that 'race' was back on the agenda.

With 'race' back on the agenda, there is the potential for the radical right to gain credence and impetus from the resonance between its view and the problematisation of immigration emanating from the British Government. Evident in how the Government is planning to send undocumented migrants arriving in the country to Rwanda, so too is there potential resonance with the Government's 'hostile environment' policies. The function of these policies is twofold: first, they intend to make life in Britain as unbearable as possible for undocumented migrants in the hope they choose to leave; second, they intend to send a message to deter others currently thinking of coming to Britain (Liberty, 2024). Given how central the problematisation of immigration was to the Leave campaign, the potential for greater numbers of people being receptive to the ideologies of the radical would appear to be very real in today's post-Brexit Britain. That the problematisation of immigration cannot be disentangled from 'race' makes it all the more worrying. For that to come to fruition, a far more credible alternative to *Patriotic Alternative* would need to emerge.

Finally, the potential for new forms of hybridity. Given that across the past two decades, 'race' has very much been the sole preserve of the extreme right-wing, the re-emergence of 'race' within the radical right has the potential to shorten the distance between them. The result being greater hybridity between the radical right and the extreme right-wing. Given the trajectory of the radical right as indeed the context of contemporary Britain, one might speculate that if there is to be any shortening of the distance between them the direction of travel is most likely to be towards the extreme right-wing. As a result, future hybrids are likely to focus less on baking competitions and more on forced repatriation. Whether such a trajectory would appeal to non-traditional audiences is questionable. Less so its potential to appeal to those who already adhere to radical right ideologies. In the same way hybridity is likely to be determinative in the success or failure of *Patriotic Alternative*, so too is hybridity likely to be a determinative factor in the future direction of both the radical right and extreme right-wing as also their respective success.

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