Resisting the Far Right

Civil Society Strategies for Countering the Far Right in Ireland

A report by:
Barry Cannon, Richard King, Joseph Munnelly,
and Riyad el-Moslemany

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cross care **migrant project**

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Acknowledgments

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The project was carried out between March 2021 and April 2022. Four people collaborated on this project:

Dr. Barry Cannon, Lecturer at the Centre for the Study of Politics, was principal investigator of the project. Dr. Cannon is the author of books and publications on the Right in Latin America and on populism among other issues.

Richard King, was responsible for the running of the project within Crosscare, acting as liaison with the CSO sector for the project among other interventions. Richard manages Crosscare's Migrant Project and is responsible for funding, planning, management, monitoring and evaluation and staff support.

Joseph Munnelly was employed by the project as a research assistant, working particularly on the research survey, interviews and literature review. Joseph is a PhD candidate and has a MSc from the UCD Centre for Humanitarian Action. His previous research was focused on misinformation and hate speech around the European refugee crisis.

Riyad el-Moslemany acted as the main point of contact between the Maynooth based team and Crosscare for much of the life of the project. During that time, he worked as Policy Officer with the Migrant Project at Crosscare.

Many thanks must also go to all the personnel in the Civil Society Organisations which we approached and who willingly gave their time to complete survey questionnaires and be interviewed. This project would not have been possible without you and will hopefully be of use in your struggle against the threat of the far right in Ireland. This report is dedicated to all those who take part in that struggle, often at considerable personal risk.

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STOPFARRIGHT Report

Executive Summary

Introduction

The STOPFARRIGHT project was inspired by our concern at the rise of the far right throughout Europe, North America and elsewhere, and more immediately in Ireland, as the far right became increasingly visible in demonstrations against Covid 19 public health measures in the country. Our main research question was how civil society organisations most affected by far right (FR) discourse – that is those groups supporting migrants, ethnic and sexual minorities, women's rights and groups with explicit anti-FR activities - could counter-act such discourse and actions emerging from it. To this end the main objective of the project was to work with civil society organisations (CSOs) concerned about the far right in order to establish from their perspective the level of threat of the far right in Ireland, the extent and effectiveness of state, political party and civil society counter-strategising against the FR in the country, and ultimately to gather and share ideas about how these could be improved. Additionally, the project sought to facilitate information exchange between concerned sectors in Ireland and international and European academics and civil society groups who share this concern.

To achieve these objectives the project realised the following activities:

1. An online survey with follow up interviews with key CSO personnel working with affected populations, primarily in those supporting migrant populations, LGBTI+ communities, women's groups, trades unions and anti-FR groups, on the key themes of the project.

2. A series of five webinars with relevant national and international academics and CSO representatives on the themes of: far right misinformation strategies; European anti-far right strategizing; International far right strategizing; the FR and racism in Ireland; and, community strategizing against the FR in Ireland.

3. This report on research findings and the conclusions of the webinar discussions. These serve as a basis for a series of anti-far right strategizing recommendations for consideration by CSO, academic and policy communities concerned about the issue.

Results of Research Survey of relevant CSO's

The project conducted an online survey among 130 relevant CSO's with a 31 per cent response rate, that is 42 responses in total. Responses were received from all targeted sectors across the Republic of Ireland. These were followed up with seven in-depth, online interviews with respondents, again representing most of the main target groups. The survey questionnaires sought to gather perceptions and recommendations around five main categories:

1. **Threat posed by FR:** Respondents were asked to assess the level of threat posed by the FR to Irish Democracy, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing no threat and 5 an Existential Threat. Interviewees were furthermore asked to identify some causes and areas of concern regarding that threat.

2. **State policy towards FR in Ireland:** CSOs were asked where they perceived state policy on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very intolerant and 5 very tolerant) with regards to the tolerance level towards far right groups, figures, behaviour and discourse. The survey also asked respondents where they thought Irish state policy ideally should be on the scale.

3. **Political Parties:** Respondents were asked to choose from four options on political party responses to the far right: Demarcation, Confrontation, Co-optation, Cooperation. CSOs completed a multiple-choice questionnaire based on these regarding the approaches non-far right political parties should take in relation to interacting with or addressing the FR.

4. **Civil Society in general:** Here we included mainstream media, social media, the internet, business communities, trade unions and 'society in general', using a tolerance scale of 1 to 5 asking respondents to qualify their impressions of present attitudes among those groups to FR actors and ideas.

5. **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** As well as collecting data related to the impact of the FR and experience of FR activity regarding threat and harassment, the survey had respondents reflect on a number of CSO approaches to counter the FR. Respondents were also requested to evaluate the effectiveness of their own policies and approaches and suggest any possible future innovations in that regard.

Results of Survey and Interviews

Extent of Threat of FR to Irish Democracy

While almost all respondents saw the FR as a threat to Irish democracy, opinion was divided as to the level of that threat, with 21.4% viewing the FR as a minor threat, 31% as a medium threat, 38% as a serious threat and only 4.8% as an existential threat to Irish democracy. Overall, respondents felt that the Irish FR is still too small to be considered a very severe threat to Irish democracy, but nonetheless they did fear that the FR in this country could grow to be a more serious threat in the future. Reasons identified for this growth were: the COVID 19 pandemic; the stresses and struggles caused by economic austerity policies; and a lack of political leadership and representativeness in Irish politics. Respondents also noted as causes for the rise of the FR in Ireland, their strategic ability to exploit pressing social problems to further their political objectives and increasing links between the Irish FR and international FR groups, personalities and movements, including as possible funding sources.

State policy towards the far right

Most respondents found present state policy to the FR closer to tolerant than intolerant. When asked what level of tolerance the state should show to the FR, respondents expressed a preference for a much greater level of intolerance. In interviews, many respondents felt that intolerant speech in particular should not be tolerated by the state, while recognising that strict limitations on freedom of speech and expression could potentially cause adverse effects to civil liberties. They recommended education and dialogue to prevent hateful and exclusive attitudes, and evaluation and analysis of the conditions or reasoning behind individuals being attracted to far right ideas. Moreover, they stressed the need for the state to act pro-actively, rather than reactively, to FR activity, such as strategies to build awareness of and resistance to such activity, especially through socio-cultural education and by addressing inequalities and hardships in Irish society which contribute to the rise of the FR. Despite this, respondents did see some improvements in the Irish state's policy on the FR, mostly in improved policing of hate crimes, increased cooperation between Gardai and CSOs on FR activities, and of anti-vaccination and anti-public health demonstrations during the Covid 19 pandemic. Respondents also made some specific policy recommendations that the state could assume, particularly with regard to increased monitoring of FR groups, limitations on hate speech and FR street demonstrations, strengthening civil society to resist FR narratives and organising, strengthened powers of surveillance of FR online activity and increased restrictions on Social Media (SM) company facilitation of such activity etc.

Political Parties anti-FR strategies

Most respondents recommended that political parties should exclude far right parties from their political interactions and show active opposition to far right parties and their policies. Non-far right parties should demonstrate their values of inclusion, respect and equality, be proactive in denouncing and reprimanding any political groups that stir division and propagate misinformation and steadfast in challenging the various forms of hate and discrimination when they appear. Additionally, these political parties should lead by example, upholding moral and political standards and principles which are antithetical to the FR.

Media and the FR

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate levels of (in)tolerance among what we called the 'mainstream media', by which we mean newspapers, the State broadcaster RTE Television and Radio, and private TV channels. Although percentages vary between particular modes of mainstream media (newspaper, radio, etc.), the majority of respondents perceived mainstream media, especially State TV and radio, to be mostly neutral, meaning that they are neither tolerant nor intolerant of far right discourse. On the other hand, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, were perceived by respondents as being extremely tolerant of FR ideas, narratives and personalities. Indeed, a majority (66.7%) of respondents perceive social media at 5 on the tolerance scale, which is very tolerant of the FR.

From interview participants, the relation of social media to far right activity in Ireland can be categorised into three key areas. First, they create a toxic environment, with respondents emphasising the overwhelmingly negative role of social media in propagating FR ideas and personalities. This is facilitated by a low level of state regulation, and weak or non-existent self-regulation by social media companies themselves. Respondents felt that Ireland is in a unique position to pressure for greater regulation given that most of these companies have European headquarters here, while acknowledging that the power of these companies sometimes exceeds that of states such as Ireland. Respondents are particularly critical of social media companies' business models in promoting FR ideas and personalities, casting doubt on the stated intentions, efficacy and impact of companies' internal community guidelines and codes of conduct with regard to hate speech and FR talking points. Other interviewees suggest that business legislation and regulation can be used to control the role these companies have in propagating FR material and ideas.

Business, Trade Unions and Irish Society's tolerance of FR

Mainstream, non tech business, was seen to be largely neutral to the FR, with a total of almost 68% of responses qualifying them as neutral (40.5%) or largely intolerant. Trade Unions on the other hand were perceived to be largely intolerant of the FR. When asked to reflect on whether Irish society in general was becoming more or less tolerant of FR groups, ideas and personalities – the majority of respondents (52.4%) thought Irish society was becoming more tolerant of the FR, 28.6% of survey respondents thought Irish society was becoming less tolerant with the remaining 19% chose 'neither' tolerant nor intolerant. This increase in acceptance of the FR in Ireland was thought due to increased public exposure to FR ideas coming from leading foreign politicians, such as ex-US President Donald J. Trump, a general popular disillusionment with established politics, a mainstreaming of FR discourse, including among media figures and social media platforms, and a lack of state action to address the social issues that make fertile ground for FR narratives to grow.

Impact of Irish FR on organisations and CSOs

One of the first questions here was to ask respondents in CSO's to indicate the types of attacks and harassment experienced by their local groups and organisations. The results show that almost 67% of these organisations have had staff or clients experiencing threats or violence from the FR, 100% reporting online harassment or threats, 75% reporting verbal harassment or threats, 50% reporting physical harassment or threats and close to 40% property damage. Moreover, most (80%) felt that the frequency of these attacks had increased over the last five years.

Respondents were then asked if their organisation had a specific anti-FR strategy, with almost 60% replying that they did not. Those organisations that did have such a strategy had a combination of demarcation from, and confrontation with the FR, meaning in the first instance forbidding members to associate with FR organisations or espouse FR ideas and in the second instance, attending marches and demonstrations against the FR or behaviour associated with the FR, such as racism, homophobia etc. There was also evidence of a third strategy, whereby CSOs actively offer inclusive alternatives through citizenship practice to counter negative, degrading and violent FR discourse and action. This is done primarily through providing policies, protocols and training to support staff in countering FR discourse and actions and supporting their client populations who might experience it. Emphasis was also placed on coalition building and knowledge sharing with other organisations affected by, and concerned with, the FR. Some respondents emphasised the psychological and physical toll of working against the FR, particularly having to sustain internet trolling and abuse, including physical abuse.

When respondents who said that their organisation did not have an anti-FR strategy were asked which sorts of strategies they would endorse, the majority identified policies and protocols to manage online harassment and trolling and anti-far right and anti-racism trainings.

Respondents were also asked if an agreed national anti-FR strategy should be adopted, with a majority of almost 65% thinking this would be useful. Those who agreed with such a strategy, believed that it should have a bottom up, community involvement approach to its construction, placing education and awareness building at its centre. It should also include strategies to tackle inequalities which leave marginalised communities vulnerable to FR exploitation and attempt to find a more equal balance between the rights of freedom of expression and the right to freedom from threatening behaviours.

Webinar Series

The second part of the project was a series of five webinars with concerned national and international academics and CSO representatives on the themes of: far right misinformation strategies; European anti-far right strategizing; International anti-far right strategizing; the FR and racism in Ireland; and community strategizing against the FR in Ireland. The content of these will be summarised here in the same order.

Webinar 1: Far Right Misinformation Strategies

Speakers for this webinar were Eileen Culloty, of Dublin City University, Aoife Gallagher, from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, London, and Owen Worth, from the University of Limerick. The webinar was moderated by Joseph Munnelly, research assistant to the STOPFARRIGHT project. Themes covered were: Far right action and strategies; the threat of the far right to Irish democracy; and possible state, political party, and civil society responses to that threat.

With regard to the first theme, FR action and strategies, speakers identified a number of key strategies used, namely disinformation, misinformation and mainstreaming - that is telling lies about an issue, twisting the truth about an issue to suit FR objectives and ensuring that these messages are picked up and popularised among dominant media outlets, opinion makers and politicians. This strategy is both overt in that named FR spokespeople communicate such ideas publicly, and covert as anonymous individuals and groups spread them through the internet, both at a national and international level. With regard to the threat of the FR to Irish democracy, speakers agreed that for the moment the threat is not too grave. Nonetheless, they argue, this could change quite suddenly and rapidly, and it is important not to be too complacent about the FR threat.

Finally, regarding questions on state, political party and civil society anti-FR counter strategizing, speakers argued that the State should carry out public media literacy campaigns, advance greater regulation on social media companies, especially at European Union level, and increase trust in institutions by providing clear, effective solutions to problems created by inequality. Political parties should refrain from disinformation or misinformation and/or not work with the far right. However, such strategies need "a lot of thought, a lot of consensus and a lot of consideration" if they are not to backfire, according to Owen Worth. Finally, regarding civil society anti-FR strategizing speakers recommended that the public must help put regulations of social media (SM) companies on the political agenda, individuals should always report hate messaging to SM companies, and CSOs can use public 'inoculation' strategies on issues which invite strong FR reactions, anticipating and debunking FR discourse on these issues in advance. Other suggestions were to continue with 'deplatforming' of FR speakers, despite drawbacks on free speech ideals, refraining from sharing FR discourse on SM and broadening and deepening who and what are defined as 'civil society' in order to ensure more broad-based support for anti-FR measures.

Webinar 2: European perspectives on the far right

Webinar participants were: Anna Krasteva, founder and director of CERMES (Centre for European Refugees, Migration and Ethnic Studies), and professor at the Department of Political Science of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria; Aurelien Mondón, senior lecturer at the University of Bath, UK; Simone Rafael, journalist and editor-in-chief of www.belltower.news and head of the Digital Project area for the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in Germany; and, Aaron Winter, associate professor of Criminology at the University of East London, UK. The seminar was moderated by Prof. John O'Brennan, senior lecturer at Maynooth University Sociology Department, Jean Monnet Chair in European Integration and director of the Maynooth Centre for European and Eurasian Studies. The themes that were covered in the seminar were: Far right action and strategies; the threat of the far right to Europe; and possible state, political party and civil society responses to that threat.

Regarding the first theme, far right action and strategies, the main issue of concern for speakers was the mainstreaming of FR themes into public discourse. Krasteva pointed out that in some post-Communist countries this takes place even without FR public representation. Winter argued that many FR themes have long been mainstreamed in European society, such as racism. The issue then is to eradicate racism, and not just the FR. Rafael noted that the emergence of Social Media (SM) was a 'gamechanger' for the FR as it facilitates the mainstreaming and popularisation of its ideas and influence. Participants pointed out that this mainstreaming comes in the form of non-FR politicians arguing for immigration controls, Islamophobia, racism and other far right ideas, albeit presented in a more moderate form.

This leads on to the threat to democracy posed by the extreme lack of regulation of SM companies and poor self-policing by the companies themselves. The mainstreaming of FR messaging is a threat to democracy as it provides a negative, anti-democratic framing for anti-systemic sentiment, particularly in societies, such as post-Communist societies, where democracy has shallow roots. Winter points out that differentiating the FR as 'populist' from 'mainstream' politics casts the blame for ideas and attitudes attributed to the FR on working-class communities or the 'people', when in fact many of these, such as racism and Islamophobia are institutionalised in European liberal democracies. Rafael pointed to the example of the Covid 19 pandemic as a wedge issue used by the FR to gain popular support and further undermine democratic institutions.

With regard to state, political party, and civil society responses to the FR, participants argued, first, that the State must challenge media mainstreaming of FR ideas, personalities and groups. Political parties must examine people's disillusion with mainstream politics and challenge SM company power. SM companies must improve their moderation systems and be more transparent on how their algorithms work. CSOs and private businesses need assistance in developing anti-FR counter strategies, including advocacy, training funding and online strategising. Winter argues that there is a need to recognise the institutionalised origins of many far right themes, such as racism and xenophobia, and not simply compartmentalise them as something unique to the far right. Additionally, grassroots citizen initiatives in tackling many of these themes should be recognised and supported.

Webinar 3: International anti-far right strategizing

The third STOPFARRIGHT webinar on anti-far right strategizing had three New Zealand based academics as participants: Emily Beausoleil, Senior Lecturer of Political Theory; Chamsy el-Ojeili, Associate Professor of Sociology, both at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington; and Sean Phelan, Associate Professor from the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University. The main themes which emerged from this seminar were the centrality of listening as an anti-far right strategy (Beausoleil); critiquing the concept of extremism as a categorisation of the far right and the need to identify the utopian elements behind FR thinking (el-Ojeili); and far right thinking as critique (Phelan).

Beausoleil discussed the importance of listening as a tool to challenge advantaged groups' difficulty in accepting criticism. She discussed a project she worked with, Tauiwi Tautoko, which sought to lessen polarization and help previously closed people to move to more progressive or open views. El-Ojeili discussed his rejection of the concept of extremism in describing the far right, and other groups labelled extremist, as it presupposes a 'moderate' mainstream, which in fact does not exist, and can silence legitimate critique. He also argued that it is important to identify the utopian aspects of far right thinking as only by doing so can we properly understand it and therefore challenge it. Phelan discussed the fact that much far right thinking emerges from valid critique of existing social and political conditions, but its solutions are not conducive to solving these issues.

Webinar 4: The far right and racism in Ireland

Participants at this webinar were: Bryan Fanning, Professor of Migration and Social Policy at University College Dublin; Rhona McCord: Anti-racist and anti-fascist organizer, at the Trade Union, 'Unite'; and, Gavan Titley, Senior lecturer in the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University and docent in the Swedish School of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland.

Seminar participants offered possible responses for tackling the far right in Ireland that the State, political parties and civil society groups could adopt. Participants argued that the state should ensure that migrant workers are organised so that migration does not continue to be used for racist purpose. It is also important to consider the role of the media in the spread of far right ideas. Political parties must confront the far right and stand in solidarity with those affected by far right organising, as well as avoiding being drawn into far right led policy discussions. State and parties must publicly discuss the far right more and how best to tackle it. Civil society must engage with particular ideas that the far right puts out and offer rival narratives to these ideas, such as around conceptions of nationalism. It is necessary also to be clear on who the far right are and we must be aware that when we are talking about the far right, we are talking about organisations that play a historical role in attacking people and being incredibly divisive. Far right attacks on Travellers must be more clearly acknowledged. One of the key means to combat the far right is by mobilization and solidarity. It is important to update these strategies, however, to take account of how the far right has capitalised on new technology and media.

Webinar 5: Community strategizing against the FR in Ireland

The fifth and final webinar examined the impact of the far right on civil society and how local communities and civil voluntary groups can strategise against the growing influence of the far right in Irish communities. The seminar participants were: Mark Malone, Communications Officer, Far Right Observatory; Theresa O'Donohoe, who facilitated a community response to a proposed Direct Provision centre in her local community of Lisdoonvarna, and Sarah Clancy, poet, activist and community worker, Coordinator of Clare Public Participation. The seminar was moderated by Shane O'Curry, director of the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR). The themes that were covered in the seminar were: Far right action and strategy; the far right in rural Irish communities; and civil society responses to the far right in Irish communities.

Seminar participants concluded that their experience showed that the far right can move into rural communities and attempt to stir up discontent especially with regard to migrants. To counter-act this, participants recommended that the state invest more in rural communities, include the local community more in planning direct provision centres and along with local civil society actors create more 'safe spaces' for local communities to mobilise and discuss issues. It is also important that greater effort is put into integrating migrants and asylum seekers into local communities to ensure greater community solidarity, hence reducing the space for far right actors to exploit and create division. Local civil society should call out far right behaviour and discourse for what it is and prepare counter-narratives which can refute far right narratives. Small local solidarity initiatives can also help to counteract the far right.
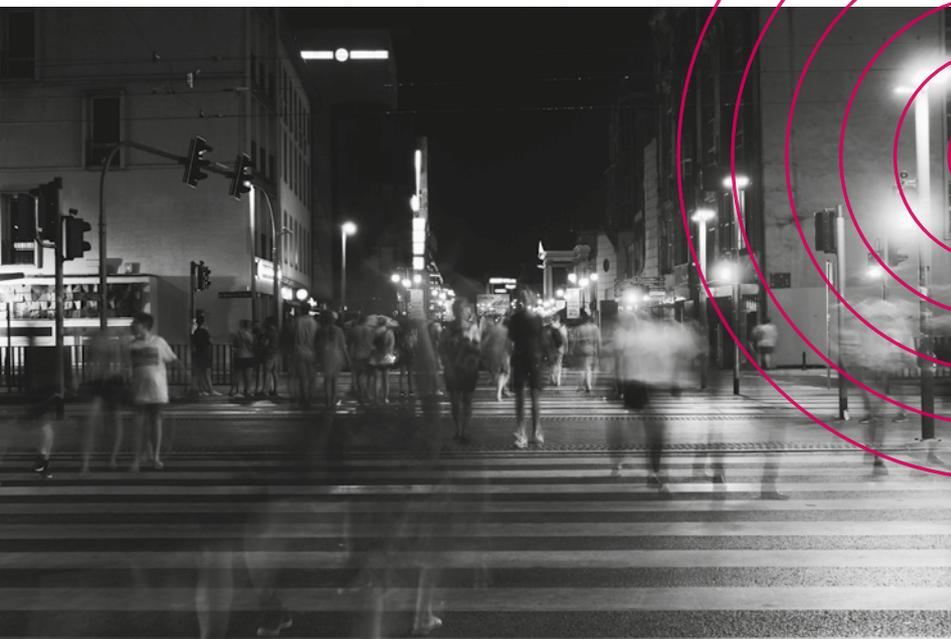
Conclusion

The report finishes by gathering together the different strategies identified through project activities for state, political parties and civil society, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of policy responses suggested which can be drawn on by CSO members and policy makers. The outlines of a national strategy are sketched here, which includes a more militant state in the defence of Irish democracy, with more controls on SM companies, more principled and exemplary conduct from non-FR political parties, which are more intolerant of the FR and FR linked ideas, and a better supported and more active CS which can build resilience and intolerance of the FR among local communities.

Chapter 1
The Irish Far Right Contextualised

Emergence, Causes, Characterisation, Consequences, and anti-Far Right Strategising
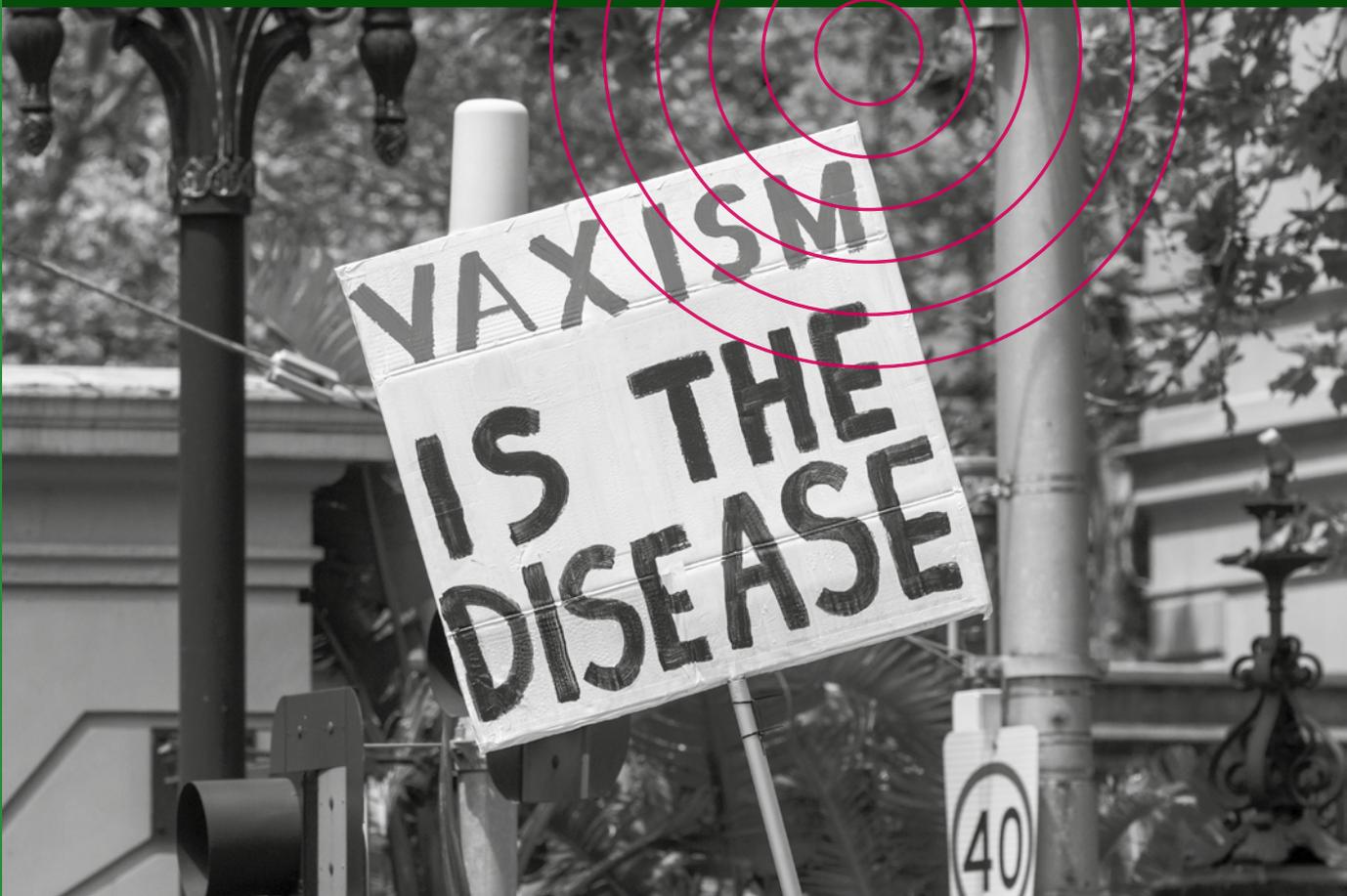
Introduction

The STOPFARRIGHT project aims to address the urgent issue of how CSOs can organise and campaign to resist far right growth and narratives in Ireland. Ireland is one of the few countries in Europe which has not yet seen the emergence of a viable far right party (Garner 2007; O' Malley, 2008; McGuigan 2014).

Yet in recent years the far right has been involved in mobilisations against direct provision centres and COVID-19 prevention measures (Gallagher 2020). The main aim of this introductory section of the report is to place the phenomenon in Ireland within the wider international and European context. Specifically, it seeks to review reasons as to why Ireland, unlike most of our European neighbours, has not seen the emergence of an organised, electorally significant far right party.

To answer this question, we will first discuss and clarify our terminology, specifically the use of the term far right. Then we will enquire into the causes of the rise of the far right in other countries, before examining the Irish context. Finally, we will discuss what the best strategies are to prevent and contain the rise of the far right.

Definitions

For the purposes of this project, we use Mudde's (2019) use of the term far right. We define the Right, following Bobbio (1996) as those parties and movements which, traditionally at least, view social inequalities, particularly class, gender and racial inequalities, as "natural and positive, [which] should be either defended or left alone by the state" (Mudde, 2019: 7). Nonetheless, what divides the mainstream right from the far right is attitudes to (liberal) democracy. The mainstream right, "such as conservatives and liberals/libertarians" (ibid.), accepts liberal democracy, including its key values of tolerance and pluralism, as the sole means to compete for power. The far right, divided into the extreme right and the radical right, on the other hand is "hostile to liberal democracy" (Mudde, ibid.). The extreme right, however, in the tradition of fascism, reject democracy *tout court* while the radical right "accepts the essence of democracy, but opposes fundamental elements of liberal democracy, most notably minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers" (ibid). This project accepts these broad definitions, but slippage between them and indeed between fascism and the far right is prevalent.

This is because there is no general consensus on definitions of the phenomenon. Mudde (2019, 7-8), for example has often labelled the radical right as predominantly populist. By 'populist' what he means is a political grouping that "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the pure people and the corrupt elite and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (ibid.). In this conception then both left and right parties and movements can be populist. As the radical right accepts democracy, but not liberal democracy, he argues, then it is predominantly populist in the current context. Rydgren (2018: 28) on the other hand, argues "that populism is a characteristic but not a distinctive feature of the radical right". He rather maintains that "ethnic-nationalism, not a populist ideology,,…primarily defines the contemporary radical right" (ibid.), as it is the former "that largely influences the radical right's populist message" (ibid.). On the other hand, Mammone (2009) questions entirely the use of populism to describe what he terms "right-wing extremist" groups in Europe. He argues that the use of the term populist to describe these parties runs the risk of "over-simplifying their party philosophies, decontextualising analysis, and by-passing their 'burden of the past.'" (ibid.: 185). Rather than populist, these movements are in effect "a contemporarization of neo-fascism within a post-materialist and global society" (ibid.: 187) and should be recognized as such. In a similar vein, Traverso (2019: 52) uses the term "post-fascism" to better contextualise these parties and movements, as the term recognises "the contradictory coexistence of the inheritance of classical fascism with new elements that do not belong to its tradition." Hence, for operational purposes the far right is a useful term as it encompasses both extreme and radical right, both concerns for this project, but we also note reservations on the use of the term, particularly with regard to the radical right element, put forth by these analysts.

History

Mudde (2019) identifies four waves of the far right in post-war democracies, especially in Europe. The first two waves (1945-1955 and 1955-1980) were peripheral to mainstream politics, with the first wave radical right defending the defeated fascist regimes and those who collaborated with it, and the second wave acting as peripheral critics of the post-war consensus, particularly regarding the welfare state. The third wave saw the emergence of many of the present generation of radical right parties, making substantial electoral inroads in Western Europe and later in post-communist Eastern Europe. These parties' key themes began to emerge as they railed "against immigrants, and/or indigenous minorities as well as European and national elites, while presenting themselves as the voice of the people who said what the people think" (ibid.:18).

The *fourth* and current wave (2000-), consolidated the third wave parties while introducing new ones. These parties gained much political and electoral headway due to three 'crises': the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (in the United States and beyond), the Great Recession of 2008, and the 'refugee crisis' of 2015" (ibid.: 20). As the parties made electoral gains, so they became more "mainstreamed", with their key themes becoming increasingly common in political discourse and the parties becoming more "acceptable for coalitions by more and more mainstream right parties, and sometimes even left parties" (ibid.: 21). It is also much more heterogenous, with three types of parties: well established radical right parties (i.e. the Front National [FN now National Rally NR] in France), transformed conservative parties (i.e. Fidesz in Hungary) and extreme right parties (i.e. Golden Dawn in Greece).

Fourth wave parties have increased their support and presence in democratic institutions, have broken through in countries which had resisted them (Germany) or where they were marginal (Hungary and the Netherlands), becoming sometimes the largest parties in parliament or the main opposition party. As a result, they are more relevant for government formation, either as leading government, as part of a coalition, supporting a government from the outside, or in opposition. They also have a strengthened agenda setting impact, particularly as electoral representation allows them more media space, and as a result their themes and issue framing has become increasingly used by mainstream centre-right parties (ibid.: 22). The fourth wave is also a global phenomenon, with radical right parties or leaders found in most continents, some of them reaching power (ex-President Trump in the US, for example, President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Prime Minister Narenda Modi in India). Hence the fourth wave radical right is now mainstreamed ideologically politically and organisationally, with "the borders between the radical right and the mainstream right - and in some cases left, as in the Czech Republic and Denmark - more and more difficult to establish" (ibid.: 23).

Ideological Characteristics

Apart from populism, discussed above, the fourth wave far right has, according to Mudde (2019) three other key ideological characteristics: nativism, authoritarianism, and familialism.

Nativism

Nativism holds "that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native groups (the nation) and that non-native (or 'alien') elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state" (Mudde, 2019: 27). The ultimate goal for the radical right is an ethnocracy, that is "a democracy in which citizenship is based on ethnicity" (ibid.: 26). As a result, "aliens" must either 'assimilate' or be expelled from the country. Many far right parties and movements hold to a form of "ethno-pluralism", which advocates separatism between peoples in order to preserve their supposedly unique national character (Rydgren, 2018: 26). This perspective does not therefore argue in favour of racial or ethnic hierarchy, but rather that each ethnicity or race is "different, incompatible, and incommensurable" (ibid.). The "national culture" therefore must be protected from threats and chief among them is immigration.

In both extreme and radical rights (and increasingly in centrist politics on both right and left) immigration is seen as problematic, at best, or fundamentally inoperable at worst and most, if not all immigration should be stopped. Moreover, "Anti-immigration sentiments are the single most important reason why voters support the radical right" (Rydgren, 2018: 30). Immigrants are viewed as a problem in four different ways: "a threat to ethno-national identity…; a major cause of criminality;…a cause of unemployment; and as abusers of…welfare states…which results in fewer state subsidies and other benefits for 'natives'" (Rydgren, 2018: 26). Hence a policy emphasis on privileging 'natives' in accessing "jobs, housing, health care etc as a sort of 'reverse affirmative action'" (ibid.: 27) is often advocated.

Nativism can also lead to rejection of large settled ethnic minorities within states. Traditionally, antisemitism has been central to far right nativism, and while this continues to be the case to some extent, Islamophobia, that is "an irrational fear of Islam or Muslims" (Mudde, 2019: 28), is much more common among the contemporary radical right. Islamophobia "equates Islam with Islamism or extremist political interpretations of Islam, and Muslims are seen as hostile to democracy and to all non-Muslims…." (ibid.: 28). Among much of the far right, anti-Muslim messaging has taken on a religious flavour as Islamophobia is framed as "a differentiation between 'Judeo-Christian" and 'Islamic' identities" (Rydgren, 2018: 27). Other European minorities are also targeted (ibid.) including Roma populations.

Authoritarianism

Far right groups are authoritarian in that they believe in "a strictly ordered society, in which infringements on authority are to be punished severely" (Mudde, 2019: 29). Social problems (alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, violence etc.) need to be dealt with as law and order issues. The origins of these problems are often blamed on "elites", specifically supposedly "left-wing" teachers and academics "who corrupt youth with 'cultural Marxism' and other 'perverse' ideas" (ibid.: 35), such as gender, sexual diversity and multiculturalism. These processes of "indoctrination", alongside immigration, are seen to weaken the nation, which is equated to ethnicity and the nuclear family.

Familialism

Familialism is, according to Kemper (cited by Mudde, 2019:148), "a form of biopolitics which views the traditional family as the foundation of the nation and subjugates individual reproductive and self-determination rights [of women in particular] to the normative demands of the reproduction of the nation". This can translate into sexism and traditional binary views of gender, and feminism and feminists as well as LGBT+ groups are viewed very negatively as a result (ibid.: 151). Nonetheless, there are variations of these views among the far right in different areas of Europe, with some Western European, especially Northern European radical right parties nominally accepting gender and sexual equality achievements. Indeed, this can be translated respectively into "feiminonationalism" and "homonationalism", wherein the levels of gender and LGBT+ equality achieved are seen as a badge of national pride, and essential to the nation's self-definition, especially with regard to "retrograde" Islam. Moreover, many RR parties have had women or LGBT+ leaders, as well as supporters and voters from these groups. Nonetheless, despite such supposedly "progressive" stances, most would not advocate further legislation in these areas, arguing that "equality" has been achieved, and few would question the doctrine of familialism.

Causes

Mudde (2019) locates most of the causes for the emergence of the radical right in the electoral arena - in other words the radical right has emerged as an electoral force largely due to popular electoral demands and choices. Mudde (ibid.: 99) identifies four reasons for the expansion of the FR in the current context. Firstly, he argues that people can vote radical right either to protest against the established parties and/ or because they support radical right policies. Second, popular support for radical right parties is due to a mixture of economic and cultural insecurities, whereby voters are "responding to economic stress caused by 'neoliberal globalization' (ibid.: 101), even as they seemingly prioritise cultural motivations, such as their disapproval of immigration and multiculturalism (ibid.: 101).

Rydgren (2018: 30) more precisely locates the origins of these concerns in a political realignment from socio-economic conflicts to socio-cultural conflicts, stemming first from the greater salience given to cultural issues by the Left since the civil rights protests of the 1960s and 1970s and second, due to the abandonment of class as the main political organising principle during the 1980s, particularly in the wake of the fall of communism. He notes that where socio-economic conflicts remain prioritised over cultural issues, radical right parties' electoral chances decrease and vice versa (ibid: 30). Moreover, socio-cultural conflict has increased as socio-economic decision making has migrated upwards to unelected and unaccountable multilateral or intergovernmental bodies including the EU, contributing "to greater convergence between the parties regarding socio-economic policy" (ibid.) and hence leading to its depoliticisation. This, as Merkel (2014: 18-20) points out, resulted in challenges in three areas central to democracy's good functioning: participation, representation, and governance, resulting in "'simulative democracies,' with hollowed out democratic institutions" (ibid: 18.), and a "two-fold oligarchization: socio- economically driven political self-exclusion of the lower classes and the self-liberation of the top 1 per cent....of the income hierarchy from the social responsibility that comes with property, accompanied by maximal political influence" (ibid.: 19). Democracy's equalising dynamics, as a result, have been put in severe crisis, creating space for dissatisfaction with liberal democracy, and therefore for the radical right to grow.

A third cause for the success of the far right, is the mixing of such global and local concerns. This can be located in the local electoral regimes, which may favour smaller parties, and with the emergence of effective far right leaderships and parties which take advantage of popular discontent around economic and cultural issues. Another important area is the media climate, whereby popular interest in far right themes can be exacerbated by media coverage of the far right. While the media may not always sway voters to vote one way or the other, they can "determine which issues voters deem important" (Mudde, 2019: 110), by giving platforms to far right figures, prioritising crime, corruption, immigration, and terrorism, all favourite far right themes, at the expense of, for instance, education, housing and welfare (ibid.), and framing issues such as immigration as "problems". Social media further complicates the matter, as it provides the FR with "an opportunity to circumvent traditional media gatekeepers and push [their] way into public debate" (ibid.: 111). The internet "has made it easier for the radical right to share ideas, coordinate activities, disseminate propaganda, form alliances, sell merchandise, and recruit members", as well as "foster collective identities among participants with little or no connection to offline mobilisation" (Rydgren, 2018: 33, citing Venglers and Menard, chap 15). They also act as fora for verbal violence and organisational tools for demonstrations that can lead to physical violence (ibid). Increasingly such organisation is at an EU and international level.

1. https://www.eurozine.com/the-populist-radical-right-a-pathological-normalcy/

Ultimately, however, Mudde (2018: 1111) argues that to gain headway among the wider public, themes circulated on social media need to be amplified by mainstream media and/or politicians. Similarly, mainstream politicians can co-opt far right issues, in an attempt to stop it winning votes. This is a risky strategy, however, as not only can it give prominence to these issues, but it may also provide more benefit to the far right party than the mainstream party. Regarding this latter point, there is a fourth and final debate about the relative importance of leaders versus organisations to attract and retain voters. Overall, in the case of the radical right, despite having many prominent and effective leaders, "in most cases parties trump leaders" (ibid.: 105). Extreme right groups, on the other hand, are groups of individuals "looking for a community and camaraderie, based around a provocative ideology" (ibid.).

While Rydgren (2018: 30) observes the predominance of work on electoral politics in the study of the far right, he also underlines the importance of analysing radical right social movements. This can range from "local initiatives to provide social services such as helping the old, repairing housing and supporting socio-economically vulnerable (but native) segments of the population" (ibid.: 33) to "circles of intellectuals and press and publishing houses…professional groups and other civil society organisations" (ibid.). The relations of these organisations, groups and individuals with radical right parties can vary from close to loose, but their importance to them should not be underestimated as they can serve as "… bridges between the radical right and the political mainstream", normalising radical right issue frames, facilitating mobilisation and contributing to political socialization (ibid.).

Overall, Mudde (2019:107) argues that while the extreme right is a "normal pathology, largely unconnected to the political mainstream, ….the populist radical right is better seen as a pathological normalcy that is a radicalisation of the political mainstream" (ibid.). The main question for him then, is not why people vote for the far right, as far right positions are already quite widespread among the electorate, but "why so few parties have fallen on fertile ground."[1] "The answer is to be found in the supply-side of issue politics, he continues, "most notably in the struggles over the saliency of issues…. and over issue position ownership" (ibid.). Nonetheless, in both cases, Mudde (2019) is viewing attitudes and issue positions associated with the radical right as pathological, that is problematic or even extreme.

El Ojeili and Taylor (2020) reject viewing such positions as purely pathological, however, as such an approach can obscure wider conjunctural and geostrategic explanatory factors. Positions such as Mudde's, they argue, serve dominant interests and the status quo, while blocking utopian thinking, that is "imaginative constructions of other better ways of being" (ibid.: 1152). They note that qualifying a political phenomenon as "extreme' indicates that it is "outside of mainstream attitudes, violating common standards or conventions" (ibid: 1143). This stance has three problems, they argue: it is ahistorical, as it fails to appreciate how such standards or conventions can change over time; it endorses a majoritarian perspective, regardless of the moral or political content of that perspective; and assumes an "unproblematic access to and measurement of middle-lying normative values" (ibid: 1144). Moreover, it correlates liberalism with moderation, when in fact, following Losurdo (2014), liberalism is "a tangle of both freedom and oppression, emancipation and dis-emancipation" (ibid.:1144) and cannot be reduced to such an imprecise term. Instead, the radical right must be viewed as symptom and result of a global "crisis of liberal intellectual and moral leadership" (ibid.: 1150) within a fragmented "post-hegemonic liberalism" (ibid.) which nonetheless is united by a "shared suspicion of popular politics, the people or the masses" (ibid.: 1151). There is a need then to return to utopian thinking to break this impasse and radical right ideation must also be studied from this perspective.

Consequences

In general, the overall aims of the far right are both to move their countries in an illiberal direction, "undermining the independence of courts and the media, snubbing minority rights, and weakening the separation of powers" (Mudde, 2019: 114), and to establish an "ethnocracy, a nominally democratic regime in which the dominance of one ethnic group, is structurally determined" (ibid.:115). The impacts of these policies have been felt in those countries governed by far right parties, or which have far right parties in their government as part of coalitions. In all countries with far right opposition parties, social movements, and non-party organisations public opinion can shift to focus on issues propelled by the radical right (Rydgren, 2018: 34). An example of this is Islamophobia whereby "the radical right has increasingly established a political-religious master frame with a large influence on the public discourse, far beyond the confines of the RR voters and activists" (ibid.: 34-35). The key desired outcome here, Mudde (2019: 121) argues is not so much to change public positions on these issues but to increase their salience, that is, "how important people think an issue is- and perhaps on the intensity of their positions" (ibid.), hence setting the agenda, so that the "political mainstream (media and politics) adopt[s] its issues and frames uncritically" (ibid.: 121). This can be part of a broader strategy to enter local, national and supranational representative institutions. Such shifts in public opinion can also lead to violence or the threat of violence which can have a chilling effect on targeted minorities and may exacerbate existing mistrust of state institutions among them, in the face of inaction against the far right on their part (Mudde, 2019: 114). This is particularly true of security forces, which are often suspected to have FR sympathies, which in some countries has indeed been found to be the case (ibid.).

Responses

Mudde (2019) outlines responses, or counterstrategies used by state, political parties, and civil society to challenge the FR, and evaluates their effectiveness. State reactions he measures on a scale from an intolerant 'militant democracy' to a very tolerant 'liberal permissiveness'. Political party reactions are marked by demarcation, confrontation, co-optation and incorporation, in other words parties can distance themselves from the FR or begin to incorporate FR ideas and even cooperate with their parties in government formation. Finally, CSOs can react by demarcation and confrontation. Ultimately, the mix of reactions will depend on local and national contextual conditions.

State: From 'Militant Democracy' to 'Liberal Permissiveness'

Mudde (ibid.) presents the German and US models as two extremes on a continuum of state responses to the far right. Germany is a "militant democracy" in which the main political institutions (executives, legislatures, and judiciary) are given extensive powers and duties to defend the liberal democratic order (ibid.: 131). The US model on the other hand, through the second amendment of that country's Constitution, provides sacrosanct and unquestioned protection to free speech. Hence, the German state can and does pursue far right groups, through say banning or preventing certain activities, while the US does not do this. Indeed, the supremacy of free speech concerns ensures that US courts will, for example, allow FR groups to mount demonstrations through neighbourhoods where their presence is sure to cause social tension. Both the US and Germany, however, do not tolerate violence, although it is said that both states are more tolerant of FR violence than from other groups.

Parties: Demarcation and Incorporation

Political parties can take four prominent and distinct approaches to the FR: demarcation, confrontation, co-optation, and incorporation. *Demarcation* is when liberal democratic parties exclude far right parties from their political interactions" (ibid.: 133). This can mean not only excluding the FR party, but also its main issues, such as immigration (e.g. Vlaams Belang in Belgium) (ibid: 134). *Confrontation* that is "… active opposition to FR parties and, most often, their policies" (ibid.), is usually practiced by left parties and it is often directed at more extreme FR parties and issues. With large radical right parties, it is more difficult to implement as these may be potential coalition parties for mainstream right parties in particular, and, moreover, confrontation with large RR parties may alienate potential voters. As Mudde explains: "If a mainstream party confronts a populist radical right party over its anti-immigrant or anti-Islam agenda, it could be perceived as (too) pro-immigrant and pro-Islam by mainstream voters and their own" (ibid.: 135). *Co-optation* is when "liberal democratic parties exclude [radical right] parties, but not their ideas" (ibid.: 136). This is the most common model of interaction since the 1990s. Whereas, in the past this could often mean more rhetoric than policy implementation, especially on immigration and terrorism, in more recent years this has become less the case.

Incorporation is when "not just populist radical right positions, but also populist radical right parties are mainstreamed and normalised" (ibid.: 137). This happens largely due to their "growing electoral relevance - and…the public perception of their rise…" (ibid.: 138). These parties have now become so big in many countries "that excluding them from government creates increasingly high costs for particularly mainstream right-wing parties" (ibid.). There have been Grand Coalitions between the larger centre-right and centre-left parties, as in Germany, and in many other countries there have been "potentially unstable

coalitions with ideologically diverse smaller parties" (ibid.: 138), in order to achieve demarcation of the far right. Nonetheless, centre-right parties avoid the negative consequences of these solutions by going into coalition with the radical right party, made even more possible by the fact that many centre-right parties have been moving right-wards anyway, resulting in little difference in their policy positions to those of the radical right party (ibid.: 138).

Civil Society: Between non-violent and violent resistance

Civil society responses to the FR are "primarily characterised by demarcation and confrontation" (ibid.: 139). With *demarcation* many civil society organisations (CSO's) (i.e. trade unions) "bar their members from being active within FR movements, or at the very least, from being candidates for FR parties or leaders of FR groups" (ibid.). This stance can vary from country to country and sector to sector with some being more or less strict - or even tacitly tolerant. On the other hand, *confrontation* "remains an important part of civil society responses to the far right" (ibid.: 141). Large marches, such as anti-racist or pro-women's rights demonstrations, have been held in many countries which directly or indirectly challenge the far right. There have also been smaller anti-fascist demonstrations, which can directly confront far right demonstrations and in which radical "black bloc" (i.e. young anarchist) elements can use violence. Such violence can, however, give the far right greater publicity and is questioned by the broader anti-fascist movement.

Krasteva et al (2019: 457), however, go further than Mudde (2019) as they not only identify "citizen's activism as a major site for countering far right populism" but also "for reimagining and revitalizing democracy". Hence, civil society's anti-FR counter-strategising can lead to new forms of democratic practice being suggested and developed. They identify four "types of citizenship relevant to the study of countering far right populism: contestatory, solidary, everyday, and creative" (ibidi. 458). *Contestatory citizenship* is when civil society movements seek "to offer alternative policies or ways of doing politics" (ibid.) through their contestation of "illegitimate domination and the (mis)use of resources/power in society" (ibid.). Activists in this sense seek to directly tend to the sources of populist discontent, and in so doing provide new models of democratic practice. *Solidary citizenship* seeks to counter FR discursive practices of Othering, with "alternative discourses of solidarity, human security, inclusion, and acts that are foundational for constituting civic actors through their struggle for human dignity and [a] politics of friendship" (ibid.: 464). Examples given are community centres open to all, regardless of legal or civic status; community support for deportees or the rights of asylum seekers; and, challenging negative discourses regarding vulnerable groups by creating and disseminating positive terms and tropes about them. *Everyday citizenship* is when "every active citizen can become an activist citizen and transform hospitality into [a] politics of friendship," such as, for example, opening their homes to migrants (ibid.: 468). Finally, *creative citizenship* is the use of culture and artistic practice as part of a "protest and activist repertoire" (ibid.: 469), and as a "means of empowerment of vulnerable groups" (ibid.), by for example, integrating creative and artistic elements into protest and facilitating artistic endeavours and expressions among vulnerable groups to help articulate their life situations to the authorities and wider society. While these approaches, the authors surmise, may not be effective in producing change in the short term, in the long term it can help citizens to look "for ways out of dead ends, of formulating utopias and political alternatives" (ibid: 470). Hence, Krasteva el al (2019) suggest a third civil society anti-FR strategy: actively offering imaginative inclusive alternatives through citizenship practice to counter negative, degrading and violent FR discourse and action.

What works?

Mudde (2019: 143) argues that which strategies or combinations of strategies work, will depend "on a broad variety of objective and subjective conditions, including the history of a country, the political culture, the strength of both liberal democracy and the FR group, and the control/role of the media." Additionally, he emphasises that the effectiveness of an approach depends on what its' objective is, which is itself linked to what the understanding of liberal democracy is, that is "whether one believes that the intolerant should be tolerated" (ibid.: 143). If the objective is to minimise the direct impact of a FR group, a ban is effective, as it can halt their gaining votes. However, this is a more difficult option when parties are larger and present in democratic institutions and when their ideology is similar to that of the mainstream centre-right party. In any case, "parties can and do re-emerge, rebranding as more moderate, without changing their ideology" (ibid.: 143). If they cannot be banned, another strategy is demarcation, that is limiting altogether interactions with the radical right party, the so-called *cordon sanitaire* approach to be found in France and Germany for example. This can work but only when all major parties engage in it, when the media is supportive of it, and when the radical right party remains small. While it can help exclude the party, it may not help in excluding the issues.

CSO demarcation activities can limit full mainstreaming but cannot prevent members supporting far right ideas and parties. Demonstrations, against racism, for example, can send positive signals to threatened groups but they have not stopped far right growth. Deplatforming - that is banning far right speakers - can stop them speaking, but it can also give them more publicity. Overall, in defining strategy it's important to look at the local and national context and use a combination of approaches based on that (ibid.: 146).

Mudde (2019) ultimately argues that the best strategy to combat the far right is to strengthen liberal democracy, by, first, explaining why liberal democracy is the best governance system we have "and how it protects all our discontents" (ibid.: 178). In particular, we should be honest about its' inherent tensions, "most notably between majority rule and minority rights" (ibid.). Second, there is a need to "develop and propagate positive political alternatives based on a host of liberal democratic ideologies (Christian democrat, conservative, Green, liberal and social democracy)" (ibid.: 179). Third, liberal democratic parties need to develop their own positions, from the perspective of their own ideologies, on a whole range of issues which the electorate are concerned with. These should include those that the far right has claimed as their own, but not exclusively and not following their lead. Fourth, and finally there is a need to "define limits to what collaborations and positions are consistent with liberal democratic values" in facing the challenge of the far right, preferably before being presented with that challenge (ibid: 179).

Others question Mudde's (2019) emphasis of liberal democracy as an antidote to the FR. Mudde (ibid.), for example explains why people vote for the far right but does not explain the structural reasons for its emergence. He discusses, for example, economic and cultural reasons for people voting far right, linking the two to 'neoliberal globalisation'. However, he does not discuss how or why 'neoliberal globalisation' came about, or who was responsible for its emergence and consolidation. Indeed, there is very little discussion of neoliberalism or capitalism as the wider context in which the far right has emerged, and how this may have impacted on its emergence. Nor does he interrogate the role of liberal democracy as the institutional context in which the far right has emerged, nor indeed its' role in the emergence of neoliberalism. He is quite critical of the media's role in providing an agenda-setting platform for the far right, yet in his defence of liberal democracy as the solution to the far right, he fails to critique liberal reification of free speech and how this is shaped by market structures, themselves impacted by

neoliberalism. His formula of the far right as some form of pathology is indicative: while the extreme right is a "normal pathology, largely unconnected to the political mainstream, ….the populist radical right is better seen as a pathological normalcy that is a radicalisation of the political mainstream" (Mudde, 2019: 107). The counterpoints here are pathology opposed to normalcy. Normalcy for Mudde then is the "political mainstream", which in the final analysis he identifies as liberal democracy and "liberal democratic ideologies (Christian democrat, conservative, Green, liberal and social democracy)" (ibid.: 179). He does not interrogate this notion of "normalcy" or "mainstream", failing to recognise their normative and partial designations, nor the tangled history of liberalism, with its shadows and light, as pointed to by El Ojeili and Taylor (2020).

In the end, what Mudde (2019) seems to be implying is that the origins and solutions to the far right are in narrative construction or framing. The far right has provided a particular narrative of the current socio-economic and political global context, and the solution is to provide a counter-narrative, based most forcefully around the content and value(s) of liberalism in general and liberal democracy in particular. Liberalism therefore remains absolved from any responsibility or blame for the emergence of the far right, and with this its' links to capitalism in general and to neoliberalism in particular as the context which has given birth to the far right. This can be contrasted, for example, with Wendy Brown's (2019) analysis which draws a direct causal line from neoliberal philosophical thinking and its real word consequences, and the emergence of far right ideas, parties and personalities. Hence there is a need to think further on how to incorporate these wider conjunctural and, indeed, geostrategic approaches into the study, as recommended by El Ojeili and Taylor (2020). Rather than simply doubling down on the benefits of actually existing liberal democracy, anti-FR strategizing could also be taken as an opportunity, as Siime et al. (2019) indicate, to actively reimagine and expand the content of democracy and democratic citizenship, as an alternative to the FR's narrow, exclusionary and negative interpretations of these.

Chapter 2
The Far-right in
the Irish context

History

As pointed out earlier, Ireland, unlike most of its European neighbours, does not have a politically significant far right party yet the country does display many of the conditions which would favour such a party's growth, such as rapid socio-economic change, increased immigration, socio-cultural adaptation and subsequent economic crashes (Garner, 2007; O'Malley, 2008). There are three main explanations provided in the literature as to why this is so.

First, the Irish political system with its domination by non-ideological populist nationalist parties had reduced the discursive and electoral space available to RR parties (Fanning and Mutwarasibo, 2007; Garner 2007). The two hegemonic mainstream parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, created an ethnically homogenous political narrative that goes back to the foundation of the state. Additionally, both these parties upheld a state-sanctioned regime based on strict traditional family values as interpreted and implemented by the dominant Roman Catholic Church. Both these factors effectively excluded outsiders and inhibited the growth of more right-wing nationalistic narratives (Fanning and Mutwarasibo, 2007). Nevertheless, in more recent times, both these parties have adopted more liberal stances on familial issue, which instead has been taken up by Irish far right circles. For example, Siol na hÉireann is described by its founder Niall McConnell as a "hard line Irish Catholic Nationalist Party" (The Irish Times, 2020) and its affiliate the Irish Patriot, an online and offline newspaper, distributes homophobic and transphobic hate as well as strong opposition to women's bodily autonomy (Irish Patriot, 2021).

Secondly, according to O'Malley (2008), Sinn Fein occupies much of the electoral space of working class and anti-establishment voters which would in other countries vote radical right. Sinn Fein's espousal of a progressive, left-wing and universalist version of nationalism and associated economic and social policies, offers an alternative discourse to explain inequalities among that electorate to that of the radical right (ibid: 971).

Third, there is an elite agreement against discriminatory discourse, and often on progressive legislation affecting identity issues as well. Ireland has become much more liberal on rights for sexual minorities, for example, a position broadly supported across the political and media spectrum. Similarly, gender equality has now become a key objective for all Irish political parties. There is also, broadly speaking, elite discursive agreement on migration in Ireland, particularly with regard to the benefits of labour migration (Fanning and Farrell, 2018; Elliot, 2019). Policy may, and in the case of migrants, often does, contradict such discourse (ibid.), but nevertheless most political and media elites by and large refrain from overt discriminatory language (O'Malley, 2008). This reduces space for far right discourse on these issues to be broadcast, at least in mainstream politics and media. Nevertheless, as many analysts note (see Elliot, 2019: 565), discriminatory attitudes and practices are far from eradicated from Irish society and governance structures, and hence remain available to be exploited by far right groups seeking to expand their influence in the country.

Despite these factors inhibiting FR electoral success in Ireland, FR-style discursive tactics have been used in a number of political contests, indicating the risk that such attitudes can be mainstreamed and the existence of an electoral well which responds positively to them. One example was in the 2004 Citizenship Referendum which successfully restricted Ireland's traditional jus soli citizenship regime. In this case, the mainstream parties used anti-migrant and racist rhetoric redolent of FR style discourse to garner the victorious yes vote (although on a remarkably low turnout) (Garner, 2004; Loyal 2011; Fanning 2012). Another example was in the 2018 Presidential elections, when businessman, Peter Casey, ran a campaign focused on tackling 'uncontrolled immigration' and ridding Ireland of refugee 'free-loaders', winning an impressive 24% of votes (The Irish Times, 2018).

Additionally various reports have noted increasing levels of populism and chauvinistic nationalism in Ireland (O'Connell, 2003; Carr, 2011; ENAR, 2017; INAR, 2020), with groups such as 'Irexit', the 'Irish Yellow Vests', the 'Nationalist Party', the Irish Freedom Party and 'Anti-corruption Ireland' mobilising to oppose the perceived threats of globalism and multiculturalism. Prominent spokespeople for these movements have emerged, using bellicose language reminiscent of ex US President Donald J. Trump, such as Gemma O'Doherty of Anti-corruption Ireland, a journalist and ex-presidential candidate, Justin Barrett of The National Party and Herman Kelly of the Irish Freedom Party, among others (McLoone, 2019). O'Doherty, Kelly, Barrett and their supporters provide a series of examples of a push-back on minority groups in Ireland whereby calls to oppose immigration are rationalised within a discourse of defensive nationalism. COVID-19 has provided a further platform for many of these far right personalities, capitalising on public anger at lockdown restriction violations by government officials and high-profile media figures, at perceived government incompetence in management of the pandemic and pandemic induced anxiety (Curran, 2021; ISD, 2021), often resulting in well attended anti-'lockdown' demonstrations. The pandemic, therefore, also presented an opportunity for the far right to enter mainstream politics and discourse in Ireland as elsewhere (Mudde, 2019:23; Gallagher, 2020).

On the fringes of the FR, quite a few CSOs have noted a rise in hate crime and in some cases acts of arson and destruction linked to FR groups (INAR, 2020; Schweppe et al. 2018; ENAR, 2017). INAR's (2020) report on racist hate has seen an increase of 30% of racist incidents since 2019, with racist assaults recorded at an all-time high linking this to increased far right activity both offline and online (Michael, 2020; Michael 2021). Reports also note the role of the internet in facilitating such actions, with user anonymity and lack of regulation facilitating FR dominance of the online space, often driving alternative voices or the voices of those they attack to retreat from those cyberspaces, hence facilitating an easier spread of online hate and disinformation (Hate Track, 2019; ISD, 2021; OHCHR, 2021). Other sources have noted how in online activities FR groups juxtapose the arrival of refugees in the country with homelessness, trumpeting messages such as "we should look after our own" (Irish Freedom Party, 2021) and posing as the champions of the 'native' Irish who have been forgotten and neglected by the liberal elite or threatened by so-called Marxist and LGBTQI+ propaganda (The Journal, 2020).

While many of those subscribing to such beliefs may be racist, it also preys on the insecurities of others who would not regard themselves as such, but would have concerns about immigration, asylum seekers or specific ethnic groups over others. In this sense, as Jefferson (2015: 128) points out, the reasons for joining or being interested in the FR range from an opportunity to exercise (racial) hatred to a desire to do something about local problems in which immigration and particular ethnic groups figure prominently. Equally, the spectrum of attitudes towards immigrants and particular ethnic groups ranges from strong expressions of hatred, including acting on these violently, through strong prejudicial feelings towards particular ethnic or immigrant groups, to the feeling that 'outsiders' should not benefit at the expense of 'insiders' (Jefferson, 2015: 128).

In this respect the Far-right capitalises on all these varying attitudes by playing to specific audiences, and upon concern for certain socio-community issues, such as housing. This element of exclusion, of feeling 'we should take care of our own' is a prominent attitude in Ireland (Hate Track, 2019; Fox, 2019; ENAR 2017) and these aspects of xenophobia stem from ethnocentrism, a perception or state of mind that encompasses othering. It is "a form of prejudice that protects group identity in economic, social and political terms … (and) does not in and of itself imply violence or entail legitimatising violence (but)… is aversive" (Young-Bruehl, 1996).

Responses

State Responses

Irish State action against the far right could be qualified, using Mudde's (2019) classification, as leaning more towards a US style, permissive model, than a German style 'militant democracy' model, with action largely confined to policing public disorder and violence. As Fanning and Farrell (2018) point out, the Irish state has taken little action to pre-empt the emergence of an electorally significant far right party in the country. Far right political parties operate freely in the state and compete freely (though not very successfully) in elections.

Regarding far right discursive tropes, there are specific legal prohibitions against discriminatory discourse, such as the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act, 1989. This law outlaws hate speech "against a group of persons in the State or elsewhere on account of their race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, membership of the travelling community or sexual orientation." Yet critics view the Act as outdated and inadequate in tackling hate crime, especially hate online (Schweppe, 2014) as it lacks consensus to distinguish between prohibited hate and non-prohibited offensive discourse (Ansbro, 2019). Without clear parameters on prohibited discourse, the Irish far right can mobilise and propagate campaigns and misinformation relatively unrestrictedly, especially online (INAR, 2021; ISD, 2021) with growing popularity on social media platforms (The Far-Right Observatory, 2020; Thomas, 2021). In response Gardaí have been concerned about the burgeoning far right in Ireland for some time and a small unit had been tasked with monitoring their online content - but only in 2019 were these fears voiced publicly (Gallagher, 2020).

At the European Union level, an Action plan has been drafted by the European Commission in response to the growing issue of misinformation and conspiracy within the EU (European Commission, 2021). The strategic communication briefing paper called for the union to be "prepared to anticipate and respond to disinformation relating to the EU" (European Parliament, 2015:1). The disinformation being targeted is inaccurate claims or lies regarding the work or policies of the EU, not disinformation generally, and the plan has the specific task to counter or "thwart Russian disinformation attacks" (European Parliament, 2015:2). Other than the action plan of November 2015, discussed above - very little of European policy (or Irish national policy) addresses the need to counter disinformation. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the salience of the issue once again, resulting in public health and safety concerns that the State can no longer disregard (European Commission, 2021; ISD, 2021; RTE, 2021).

Political Party Responses

Similarly, it could be argued that as there is no significant far right presence in any of Ireland's democratic institutions, political parties have not had to take a specific stand on how to relate to them. However, far right related events, such as anti-lockdown protests, have prompted reactions against the far right from some left wing parties such as Sinn Fein[2], People Before Profit[3], and the Socialist Party[4], indicating demarcation and sometimes confrontational approaches to the FR.

Civil Society Responses

Civil society action specifically against the far right, as opposed to the much more prevalent action against racism, misogyny or homophobia, has been sparse but is growing. The anti-FR strategizing that does take place, could be viewed as both demarcation and confrontation. The country has a relatively well-established anti-fascist movement that plays an influential role within radical left circles (Arlow, 2020). The so-called 'Antifa' movement according to Arlow (ibid.), makes its presence felt in three ways: as an area of left convergence and unity, as a preventative strategy, and as a cultural tradition.

Firstly, anti-fascism acts as a site of left convergence, in which ideological divisions within leftist circles can be subdued as political collaboration is encouraged against a common enemy. Second, in the absence of effective extreme right forces, anti-fascism acts as a form of prophylactic action (i.e. it takes preventive action) denying political space to extreme right micro groups before they become a popular force or a more serious political threat. Finally, a close cultural lineage between elements within the left and a past revolutionary tradition increases the appeal of anti-fascist activism among left-wing activists (Arlow, 2020). Examples of this preventative action include the push back on the extreme right movement PEGIDA's attempt to launch their fifteenth European branch in Dublin (Lavin, 2016) and counter-protests challenging the far right organised 'March for Innocence' rally in 2020, calling for the resignation of Green Party TD and Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman. COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown restrictions have meant that offline activist resistance has dwindled, due to these groups' adherence to public health guidelines, leaving public spaces dominated by the far right in a number of anti-lockdown protests (Curran, 2021).

Overall, then, there has been little action to counter the threat of the far right gaining headway in Ireland from the State and most mainstream political parties. What pre-emptive action has been taken has mostly emerged from civil society, most notably from anti-fascist and anti-racist movements. The recent founding of organisations such as the Far Right Observatory (FRO) are testament to an increasing concern in that sector to the threat of the far right.

2. See https://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/60039

3. https://www.pbp.ie/policies/racism-and-immigration-policy/#:~:text=People%20Before%20Profit%20supports%2
both%20and%20works%20alongside,fascists%20and%20hard-right%20groups%20to%20spread%20their%20hatred

4. https://socialistparty.ie/2021/12/limerick-far-right-defeated-in-anti-fascist-counter-protest/

The STOPFARRIGHT Project

The STOPFARRIGHT project shares this burgeoning concern with Civil Society about the possible growth of the far right in Ireland. The main objective of the project is to work with CSOs concerned about the far right in order to establish from their perspective the level of threat of the far right in Ireland, the extent and effectiveness of state, political party and civil society counter-strategising against the FR in the country, and ultimately to gather and share ideas about how these could be improved. Additionally, the project sought to facilitate information exchange between concerned sectors in Ireland and international and European academics and civil society groups who share this concern. To achieve these objectives the project has realised the following activities:

1. An online survey with follow up interviews with key CSO personnel working with affected populations, primarily in those supporting migrant populations, LGBTQI+ communities, women's groups and trades unions on the key themes of the project.

2. Holding a series of five webinars with concerned national and international academics and CSOs on the themes of: far right misinformation strategies; European anti-far right strategizing; International far right strategizing; the FR and racism in Ireland; and community strategizing against the FR in Ireland.

3. Producing a report on research findings and the conclusions of the webinar discussions and drawing up a series of anti-far right strategizing recommendations based on those for consideration by CSO, academic and policy communities concerned about the issue.

4. Launch and dissemination of this report.

In the next sections, this report will provide a summary of conclusions from the survey and interviews.

Chapter 3
Survey and
Interview Results
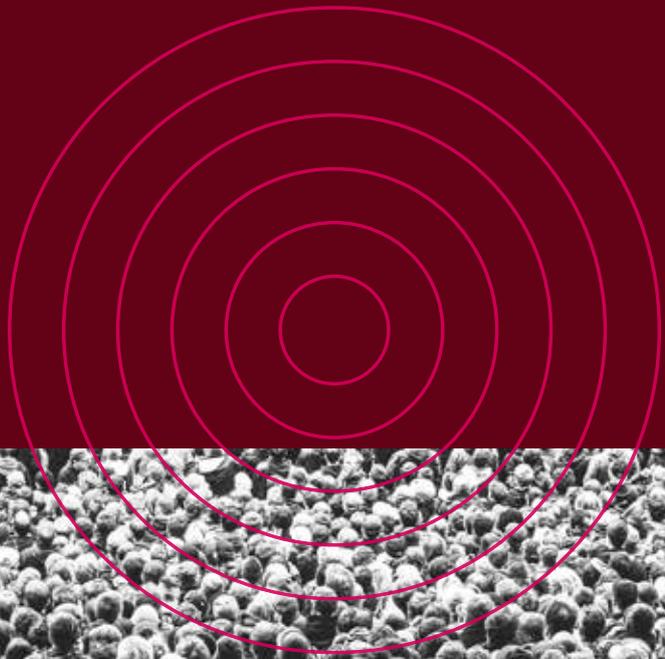
Introduction

As discussed above, the growth of the far right is of major concern for liberal democracies, yet Ireland is an exception to this trend with the phenomenon prompting scant public interest. Far right involvement in protests on migrants and COVID 19 measures has highlighted the need for more engagement on the issue. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the emergence, causes and characterisation of the far right in the literature, while Chapter 2 sought to situate Ireland within that wider context.

In this Chapter, we will provide a detailed overview of an online survey and subsequent interviews, which we conducted as part of the STOPFARRIGHT project. The objective of this research project was to engage with concerned NGOs, civil voluntary organisations and trade unions to gauge the impact of the present rise in far right activity and the perceived relevance of current state, political party and civil/voluntary organisation policy or action in relation to addressing the far right. As a community based project, in partnership with Crosscare, this study focused on gathering an overview of the level of counter-strategizing among Irish minority groups and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to evaluate and reflect on Mudde's (2019) outline of strategy for state, political parties and civil society. This survey and the subsequent interviews were based on Mudde's (2019) typology of responses or counter-strategies used by state, political parties, and civil society to challenge the far right, which can be summarised as follows.

With regard to State responses, he identifies Germany and the United States as two extremes on a continuum of intolerance/tolerance for the FR. Germany, here is identified as a "militant democracy" in which the main political institutions (executives, legislatures, and judiciary) are given extensive powers and duties to defend the liberal democratic order (ibid.: 131), while the US prioritises sacrosanct and unquestioned protection to free speech. Hence, the German state can and does pursue far right groups, through say banning or preventing certain activities, while the US does not do this. Neither state, Mudde (ibid.) points out, tolerate violence, although it is said that both states are more tolerant of FR violence than from other groups.

Political parties can take four prominent and distinct approaches to FR: *demarcation, confrontation, co-optation, and incorporation*. *"Demarcation* is when liberal democratic parties exclude far right parties from their political interactions"* (ibid.: 133). This can mean not only excluding the FR party, but also its main issues, such as immigration (ibid: 134). *Confrontation* that is "…active opposition to FR parties and, most often, their policies" (134), is usually practiced by left parties and it is often directed at more extreme FR parties and issues, usually through the militant rejection of FR ideas and cooperation with these parties. *Co-optation* is when "liberal democratic parties exclude [FR] parties, but not their ideas" (ibid.: 136). This is the most common model of interaction since the 1990s. Whereas, in the past this could often mean more rhetoric than policy implementation, especially on immigration and terrorism, in more recent years this has become less the case. Finally, *incorporation* is when "not just populist radical right positions, but also populist radical right parties are mainstreamed and normalised" (ibid.: 137). This means centre-

right parties both adopting FR discourse and policy on perceived FR issues and being prepared to form governmental pacts or coalitions with FR parties.

Finally, civil society responses to the FR are "primarily characterised by demarcation and confrontation" (ibid.: 139). With *demarcation* many civil society organisations (CSOs) (i.e. trade unions) "bar their members from being active within FR movements, or at the very least, from being candidates for FR parties or leaders of FR groups" (ibid.). On the other hand, *confrontation* means such tactics as large marches, anti-racist or pro-women's rights demonstrations, and smaller anti-fascist demonstrations, which directly confront far right demonstrations. A third CSO approach is also identified here, following Krasteva el al (2019) whereby CSO's actively offer imaginative inclusive alternatives through citizenship practice to counter negative, degrading and violent FR discourse and action.

Which of these approaches works best, Mudde concludes, depends on what its' key objective is and this is often conditioned by the operational understanding of liberal democracy used, specifically with regard to the degree to which the "intolerant should be tolerated" (ibid.: 143). All approaches have their advantages and disadvantages and need to be assessed within local and national contexts, using a combination of approaches based on that assessment (ibid.: 146). Ultimately, Mudde (2019) argues that the best strategy to combat the far right is to strengthen liberal democracy, by, explaining why liberal democracy is the best governance system we have "and how it protects all our discontents" (ibid.: 178).

The aim of this project focuses on identifying from a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) viewpoint, state, political party and CSO strategies aimed at limiting the growth of the far right in Ireland, assessing how effective these have been, and gathering recommendations on how to make them more effective. To achieve this, it uses an online survey and subsequent interviews, in order to outline the perceived threat to social groups targeted by the far right, quantify the collective experiences of those who have received threats and various forms of hate and harassment from far right groups in Ireland, and highlight the level of impact on minority social groups and CSOs. It also seeks to gauge the perceived level of tolerance towards far right groups, ideas and personalities in Irish State policy, among non-FR political parties and within both mainstream and online media, again from a CSO perspective. Finally, the study seeks to gain an overview of existing counter-strategies among participants as well as recommendations for improving these in order to counter the growth of far right influence and activity in Ireland.

Research process

This research was conducted only in the Republic of Ireland due primarily to limited resources, between September and December 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic was still of major concern during this period, although public health measures related to it were less severe than they had previously been. The research instruments were based on the literature reviews outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 above, particularly with regard to Mudde's (2019) typology of anti-FR counter-strategies by state, political parties and CSOs. Following the literature review, a stakeholder map was established which identified CSOs by province in the Republic of Ireland (Leinster, Munster, Connacht and Ulster) to gather a nationwide picture of impact and experiences of social groups in relation to FR activity across both urban and rural contexts. The participating community groups and organizations are among social groups that according to the literature are seen as threatening to the far right worldview and whose rights are most severely threatened by FR discourse and actions, including violence. These social groups include migrants, particularly of Muslim origin or any other ethnic minority, of migrant background or otherwise, feminist groups and women's groups in general, LGBTQI+ groups, and in general anyone espousing support for any of these groups, especially those who declare themselves as or are associated with the Left. A total of 130 groups were identified and contacted, online surveys sent to them, and follow up interviews requested from those who indicated a willingness to be interviewed. We received 42 responses to the survey, around a 31% response rate, with 7 follow up interviews being carried out. All research took place online.

Online survey:

Using Mudde's framework, the survey was designed to gather perceptions and recommendations around five main categories:

1. **Threat of FR.** Respondents were asked to indicate their perception of the threat that the FR posed to Irish democracy.

2. **State policy towards FR in Ireland.** CSOs were asked where they perceived state policy on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very intolerant and 5, very tolerant) in regard to the tolerance level towards far right groups and figures. The survey also asked respondents where they thought Irish state policy ideally should be on the scale.

3. **Political Parties:** using Mudde's (2019) four approaches outlined above: Demarcation, Confrontation, Co-optation, Cooperation. CSOs completed a multiple-choice question regarding the approaches non-far right political parties should take in relation to interacting or addressing the far right. They were also given the opportunity to explain their choices via additional dialogue/text boxes.

4. **Civil Society in general:** Here we included mainstream media, social media, the internet, business communities, trade unions and 'society in general', using a tolerance scale of 1 to 5 asking respondents to qualify their impressions of present attitudes among those groups to far right actors and ideas.

5. **CSOs:** As well as collecting data related to the impact of the FR and experience of FR activity regarding threat and harassment, the survey had respondents reflect on a number of CSO approaches to counter the FR, again using Mudde's (2019) characterization as a guide. Respondents were also requested to evaluate the effectiveness of their own policies and approaches and suggest any possible future innovations in that regard.

Interviews:

Interviewees were representative of most affected social group minorities (i.e. ethnic minority, Women's organization, LGBTQI+, Anti-Fascist and anti-racist groups). Interview schedules were based on the online survey and were designed to give participants an opportunity to develop their survey responses in more detail. All quotes from interviews below have been edited, by removing repetitions of interjections such as 'you know', 'like' etc., replacing them with […]. The aim here is not to interfere with what people are saying but rather to make it clearer and more accessible to the reader.
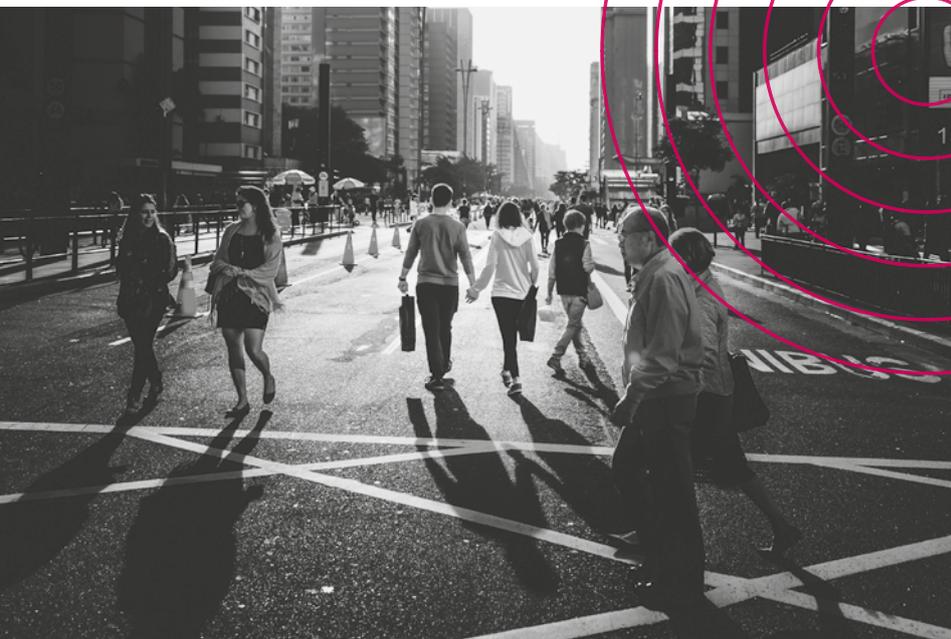
Findings report from online survey respondents and interviews:

This section of the report presents the major themes and concerns outlined in the data extracted from both the online survey and subsequent virtual interviews. The first section highlights the potential causes for the recent rise in FR activity in Ireland according to participating CSOs interviewed. These themes and identified causes are categorised into both structural and conditional causes and causes related to direct FR action and activity in Ireland. The second section outlines the perceived threat of the Irish FR to Irish democracy and the various perceptions of tolerance and intolerance in relation to Irish state policy. The third section is focused on political parties and their approach to countering or interacting with Irish FR groups. This section is followed by both survey and interview commentary on general perceptions of Irish societal tolerance of FR groups, ideas and personalities across mainstream and offline and online media. The fifth section outlines the general impact Irish FR activity has had on participating social groups and CSOs and the report concludes with commentary on proposed approaches to an anti-far right strategy and the outlined perceived priorities from CSOs in countering the FR in Ireland.

The Rise of the Far-right: Potential causes and areas of concern

In question 3 of the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate the threat of the FR to Irish democracy choosing from No Threat (1) to Existential Threat (5).

3. How would your organisation evaluate the threat of the Far RIght to Irish democracy at present from 1-5? 1 equaling no threat and 5 equivalent to an existential threat?
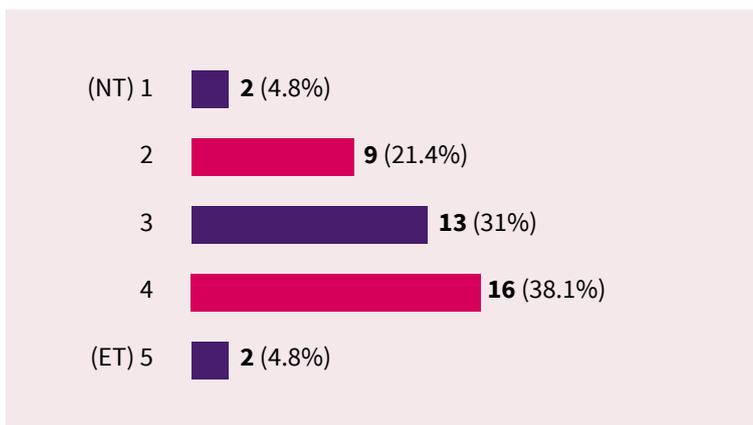
(NT) 1	**2** (4.8%)
2	**9** (21.4%)
3	**13** (31%)
4	**16** (38.1%)
(ET) 5	**2** (4.8%)

While almost all respondents saw the FR as a threat to Irish democracy, opinion was divided as to the level of that threat, with 21.4% viewing the FR as a minor threat (2), 31% as a medium threat (3), 38% as a serious threat (4) and only 4.8% as an existential threat to Irish democracy. In interviews the reasoning behind this division was clarified to some extent with interviewees recognising that the far right presence in Ireland was small, especially in regard to political representation. Nonetheless, interviewees noted that its presence was growing for a number of possible reasons:

Interviewee 3 spoke of the lack of any large FR traction in Ireland: *"I don't think they have a great presence in Ireland, you know, in the sense that I don't actually believe the far right are ever going to make many gains in Ireland. They're a very small force, I suppose, like certainly since the start of the pandemic, they have kind of mushroomed."* Although recognising the growth in FR activity, support for FR groups was seen as remaining fringe and a marginal threat.

Interviewee 6 appeared less positive regarding the recent growth of FR activity in Ireland. Although reflection was made on the historic lack of FR presence in Ireland, Interviewee 6 did recognise a significant rise in FR presence compared to six or ten years ago: *"I have found myself down the years explaining to people who express surprise that Ireland hasn't historically had a bigger far right presence than it has had up until recently so it is with surprise that I have seen a more recent emergence of the far right rise. We have seen this emergence and, you know, a much more significant far right presence in Ireland today than it was six years ago, certainly what it was ten years ago."*

Interviewee 4 mirrored the observations expressed by interviewee 6: *"Yeah most certainly yeah, yeah. Particularly over the last kind of say maybe four years or thereabouts, maybe?"* Suggesting that Irish far right presence has grown within the last five years.

Interviewee 7agreed that FR presence in Ireland was definitely increasing and reasoned this view by reflecting on the Irish FR presence in local and political elections: *"I would feel like it's an increase yeah I feel like it's increasing definitely, and I mean going back years even there were no particular far right political parties".* This suggests that in recent years, the Irish FR have been mobilising to participate in the democratic process. Interviewee 7 also spoke of the increase in FR visibility: *"… also it would seem like there is activity, when you see some things like street protests and protests and things like that, so I would say, increasing"* – suggesting that FR presence in Ireland was becoming more visible in Irish society and was potentially gaining more attention as a result.

From the interviews a number of themes emerged outlining the reasoning behind the perceived increase of far right activity in Ireland. These factors can be categorised into two areas: structural and conditional causes and results of direct FR strategic action:

Structural & conditional causes:

Interviewees identified three structural and conditional causes for the rise in FR activity: the COVID 19 pandemic; economic austerity, stress and struggle; and a lack of political leadership and representativeness in Irish politics.

1. COVID 19 PANDEMIC:

Most interviewees spoke of the COVID 19 pandemic as being a major reason behind the recent rise of far right activity often reflecting on how the far and radical right exploit people's fears and worries in uncertain times.

Both interviewees 6 and 4, compared past occurrences of the far right reflecting on how sections of Irish society had been present to counter and protest their presence in Irish streets and communities. As lockdown restrictions limited the capacity to counter-protest and challenge rallies and gatherings, the far right was free to occupy public spaces and became increasingly visible in various anti-lockdown and anti-mask rallies and demonstrations.

According to interviewee 4, the pandemic allowed the FR to take ownership of public spaces and, additionally charged that the authorities allowed them to do so, explaining that *"with COVID we see these kind of anti-vax protests that are happening on the regular that are being facilitated."* As well as highlighting the increased FR visibility in public, interviewee 4 expressed dismay at the perceived legitimacy such FR groups received in the media coverage of various rallies and protests: *"…being echoed in the media as some sort of legitimate grouping."*

Interviewee 5 touched on the lack of coherence from the Government in relation to handling the pandemic and COVID 19 restrictions: *"I think there's a lot of suspicion with the government, and I think the pandemic, maybe didn't help us because the messaging is back and forth, maybe?"* – suggesting that public confusion and apparent state miscommunication with the public around restrictions and public health guidelines potentially aided susceptibility to anti-vaccine and conspiracy narratives borne from government suspicion.

The COVID 19 pandemic was also seen as a significant moment in drawing attention to fringe groups in communities across the country. As interviewee 1 surmised: *"I think the anti-vax movement has perhaps helped greater numbers of people to understand that what's going on is weird".* Following various anti-vax and anti-lockdown protests, affiliations and links between anti-vax movements and the Irish FR were becoming increasingly visible as fringe FR groups positioned themselves as organisers of rallies and protests around COVID 19 restrictions. As interviewee 1 suggests, this has brought the Irish FR phenomenon into mainstream conversation and media coverage.

Interviewee 7, spoke of this new intersection between the anti-vaccination movements and the far right: *"You start seeing….the intersection of… anti-vaccination and stuff that happened around COVID, but I think prior to COVID I would have thought it was quite fringe and limited, and now I feel like the far right and let's call it, maybe militant or active sense is probably still very fringe but that there's this seeping into other kind of discourses and areas … the lines are being blurred between what, you know, might have been just people who were conspiracy theorists or cranks or something like that".* For interviewee 7, the lines between two movements are becoming blurred and that although violence at protests still remains fringe – FR discourse appears to have spread into other ideological spaces.

In sum, interviewees feared that the intersection between anti-COVID 19 restrictions and the far right has meant increased visibility not only in public space but also, due to protests and public disorder, in the mainstream media.

2.ECONOMIC AUSTERITY, STRESS AND STRUGGLE:

Another potential cause for the perceived rise in far right activity is linked to economic austerity and how in uncertain times and at times of stress and struggle, scapegoating and general pessimism can potentially increase susceptibility to far right narratives. Interviewee 7, for example, pointed to the impact economic stress plays in drawing people into a negative frame of mind where anger and general pessimism can potentially dominate: *"Like, it's intellectually harder to go down the positive route and it's a lot easier to look at the negatives. It's really easy if you're in a bit of a bad mood so easy to just… be negative, be pessimistic, you know?"* In addition, interviewee 7 suggested that such negativity, especially since the pandemic, and general stress and unease, could potentially increase susceptibility to hateful FR rhetoric: *"People are wrecked and I think those things become more attractive, you know?"*

Interviewee 5 spoke similarly regarding the perceived rise in FR activity in Ireland. Like interviewee 7, the overall unhappiness and general dissatisfaction was seen as a conditioning factor in increased hateful narratives and othering. Interviewee 5, for example, argues that *"with the rise in the far right, overall, I would say it's more that people aren't happy. And they are looking for people who are different or other to blame. And the easy targets are people who don't look like them … and I think just the general feeling of dissatisfaction … but definitely when people aren't happy….easy targets are people who are different."* In this view, othering and scapegoating are assumed to be symptoms from individuals who are unhappy and struggling with life in general. In regard to social groups who are threatened by FR movements and ideas, interviewee 1 spoke of the general sense of weariness or a growing danger felt by social minorities in response to perceived negativity and hate developing as a result of general hardship, stress and tolerance of hate: *"It's just …sowing….an atmosphere of fear."* Fear in this context, is the fear of social minorities witnessing the rise in various forms of hate crime and reflecting on the increased visibility of groups who hold hateful ideas.

3.LACK OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION:

The perceived lack of leadership or trust in the current political system was another common theme suggesting that susceptibility to far right narratives is only increased by feelings of neglect and a lack of political representation which recognises these struggles. As expressed by interviewee 6, this perceived lack of leadership creates a vacuum or space in which the FR can grow: *"A lack of fight back, you know, like a leadership to articulate the frustrations that people experience in their everyday lives … if there is a void something's going to fill the void, right?"* Mistrust in the current political system can potentially lead individuals to seek representation elsewhere, including to representatives or ideologues who have less inclusive or dangerous ideas.

Both interviewees 3 and 4 spoke of people in general feeling left behind and mirrored the perception that austerity and restrictions and regulations in uncertain times have ostracized certain sectors of society, specifically those who are already struggling to make ends meet. Interviewee 3: *"I suppose you could say… where people feel that their rights are being eroded from left, right and centre so that has created a vacuum for the far right to grow in, and they have managed to … they found a little niche for themselves, you know to do this".* As interviewee 4 summarises in relation to Irish politics and societal structures in general, society at large is being neglected and in turn is seeking representation or solace elsewhere: *"I think there is a sort of a laissez faire….attitude in general within Irish….institutions and politics and [a] sort of deference to…corporatism and [an] eroding away of the state and state responsibilities towards… protecting its people and that is deliberate … It's neglect."*

Far-Right strategic action and activity:

4.EXPLOITING SOCIAL CONCERNS & ISSUES:

As well as recognising the social and structural environments that can nurture far right narratives, Far-right exploitation of pressing social problems was recognised as a strategic tool used to further FR political objectives. One such issue interviewees pointed to was how the FR juxtaposes the homeless crisis or housing shortage with issues of asylum. As interviewee 3 declares: *"what they [far right group] have done is they have adopted in many ways, you know, close to the left in the sense that, you know, they're concerned for the homeless, they're concerned for, you know….for civil liberties and this kind of stuff."* As well as touching on the perception of how the FR have adopted concerns and societal issues usually centred in the politics of the left – interviewee 3 outlines a trend in FR movements to exploit real problems faced by disadvantaged groups in Ireland.

As interviewee 4 expressed, the FR are: *"hijacking certain social issues and with the use of certain language or whatever…trying to circulate… elements of disinformation or their goals and through…what might on the surface seem quite reasonable issues or concerns… are ultimately being used as a guise to dismantle… aspects of public confidence in institutions or knowledge … and, you know, knowledge bases or attitudes towards minorities that they, for whatever reason, have a problem with".* Not only are real-life problems exploited by the FR for traction and mobilising support but as interviewee 4 outlines, they are used to dismantle and disrupt public confidence in the existing political and institutional systems. Narratives are simplified to binary and divisive tropes of 'us vs them' or subtly guised by way of exploiting the real-life concerns and worries of people but offering solutions which are exclusive with nativist elements and 'othering'.

Interviewee 6 spoke of economic hardship and people's eroding trust in the authorities: *"but it's the ongoing tolerance and facilitation … you know, the reproduction of the conditions in which the far right tries to utilise is ongoing, you know? The inequality, economic despair, constant insecurity, housing crisis, the homeless crisis, these are conditions that make fertile ground for the far right."* So, as well as highlighting a structural cause for a rise in Irish far right activity, interviewee 6 suggests the FR actively use this 'despair' and struggle to aggravate people's worries and anger, and so further their own political objectives.

Interviewee 7 takes the point further suggesting that austerity and poverty enables FR discourse to fall on disgruntled and vulnerable ears: *"I do think that economic hardship, is a contributor and it's probably more of an enabler as well in that it allows bad actors, to put them that way".* Scapegoating and xenophobic tropes are then used to amplify FR Ideas and messages. As interviewee 7 continues: *"they (FR) start pushing that narrative against migrants [that is] asylum seekers and so called fake economic migrants versus productive, economic migrants."*

5. INTERNATIONAL AND OUTSIDE INFLUENCE

Across all interviews with CSO representatives was the recognition that the Irish far right did not exist within a vacuum and that it had worldwide influences and links with international FR groups, personalities and movements which have had a significant impact on the rise of the Irish far right in recent years. Interviewee 1 spoke of US politics and the election of Donald Trump and other right-wing populist figures: *"Obviously I think Donald Trump has, you know, unleashed these forces like never before, and given license to other leaders around the world, and others of their ilk…he has had a massive impact; people are feeling like they can say dodgy stuff a bit more than what maybe was said before."* In this view, then Trump's legacy is perceived to have validated groups of people who hold xenophobic and divisive views, and, in many ways, the global rise of the FR has emboldened pockets of Irish society who share these values.

This shared FR worldview with increasing representation in countries like the US has led to the inevitable consequence of rising FR activity in Ireland. According to Interviewee 2: *"I think that's the logical consequence of the activities of the far right in other places, you know we have a very, an increasingly integrated world where people and information moves across boundaries very quickly. And if there is any time in history at all when people have become copycats more than ever before, it is now".* Drawing attention back to the Irish FR, interviewee 2 spoke of seeing patterns among FR groups in Ireland suggesting that could have been potentially inspired or encouraged by what they have seen elsewhere: *"I think that a lot of the activities of the far right that we're seeing in Ireland, you know, these are ideologies or the consequence of the kinds of things that people get exposed to, the kinds of things that we hear, the kinds of things that you see happening in other places."*

The perception of ideas and narratives transcending borders and connections with outsiders with similar ideas was mirrored by interviewee 6, where the role of social media was put in focus: *"We have social media and crucially, I think that with Ireland being in the Anglosphere, in other words, being part of the English-speaking world where suddenly local contacts and borders don't matter. They don't matter on Twitter or Facebook and whatever social media platform. And so, we had, you know, a combination of the Brexit effect and the Trump effect rippling across to Ireland and those discourses….but also the strategic targeting of Ireland by reactionary forces, you know what had happened before with Opus Dei and, you know, the protection of the unborn child, etc. And you know, the 1983 referendum to bring about a constitutional bar on a woman's right to choose were due in part to a concerted effort by an international ultra conservative conspiracy to roll back … attempts to get a foothold in Ireland … And I think that there was a kind of a coalescing of them with older reactionary ultra conservative forces, like Youth Defence which were very much far right adjacent and…which had some players with very intimate links with neo fascist and neo Nazi groups across Europe."* According to interviewee 6, then, the contemporary influence in Ireland of international FR discourse and politics, amplified by social media and the globalised world dynamic today, is part of a wider and longer established pattern of international interference in Irish politics by FR or ultra-conservative groups seeking to stymie and roll back successful socially liberal campaigns in the State.

In sum, the perceived rise in far right activity was linked to international and outside influences often amplified by social media and the borderless exchange of ideas and narratives. The rise in FR activity abroad was also seen as a significant amplifier of far right ideas in Ireland, contributing to the spread of FR ideas and personalities building support.

6.FUNDS & RESOURCES:

Linked to outside influence on the growing Irish FR, a theme among some interview participants was the suspicion that much of the funding for these groups in Ireland was coming from abroad. Interviewee 1, for example, spoke of a lack of transparency around funding and resources used by FR groups pushing transphobic narratives across various channels of the media: *"the far right are being funded from abroad in huge amounts of money and compared to the relevant NGOs representing these minority communities… like we fight every year just to just to get our salaries renewed and all of that. It's like a David and Goliath situation that's kind of … that's very, very worrying and because we can see how effective they are, how effectively they are at using social media."* Interviewee 1 expressed concern additionally at how such groups using social media seem to be able to finance questionable research and surveys to amplify their message, giving an example of one such nationwide online survey which had transphobic affiliations and biased and leading questions to manipulate participants.

In a similar vein, interviewee 6 spoke of the personal financial gain, representatives or platformed figure-heads for the Irish FR can achieve encouraged by international FR figures and alternative social media platforms and forums: *"American far right actors and would be Irish actors on the far right [have] courted tons of resources and funding and have been behaving in a way that is about [accruing] resources and funding from the US, which if you're into the far right grift - it's big you know? There's a big well of money for you to tap into and you can have all these you know, 4Chan these rooms and different spaces, where that world goes on, so I think that same thing happened."* As interviewee 6 describes there are lucrative opportunities to facilitate far right ideas and that the opportunity to gain financial resources could be accommodated in alternative online spaces.
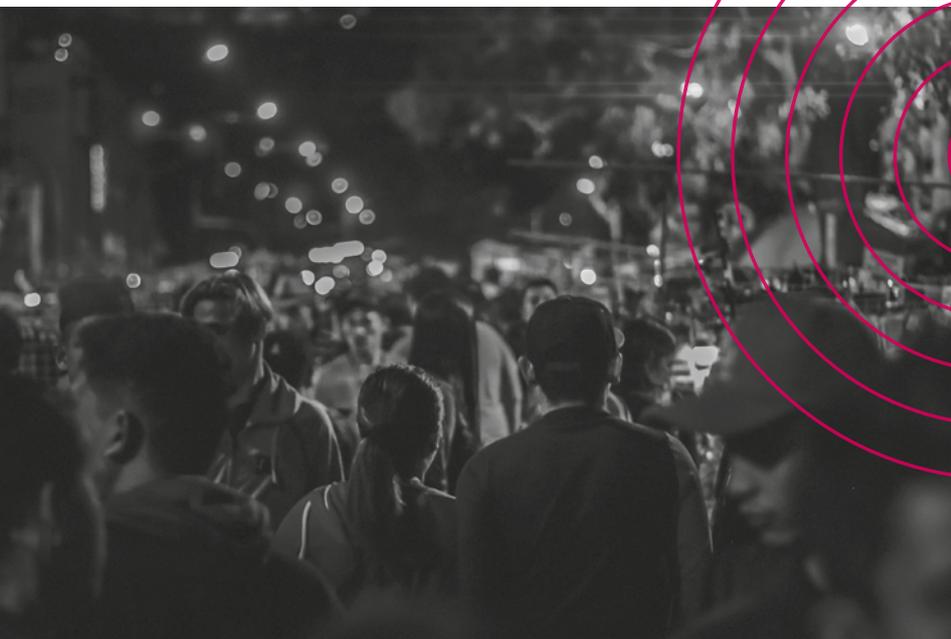
Perceived FR threat to Irish democracy and State policy:

This section refers to the impressions of respondents with regard to the level of tolerance to the FR in Ireland from the State, political parties and wider civil society. Regarding State action, Question 4 was based on Mudde's (2019) typology of state action from a US style Liberal Permissive attitude, which prioritises free speech above all else, including the content of such speech and a German-style Militant Democracy, which is intolerant of anti-democratic behaviour by political actors. In the question, respondents were asked to qualify the Irish State's approach to the far right on a five point Likert scale from Tolerant to Intolerant of far right activity, representing Mudde's models respectively.

4. With an intolerant approach at 1 and the tolerant approach at 5, where would you place Irish State Policy on the scale of 1-5?

(Intolerant) 1 — **1** (2.4%)
2 — **3** (7.1%)
3 — **13** (31%)
4 — **18** (42.9%)
(Tolerant) 5 — **7** (16.7%)
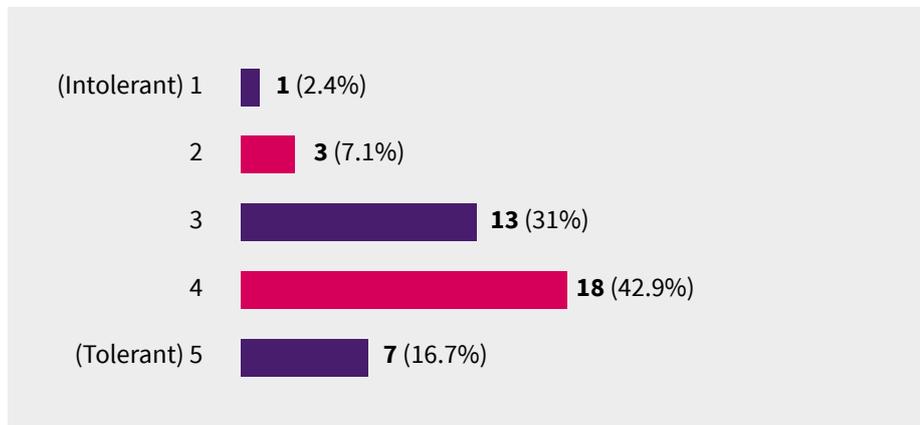
The majority of respondents saw State policy as having some level of tolerance to the FR, with only 2.1% of respondents seeing it as intolerant and 42.9% as quite tolerant.

Then in question 4a, participants were asked what degree of tolerance the State should have to the FR. Here, 80% of respondents thought that State policy should be quite or extremely intolerant.

4. a. Where should it be in your organisation's opinion?

(Intolerant) 1 — **11** (26.2%)
2 — **24** (57.1%)
3 — **7** (16.7%)
4 — **0**
(Tolerant) 5 — **0**
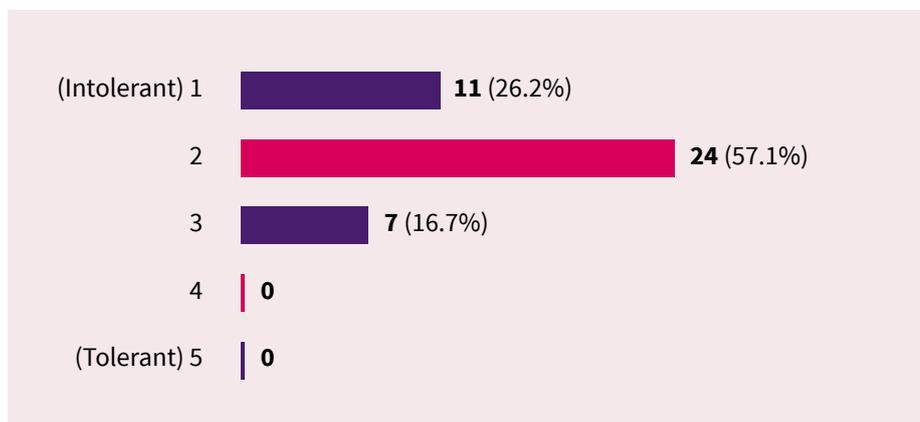
Consequently, referring back to Mudde's (2019) models, respondents saw current Irish State attitudes to the far right as closer to a US style Liberal Permissive approach, and believed that ideally it should move closer to a much less tolerant Militant Democracy model.

Respondents had an opportunity to explain their reasoning for these answers in comment boxes below the question, and many took advantage of this opportunity, perhaps indicating the strength of feeling on the issue. These responses can be categorised into two major approaches to dealing with the far right, which are not necessarily seen as mutually exclusive. The first relates back to Cas Mudde's point regarding approaches to democracy, specifically around the level of 'tolerance of the intolerant'. In this sense, many respondents felt that intolerant speech in particular should not be tolerated by the state. The second, emphasized educational approaches to counter and limit the spread of such intolerance.

Survey response 2, for example, declared that: *"Every individual has the right to 'Freedom of Expression' and duly we have the right to live without fear and to practice our beliefs without enforcing our beliefs on others. The far right instil fear and display hatred, they actively propagate notions based of personal biases and misinformation that create an arena of fear and hence leads to aggressive actions and endangering of people whom they victimize".* Hence Survey response 2 draws our attention to the issue of balance in regard to freedom of speech, that is the limitations to that freedom for the protection of others. Freedom of speech is seen as a fundamental right but so is equally the protection of those who are threatened by hateful rhetoric. Similar survey responses reemphasised this need to understand that there should be limitations to speech especially when the speech in question is inciting hatred or violence against another social group.

For example, survey response 5 argues that: *"Free speech is an important right for all, even if we don't like the things we hear. However free speech does not entitle others to incite hatred, a line the far right in Ireland dangerously crosses in many instances".* Similarly, survey response 12 believes that: *"Freedom of expression is fine but when it is reduced to fear mongering and blatant exploitation and discriminatory commentary it needs to be squashed immediately".* Survey response 1 goes further, arguing that: *"There should be zero tolerance for organisations which actively engage in hate organising and incitement - where there is a plausible threat to the safety of people from minority backgrounds"* These are only some responses from a majority arguing that freedom of speech was a right but that it should be limited by the State in cases where hatred and disinformation is used to endanger others and cause social division.

Nevertheless, though State regulation of hate speech and recognising the limitations to freedom of speech was expressed within both surveys and interviews – a common recommendation was the need for education around critical thinking and media literacy as preventative measures to far right manipulation and misinformation. Additionally, a sense of balance was recognised by some respondents as crucial, as strict speech regulation or criminalisation regarding hate speech could have adverse effects such as driving individuals to far right narratives or moving dangerous discourse underground.

SOME RESPONSES:

- Survey response 18: *"Free speech has to be maintained as a principal but with responsibility. A hard intolerant line is likely to push people toward the far right than discourage [them]. There needs to be avenues to leave far right thinking"*

- Survey response 7: *"Need to reform laws on hate speech and hate crime, need to provide critical thinking and internet literacy in education, need to tackle disinformation."*

- Survey response 15: *"I don't believe we can eradicate the threat of the far-right through criminalisation alone. There needs to be education…."*

- Survey response 42: *"I am not sure 'pursuing' is the best approach. Need to look at the conditions that help grow far-right activity"*

Hence, as well as highlighting concerns that strict limitations on freedom of speech and expression could potentially cause adverse effects, recommending the need for education pieces and dialogue to prevent hateful and exclusive attitudes, respondents also recommended evaluation and analysis of the conditions or reasoning behind individuals being attracted to far right ideas.

Recommended policy measures or actions to manage the threat of the Far-right:

Additionally interviews with various CSOs identified a number of themes and recommendations on how State policy could move towards a more Militant Democracy style approach to the rise of far right activity in Ireland, providing more depth to survey responses. These can be identified as: the need for pro-action rather than reaction to FR intolerant activity, strategies to build awareness of and resistance to such activity, especially through socio-cultural education and addressing inequalities and hardships in Irish society which contribute to the rise of the FR.

53

Need for pro-action:

With regard to pro- rather than re-action, Interviewee 7, for example spoke of the lack of action from state authorities: *"It's geared often way too much towards a type of tolerance: in letting things go until they cross some line of which I'm not sure what that line is … I'm not sure anyone is sure of [what] that line is – it's probably physical violence or extreme verbal violence, you know? But it's just creeping up to that point and I think people need to be maybe taken to task more".* This suggests that the State has a tendency to be reactionary instead of pro-active in relation to preventing the escalation to violence.

Interviewee 2 reemphasised the perception that the government does not see the Irish FR as a significant threat: *"there is a lack of leadership from the government to actively oppose the far right and…..there needs to be that leadership."* This perception was expressed by interviewee 3 and 4 also:

Interviewee 3: *"I think that goes back to the fact that they don't see them as a real threat, you know? And also, I believe that there's probably a slight fear in the state that if they were to crush them, you know and come down on them very heavily that might actually get people's backs up and actually garner them (far right) more support."* Interviewee 3, hence, questions whether strict control would produce adverse effects as a reason behind the State's lack of pro-action in addressing the FR.

Interviewee 6 perceived such inaction by the state as deliberate, that state authorities are more concerned about appearing liberal than with the social responsibilities they have towards citizens and residents: *"The predominant…..ideology is Liberal, you know, Liberal verging on libertarian in terms of that, you know, free speech, freedom to organize…. The insistence by [the Irish] State to derogate from Article four of the [United Nation's 1965 Convention on the] elimination of racial discrimination which, you know, said that [the] State should curb discourse and curb the activities of far right organizations. I think that speaks to that, you know and it's the ruling consensus and ideological position….it's the Liberal Democratic trope by….the application of reason and the engagement of people in debates that ideas get thrashed out and invalid ideas are ignored".*

Resistance, awareness building & socio-cultural education:

Many participants spoke of the need for state policy and authority to address media illiteracy and ignorance regarding issues of misinformation and FR, hence building a general public resistance to narratives which are hateful and divisive.

SOME RESPONSES:

Interviewee 4 spoke of the need for intercultural education and building conversation around issues of diversity: *"what we also need to be doing is looking at cultural change and education and normalization of minorities and, you know, not…adding further….offenses and….criminalization and all sorts of things [that] can actually be detrimental to minority groups."*

Similarly, Interviewee 5 spoke of the impact of cultural exchange and creating opportunities for different social groups to interact positively with one another: *"If I'm thinking back what would have helped myself, and it is that opportunity to meet with people. Like when I was in college, we had people from different groups come in, and you know tell us their stories and it was that real life piece. That helped and I think more opportunities like that in schools to teach and give people the opportunity there to meet with people hear about what happens. Hear about what they overcame and learn about you know what their experience was."*

Interviewee 6 reemphasised the need to build the capacity of existing local NGOs and CSOs who are resisting the growth and countering the influence of the FR in their local areas: *"Build the capacity to counter those discourses of those who plan to oppose the far right. Supporting the capacity of community actors, community groups and society groups etc. to counter discourses to you know tackle the fertile ground in which the seeds of the far right grow."*

Interviewee 1 spoke of the need to build knowledge of the experiences and impact the Irish FR are having on social minority groups to help address general complacency on the issue: *"Because I think what our Community is experiencing….ever since 2015 and marriage equality everybody thinks everything's grand for the gays and Ireland 'for god's sake, you can get married and everything, everything's grand!' The idea of trying to tell people that actually our Community is feeling much more unsafe today than they did in 2015, believe it or not, because of all of this - they're kind of going 'wow! Really? What?' you know? So, I think, yeah there's a real complacency around our democracy and there's a real lack of awareness, I don't want to call it ignorance, it's just a lack of awareness."*

Address inequalities and hardship in society:

Another area which interview participants discussed was in relation to the State's responsibility to address inequalities and help the dis-advantaged within society, thereby addressing the conditional factors which enable FR narratives and influence to thrive.

SOME EXAMPLES:

Interviewee 2 spoke of the inequalities facing migrant populations, especially asylum seekers and how inaction, or in the case of Direct Provision, structural discrimination can indirectly validate 'othering' and other divisive views: *"… to the question of inclusion, of integration, of diversity in Ireland and especially, specifically as a migrant thinking of the disposition of the Irish state to issues of asylum, and how sometimes the state has been very slow to respond to some of the very important issues that surround the welfare of asylum seekers, of migrants, especially of migrant workers you know?"* In the extract, therefore, interviewee 2 calls on the state to address the hardships of immigrants as such action goes hand in hand with acting against the FR.

Equally, Interviewee 6 spoke of the need to address the inequalities in society which make fertile ground for FR influence to grow: *"the state needs to tackle and needs to address the inequality of prosperity, insecurity and the conditions which lead people to grasp at far right ideas as a way of making sense of their frustrations and their alienation etc. tackle the underlying conditions that you know create these voids which are exploited by the far right."* In other words, by addressing real-life concerns and societal issues, state authorities can disarm the FR in their exploitation of the socio-economic concerns of vulnerable people.

Survey respondents do see some improvements in State responses to the FR. In Q.4c, respondents were asked if they saw any evidence of the Irish state taking the threat of the FR more seriously over the last five years. Most responded positively, although 45.2% saw no evidence at all.

4. c. In your organisation's opinion, over the last five years is the Irish state taking the threat of the far right more seriously?

Yes **2** (4.8%)

No **19** (45.2%)

Somewhat **16** (38.1%)

Don't know **5** (11.9%)
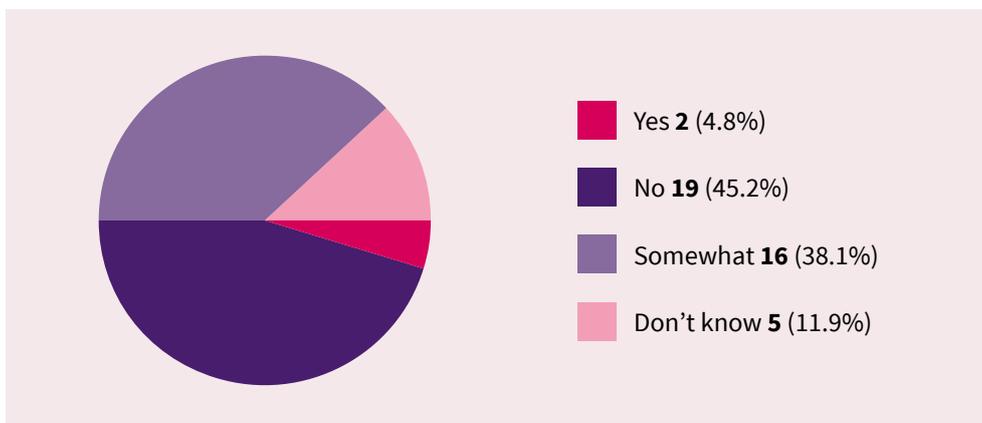
In Q.4.c.i, those who responded positively were asked to identify two examples of such increased concern, with some respondents noting increased Garda investigation of hate crimes, increased cooperation between Gardai and NGOs on FR activities, and more robust policing of anti-vaccination and anti-public health demonstrations during the COVID 19 epidemic. In 4d respondents suggested other possible state actions, such as (all direct quotes):

- *Providing resources for developing the capacity of minoritised groups and majority community groups to advocate and organise against the far right.*
- *Monitor far right groups diligently.*
- *Ban the 'Right to Protest' to such groups that are generally 'Anti-Semitic' 'Anti-Immigration' and 'Racist'.*
- *Categorise social media (SM) companies as publishers.*
- *Increase the resources, powers and reach of the Data Protection Commission to hold social media companies to account for what they publish.*
- *Compelling SM companies and far right groups to disclose their funding and revenue sources.*
- *New legislation to address loopholes in the law….to discourage hate crimes and online misinformation.*
- *Children and young people should be taught how to spot fake websites and WhatsApp stories in school.*
- *Hate crime legislation and preventing funding for far right hate groups from overseas.*

Suggested approaches to FR among political parties:

In the online survey participating CSOs were asked in Q5 about how non-FR political parties should treat the FR, including FR parties. Mudde (2019) outlines four possibilities: demarcation, confrontation, co-optation, and incorporation labelled here respectively as approaches A, B, C, and D.

There are four identified approaches to the far right among political parties:

A	Political parties exclude far right parties from their political interactions
B	Political parties show active opposition to far right parties and, most often, their policies
C	Political parties exclude far right parties, but not their ideas
D	Both far right parties and their ideas are mainstreamed and normalised

From the survey data, approaches A and B were the most considered among all survey respondents. Approach A was for: 'political parties to exclude far right parties from their political interaction' and approach B (at over 80%) was for 'political parties to show active opposition to far right parties and, most often, their policies'.

5. From the four identified approaches outlined above which does your organisation think ALL non-far right political parties should adopt? You can choose more than one.

A **24** (57.1%)
B **37** (88.1%)
C **4** (9.5%)
D 0
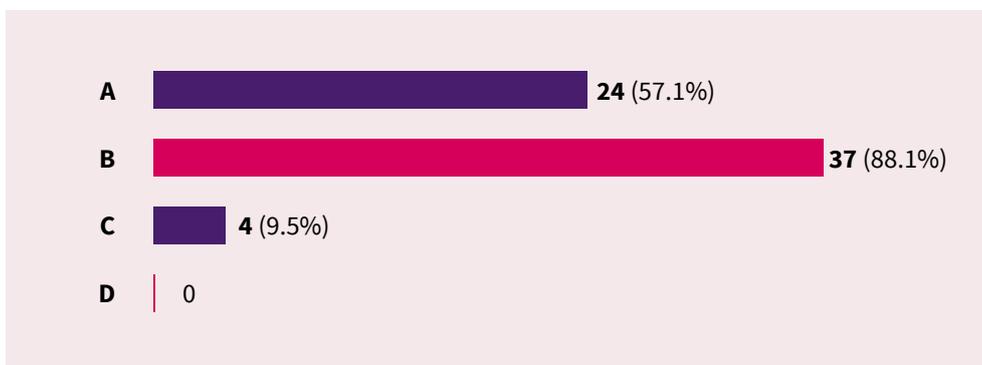
Subsequent interviews with survey participants identify two main themes behind participant support for approaches A and B in regard to political party interaction with far right groups and parties: active opposition to FR political parties and, to a lesser extent, political standards and principles.

1. ACTIVE OPPOSITION TO FAR RIGHT PARTIES:

The most popular approach among respondents was active opposition to far right parties and their ideas and policies (see figure 7). Two extracts from interview participants outline why political opposition is important to countering the growth of the Irish FR:

Interviewee 6 spoke of the need for non-far right parties to demonstrate their values of inclusion, respect and equality: *"If political parties are serious about the values… which we hold, which are, you know, equality of welfare….the wellbeing of people….our civil liberties, etc. then it's not enough to not agree but actually you need to be proactive in your opposition to them."* Hence, for Interviewee 6 it is insufficient for non-FR parties to be vocally against FR but rather should be proactive in denouncing and reprimanding any political groups that stir division and propagate misinformation.

Similarly, Interviewee 3 spoke of the importance of non-FR party leaders and members being vocal and steadfast in challenging the various forms of hate and discrimination when they appear: *"There should be active opposition then to the far right and their policies, in particular, you know? And that's from all parties, I think. I firmly believe that, where you see racism, you challenge it. Where you see transphobia, you challenge it. Where you see homophobia, you challenge it. You see sexism, you challenge it. You can have all the policy papers in the world about these things, but unless you actively stand up and be counted in relation to that, then the policy papers are worth nothing."*

2. POLITICAL STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES:

Most interview participants recognized that political parties had a responsibility to uphold political and moral standards and principles. Interviewee 1, for example, spoke of the exclusion of FR parties by non-FR parties as testament to their own political standards including competency and that such standards would dictate the interactions and affiliations they could make: *"In terms of like not engaging with them, I think that's just kind of, you know, a basic kind of charter of what our standards are… Below which we are just not willing to go and so on that basis, I think, ….such far right political actors just wouldn't qualify for it".* Interviewee 3 spoke of political standards by way of excluding party members who promote or advocate hateful divisive politics: *"I think within the mainstream parties any individual or grouping that puts forward far right ideas and in terms of, you know, all the manifestations that I've said, then I think those people should be excluded from those parties."* Interviewee 6 combined both issues, as well as addressing political standards that are based on facts and valid views. The exclusion of politics which can incite harm and division was seen as a crucial component to political organisation: *"The reality is that certain discourses are toxic and harmful in real ways on real people's lives and the ability of the far right to mobilize is a real existential threat to people, and we know historically that the far right exploits democratic spaces to expand itself and grow the seeds of authoritarian regimes and nightmares which we've seen historically. And their, you know, their propaganda and their views are just not valid democratic views, and so, for the same reason that if I was holding a seminar on low carbon energy sources. I would exclude a climate denier from that seminar, because the discourse is outside of the consensus of what is true."*

Media & the Far-Right:

In questions 6, 7, 8 and 9, survey respondents were asked to evaluate levels of (in)tolerance among what we called the 'mainstream media', by which we mean newspapers (q.6), the State broadcaster RTE Television and Radio, and private TV channels. Presented below are bar charts indicating the perceived level of tolerance across various forms of mainstream media. Although percentages vary between particular modes of mainstream media (newspaper, radio, etc.), the majority of respondents perceived mainstream media, especially State TV and radio, to be mostly neutral (3 on the tolerance scale), meaning that they are neither tolerant nor intolerant of far right discourse.

6. Mainstream newspapers (e.g. Irish Times, Independent, etc.)

(Intolerance) 1	**3** (7.1%)
2	**7** (16.7%)
3	**16** (38.1%)
4	**12** (28.6%)
(Tolerance) 5	**4** (9.5%)

7. RTÉ

(Intolerance) 1	**2** (4.8%)
2	**12** (28.6%)
3	**14** (33.3%)
4	**9** (21.4%)
(Tolerance) 5	**5** (11.9%)

8. Others (e.g. Virgin)

(Intolerance) 1	**2** (4.8%)
2	**3** (7.1%)
3	**20** (47.6%)
4	**14** (33.3%)
(Tolerance) 5	**3** (7.1%)

9. RTÉ Radio

(Intolerance) 1		**2** (4.8%)
2		**10** (23.8%)
3		**17** (40.5%)
4		**9** (21.4%)
(Tolerance) 5		**4** (9.5%)
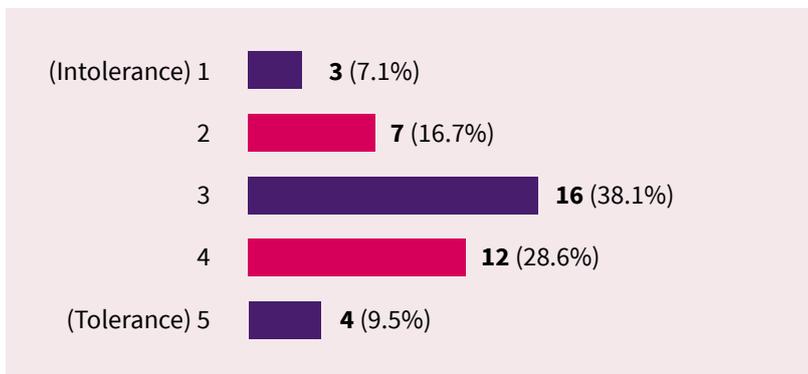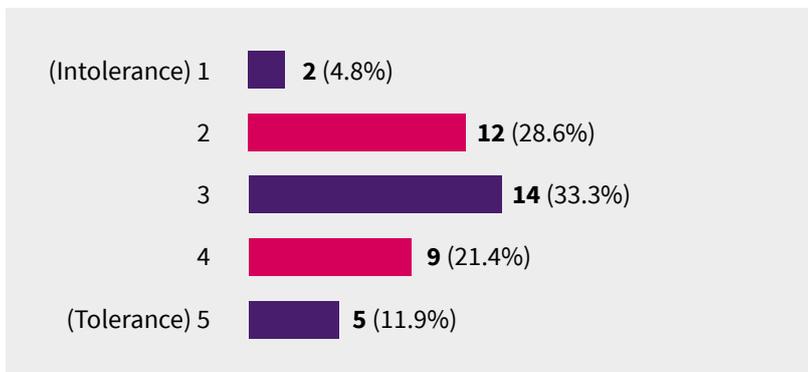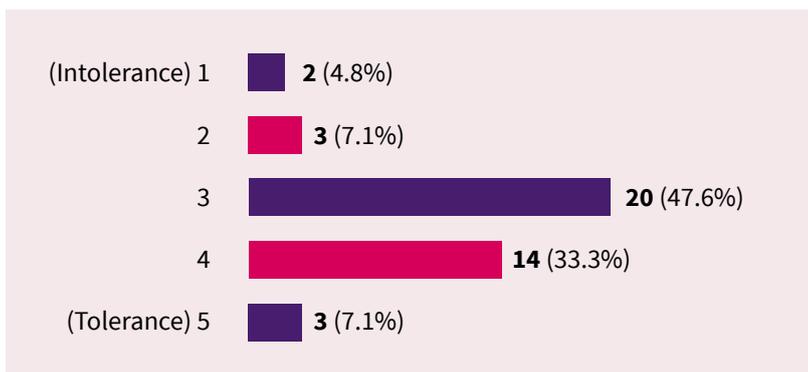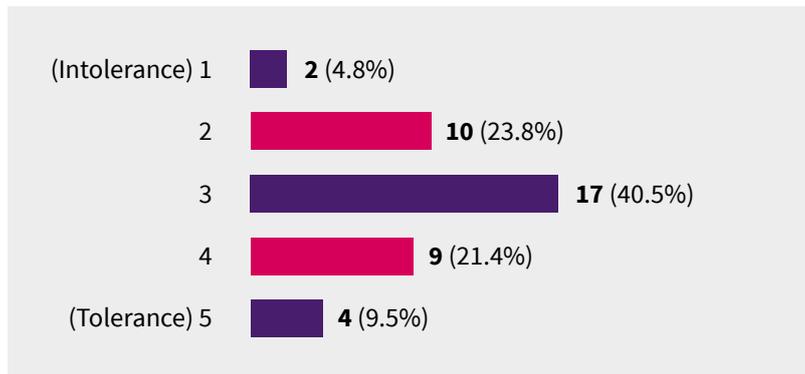
Mainstream, non tech business, was also seen to be largely neutral, with a total of almost 68% of responses qualifying them as neutral (40.5%) or largely intolerant. Trade Unions were perceived to be largely intolerant of the FR, with 47.8% or respondents selecting 2 (quite intolerant) and 28.6%, 1 (intolerant). When asked to reflect on whether Irish society in general was becoming more or less tolerant of far right groups, ideas and personalities – the majority of respondents, at 52.4%, thought Irish society were becoming more tolerant of the FR, 28.6% of survey respondents thought Irish society was becoming less tolerant with the remaining 19% choosing 'neither'.

15. In general do you think that Irish society is becoming more or less tolerant of far right ideas, groups and personalities?

More tolerant **22** (52.4%)

Less tolerant **12** (28.6%)

Neither **8** (19%)
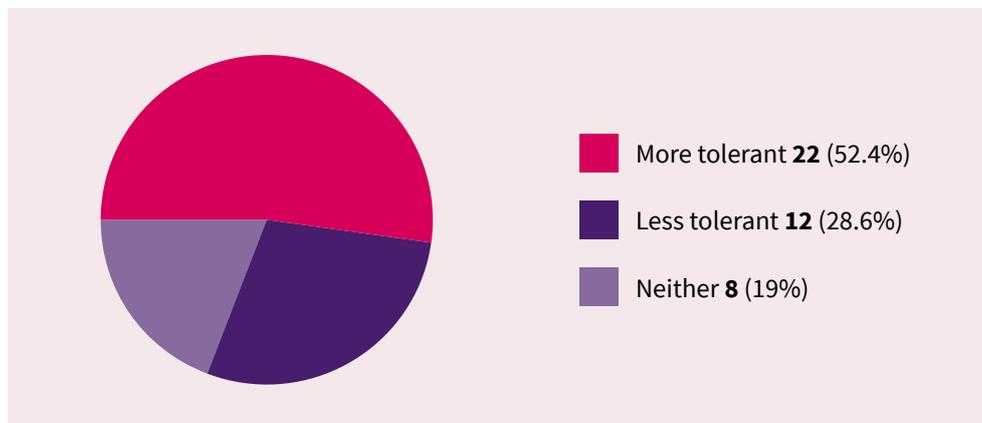
Some selected comments from interviews present diverse reasons for these various perceptions: Interviewee 1 spoke of a perceived breakdown in communication leading to people becoming more tolerant of the FR with outside influences such as Trump contributing to changing the norms of acceptable speech and behaviour: *"people are feeling like they can say dodgy stuff a bit more than what maybe was said before, so the momentum towards more respectful communication I think has … there's been one or two strong waves pushing that back a bit or stalling it and if they're not saying it outright they're certainly doing it online or they're passing it on online and there, you know what I mean, they're anonymous"*

Interviewee 7, who, in response to Q15 thought that Irish society was neither becoming more or less tolerant of the FR, instead pointed to a general malaise in Irish society of stress and uncertainty and growing mistrust and belief in conspiracy theories, suggesting that FR influence isn't the only force

shaping protest and rejection of politicians and the authorities: *"these things are mixed up, you know? Because, like there's that blurring of lines you know there's the anti-politician sentiments, you know which… crosses all the political divides you know? Loads of people have totally gone off politics for loads of good reasons."*

Interviewee 4 saw an increase in tolerance of the FR being linked with the mainstreaming of their discourse, including among media figures and social media platforms. This person also referred to a general lack of awareness of the tactics of the FR which seek to manipulate and twist narratives for divisive agendas: *"this sort of creep of polished acceptable right-wing language, it is altering people's perceptions of issues and I think, you know, that is partly because of the insidiousness of the far right and maybe perhaps a lack of literacy both amongst the general population and amongst the sort of the people in the media and other aspects who should know better"*

Speaking of the social conditions that allow the FR to grow, Interviewee 6 spoke of the growing resistance to the FR in Ireland but equally the lack of action to address the social issues that make fertile ground for FR narratives to grow: *"it's the ongoing tolerance and facilitation and you know the reproduction of the conditions which the far right tries to utilise, you know the inequality, economic despair, constant insecurity, the housing crisis, the homeless crisis, these are conditions that make fertile ground for the far right. Even, even if only a few seeds are growing, they're still falling on fertile ground all the time, there are people there to uproot them but they're just falling every day …"* Although the majority appear intolerant of the FR, pockets of disadvantaged areas of society continue to be vulnerable to FR presence.

Linking to what was expressed by interviewee 4, interviewee 5 saw a lack of awareness being a contributing factor to growing tolerance of FR ideas, but that exposure and awareness of FR movements in Ireland may make people more aware and thus more resistant to their strategies: *"I know it's becoming more vocal. So, I know we're hearing more about it … I know we're hearing more so I don't know if we're more tolerant or less tolerant. I'd like to think we're less tolerant because we're hearing it, we're talking about it".* Once again, education is suggested as an effective counter strategy.

Social media:

One particular area, which unsurprisingly drew a heavy volume of responses was regarding, social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, all of which, in Q11, were perceived by respondents as being **extremely tolerant** of far right ideas, narratives and personalities. Indeed, 66.7% of respondents perceive social media at 5 on the tolerance scale, which is very tolerant of the FR.

11. MAIN social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

(Intolerance) 1	▮	**1** (2.4%)
2	▮	**1** (2.4%)
3	▮	**2** (4.8%)
4	▬▬▬▬▬	**10** (23.8%)
(Tolerance) 5	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	**28** (66.7%)
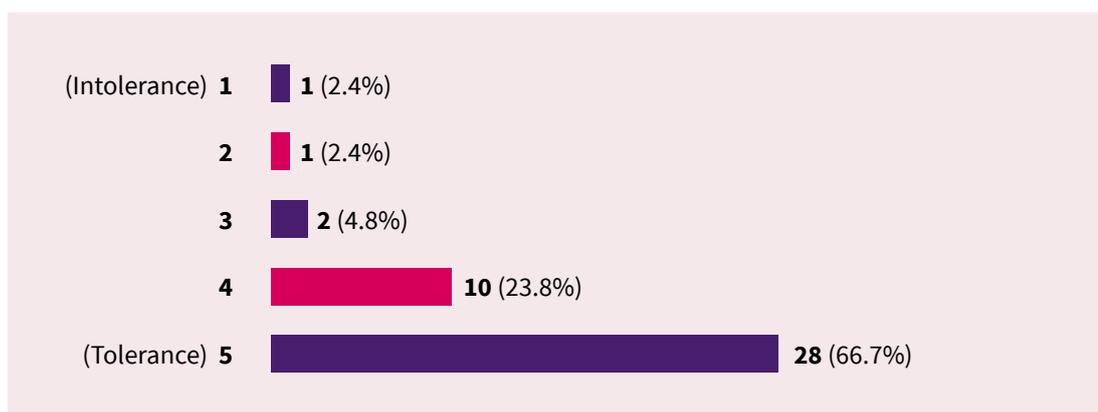
From interview participants, the topic of social media in relation to far right activity in Ireland can be categorised into three key areas: toxic environment, lack of state regulation, and social media company business models:

1. TOXIC ENVIRONMENT:

Here respondents emphasise the overwhelming negative role of social media in propagating FR ideas and personalities, and the need for robust regulations to counter this. Here are a few comments drawn from interviews:

Interviewee 1, argues for tighter regulation of these companies in order to make fighting the FR a more evenly measured battle: *"I think the main priority is to get regulation of the social media platforms, I think that would take the Goliath factor out of the battle….you know what I mean? It would make it a less overwhelming battle to think about… that's a priority, but it might be a harder priority to achieve than just getting it on the political agenda that this is real, this is a real phenomenon and it's very, very dangerous and it's hurting people"*

Interviewee 2 points to the dangers of social media companies regulating themselves, especially as it may be that the leaders of these companies themselves share far right ideological opinions: *"Social media, of course, you know, is a cesspit in that sense… the ideologies of the far right … we do not need … it's not so hard to find instances of people who have been having a field day promoting a very, very, very toxic ideology and using social media platforms…..Trump, I'm sorry to use that example, almost set America on fire before finally they suspended his [Twitter] account you know? But he had done a lot of damage before they could do that but imagine that the owner of Twitter may be….close to the far right and thinks it not necessary to counter the activities of the far right and therefore very softly encourage them by refusing to pull down their posts or you know? There's a sense that there's nothing anyone can do about it, you know, and no states would want to move against that, not liberal states operating in a liberal democracy because you'd be accused of muzzling or trying to muzzle them, you know?"*

Interviewee 6 also points to weaknesses in the self-regulation of these companies, noting how FR actors learn quickly how to circumvent social media platforms' community guidelines, particularly by co-ordinating cross-platform attacks on targeted groups or individuals. This interviewee gives the example of the Ryan family, a mixed-race family who took part in an advertisement for a supermarket chain in September 2019 and who were attacked online by right-wing groups led by FR journalist and campaigner Gemma O' Doherty[5]: *"we've noticed with Twitter that very often far right actors are smart enough to know not to explicitly breach the community guidelines. But what they will do is signal to their followers a person to be targeted. And then ….there's a pile-on on that person and the organizing may happen in other online spaces like 4chan or Telegram or wherever they are and then the pile on happens and I think case in point was the Ryan Family, the family who were in the Lidl adverts…effectively Gemma O'Doherty painted a target on their back."*

Finally, Interviewee 3 argues that there is no place for hate speech on social media platforms and should be removed: *"but in terms of de-platforming them, in terms of de-platforming racism, de-platforming homophobia, de-platforming sexism, then we [referring to CSOs] definitely do believe that they should be de-platformed for those views you know? … as soon as it becomes intolerable or hate speech in any form, it should be de-platformed, you know?"*

5. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/couple-in-ad-campaign-left-shaking-and-fearful-after-online-abuse-1.4031549

2. LACK OF REGULATION:

Respondents insist on the need for more stringent regulation of social media companies, beyond that already being offered, and note that Ireland is in a unique position to pressure for that given that most of these companies have European headquarters here. Nonetheless, some respondents note the greater extent of the power of some of these corporations in comparison to states.

Interviewee 1: *"I think if we had enough time and people, you know, we could actually mobilize quite a European pressure. I know there's pressure coming from Europe already and we could ….just grow that …because Ireland ….is in a unique situation, given that Google and Facebook and Twitter they're all … headquartered in Dublin, so you know there's a real potential for a much bigger, stronger lobby in Ireland of our Irish political class."*

Interviewee 2 also argues that states must take a role in stronger regulation of social media companies, although the interviewee also points out that these giant corporations are often more powerful than some states, including Ireland: *"I mean this is what happens when large corporations are trusted with platforms, where, you know, they allow people to say all the things they want to say, see and do because for many of them it's about profit first, before anything else; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on. And the onus rests with governments to decide what they want to do with these corporations. Unfortunately, many of these corporations are stronger, more powerful than modern states, you know?"*

Interviewee 3 points out that regulation is needed most of all for the social media arms of tech corporations : *"I think it's for the social media companies you know and shutting them down really on social media that's where they have the most traction, that's where they spread the hatred, that's where they spread the racism, that's where, you know, ideas mushroom and I think that's really where they need to be tackled, first and foremost".*

Interviewee 5 argues that regulation of these companies could be like with any other media company, especially to avoid the spread of false, misleading and hateful content: *"Yeah that they don't spread hatred towards groups, that they don't spread false information, and I think they have a responsibility to act on this. And, just like every other form of media has, you know, your newspapers have, your TV networks have and I'm not really sure why social media have you know free rein on letting whatever spread or having no control over it"*

3. BUSINESS MODEL:

The importance of social media companies' business model in promoting FR ideas and personalities is also noted by respondents. Some cast doubt on the stated intentions, efficacy and impact of companies' internal community guidelines and codes of conduct with regard to hate speech and FR talking points. Other interviewees suggest that business legislation and regulation can be used to control the role of these companies in propagating FR material and ideas.

Interviewee 6, for example, explicitly singles out the need for tech companies' business models to be regulated, and looks forward to the upcoming Online Safety and Regulation Bill,[6] to be published by government in January 2022, as overdue: *"I think we need to talk about the business model, I mean … I think that what needs to happen in…the social media regulation bill coming in, so that's a very important thing…."*

Interviewee 7 points out how the algorithms used by these companies can generate discriminatory content for even the most casual of users: *" … I'm not an avid social media user I've never had a Facebook account. I use Twitter for work, because I have to, I'm not really into it. I randomly sign in to watch a TikTok video someone sent me so you set up an account and I have no preferences, no followers and what the algorithm sent me mixed in with some just random horrible misogynistic, racist stuff that just appeared … whatever that did with the algorithms it threw other videos that were like yeah straight up you know racist, misogynistic and it was so easy to access some of which is like insane you know?"*

Interviewee 6 suggests that not only should legislation aim to regulate content, but also that *"….business legislation and regulation needs to be brought in to tackle the business model itself…These are cases where Facebook should be in the dock frankly and made answerable…until they change the policies and follow through. And they should be fined regularly [because they] have Community guidelines and they are signed up to a voluntary code of conduct on hate content online [but] they don't follow their own Community guidelines and they don't adhere to the voluntary code of conduct, and so it really leads you to suspect those policies are just fig leaves…to blow smoke in people's faces."*

6. Please see: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8e4c-online-safety-and-media-regulation-bill/
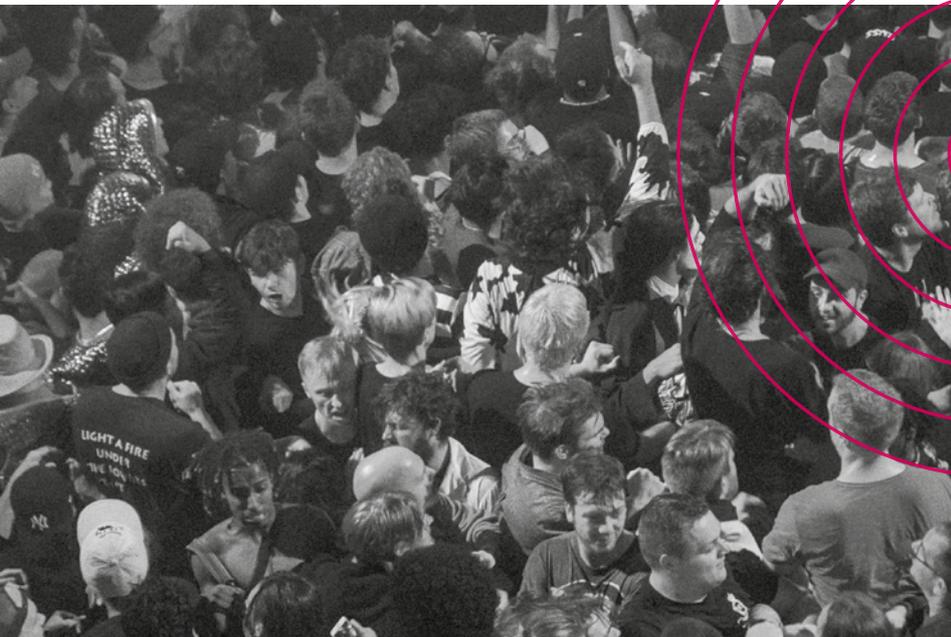
Impact of Irish FR on organisations and CVOs:

This section presents the level of impact the Irish FR is having on CSOs from various social groups across the country. As well as quantifying the level of experience, survey respondents were also asked to indicate the types of attacks and harassment experienced by their local groups and organisations. The results show that almost 67% of these organisations have had staff or clients experiencing threats or violence from the FR (Q16). In Q16b, all respondents (100%) reported online harassment or threats, while 75% reported verbal harassment or threats, 50% physical and close to 40% property damage. Finally, Q16c asked participants whether over the last 5 years the frequency of FR attacks had increased or decreased, with the overwhelming majority (80%) feeling that they had **increased.**

16. Have any of your staff or client groups experienced threats or violence from far right linked individuals or groups?

Yes **28** (66.7%)

No **5** (11.9%)

Don't know **9** (21.4%)
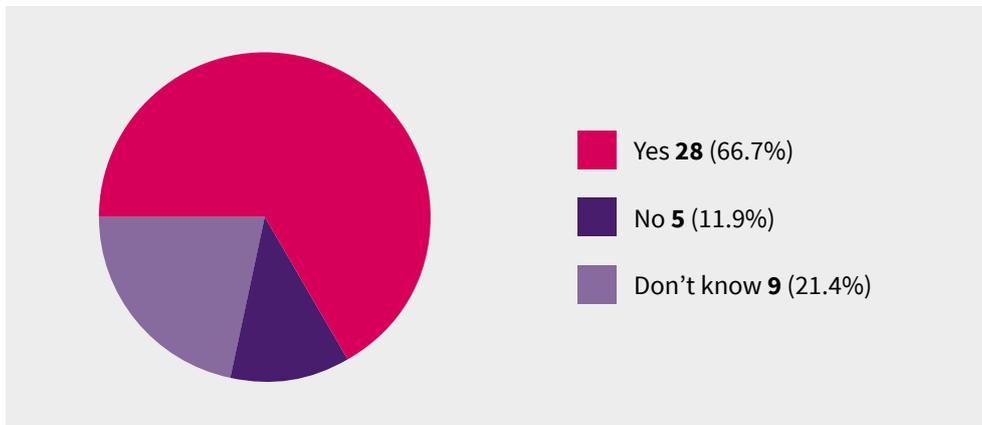
16. b. What kind of attacks were involved (you can choose more than one):

Online harassment or threats	**28** (100%)
Verbal harassment or threats	**21** (75%)
Physical harassment or threats	**14** (50%)
Vandalism/property damage	**11** (39.3%)
Other	**3** (10.7%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all of this question's respondents chose that option)
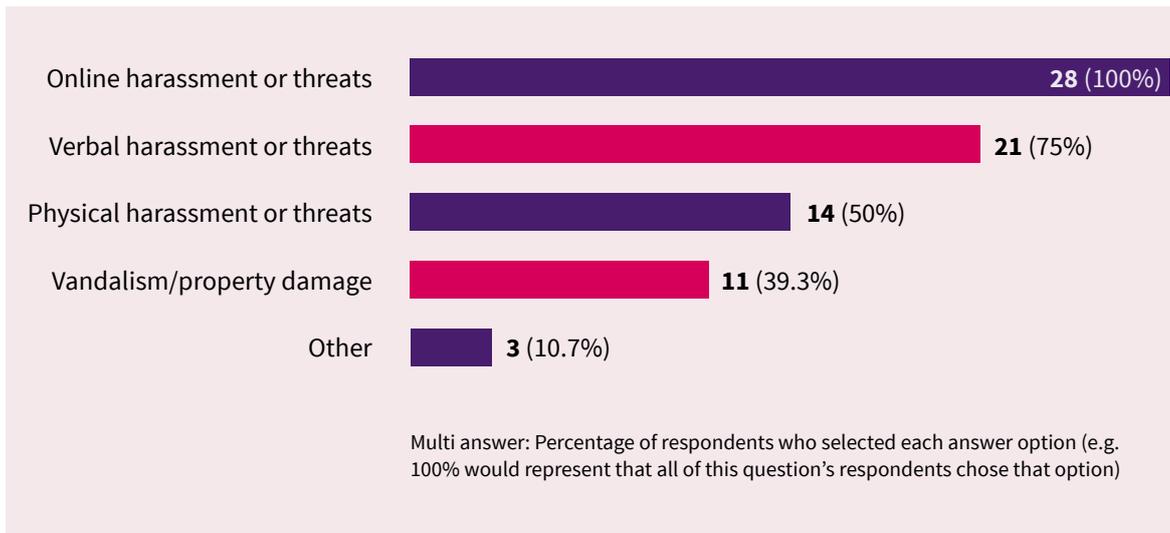
16. c. Over the last five years, have the frequency of such far right attacks:

Decreased **1** (3.6%)

Increased **23** (82.1%)

Stayed the same **1** (3.6%)

Don't know **3** (10.7%)
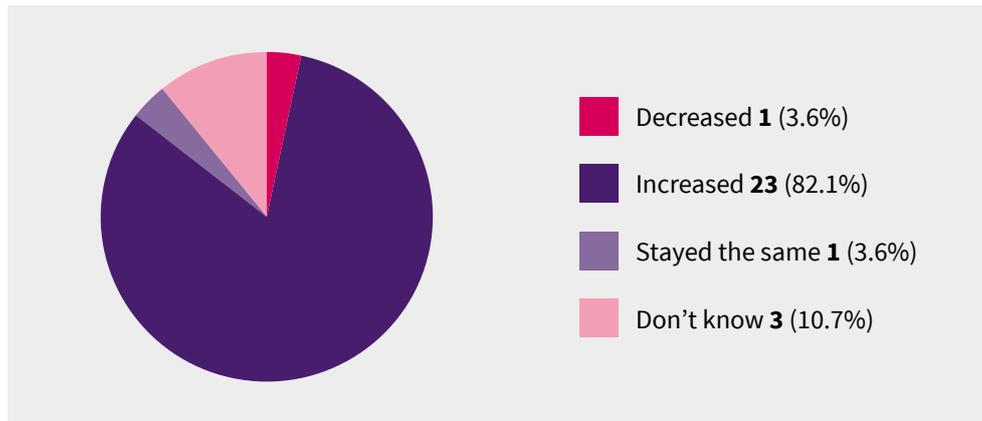
Interviews provide further insight into the impact of attacks and harassment by these groups:

VERBAL HARASSMENT, ONLINE HATE AND THREATS:

Most survey respondents experienced online hate and harassment. Interviewee 1 spoke of the anonymity of social media and how it emboldens some individuals to post hateful and threatening comments and posts as it gives *"so much power to people who may not want to be known to have those attitudes, but they have them and they express them online and share them online and I think because of that it's giving confidence to people to then take actions offline".* Interviewee 1 then, suggests that such online behaviour has a direct causal relation to the same hateful behaviour offline.

Mirroring the fear that online hate can lead to real world damage and hate crime, Interviewee 4 spoke of how hate speech and divisive narratives can grow and spread, becoming dangerous: *"Things can seem very inconsequential but narratives can move incredibly quickly but people just don't pick up or recognize it or are just lazy to it, because they feel it doesn't necessarily affect them until it's too late".* As interviewee 4 suggests it is important for majority groups to listen to the social groups who are most at risk as the former can be indifferent to what does not affect them.

PHYSICAL HARASSMENT AND THREATS:

Interviewee 3 spoke of physical harm related to the active opposition and counter-protesting of FR groups in local areas: *"…we've seen attacks on the streets and where the far right gather and if we go to counteract them, they will attack us. You know? They will attack anybody, actually, who heckles them or who counter protests against them…. They try to target our workplaces and if they know where we live, then there's no doubt in my mind that they'll be at our doors as well, you know".* Attacks such as these are prominent due to the nature of CSO led confrontational anti-FR counter-strategies i.e. confronting FR individuals in public spaces.

Similarly, Interviewee 6 spoke about how CSO's which actively combat racist narratives and FR hate discourse, can make them into FR hate targets: *"We advocate for not just minority rights, but also, you know, making common sense statements in favour of inward migration. We think it's good, it's good for the economy. In tackling racism, in condemning racist policies and practices and, of course, opposing the far right, all of this has made us into hate figures for them."*

OTHER FORMS OF ATTACKS IDENTIFIED IN SURVEY [ALL DIRECT QUOTES]:

- *Stalking by local neo-Nazis*
- *Threats to associates or friends and family.*
- *Correspondence sent to third parties to undermine our organisation.*
- *Receiving threatening letters.*

VANDALISM & PROPERTY DAMAGE:

Interviewee 1 recounts recent hate crime and vandalism which saw LGBTQ businesses and communities targeted during Pride month: *"in Waterford at pride, the flags there, Cork pride had flags* [referring to LGBTQ flags being burnt or damaged]. *In Dublin, the graffiti at Panti bar. You know? It's like, God?! Like it's really like we're going backwards now",* reemphasising the perception of danger from minority social groups.
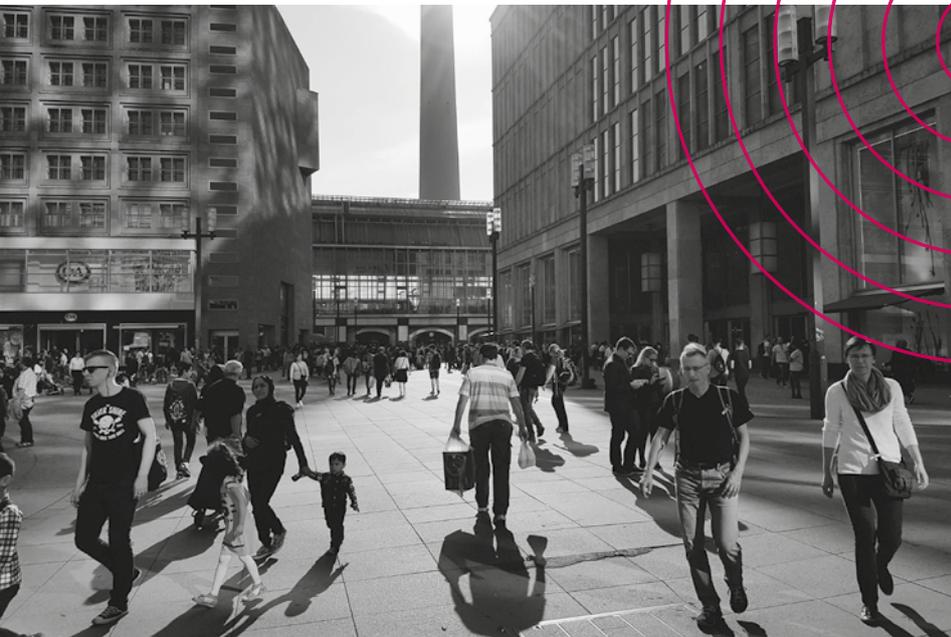
Anti-Far Right Strategies of CSOs:

Question 17 in the survey focused on creating a picture of the level of anti-far right strategizing among various social groups and the various approaches outlined by Mudde's (2019) CSO counter-strategizing. **The majority of survey respondents at 57.1% did not have an anti-far right strategy.**

17. Does your organisation have an anti-far right strategy?

Yes — **16** (38.1%)

No — **24** (57.1%)

Don't know — 2 (4.8%)
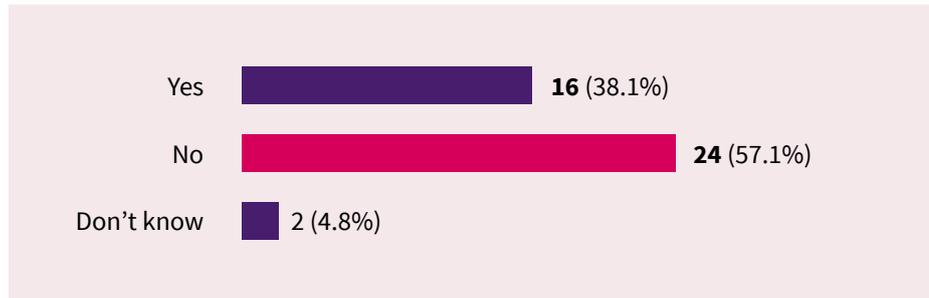
Those who did have a strategy were asked in multiple choice question 17.a, to choose from a list of strategies that their organisation uses. These were as follows:

Please read the following before moving onto the next question:

Here are a variety of Anti-Far right strategies which can be used by Civil and Voluntary Organisations (CVOs) such as yours

A   Forbidding staff or members of your organisation to be members of or associate with far right groups

B   Organising or attending marches or demonstrations against far right groups or ideas (i.e. racism, anti-immigration, xenophobia etc.)

C   Policies and protocols to combat online far right harassment (e.g. trolling etc.)

D   Providing support, especially legal support, to victims of far right physical, verbal and/or online threats

E   Attending Training/Events (e.g. online/real world training courses in anti-far right or anti-racism training)

F   Other

The results were as follows:

17. a. From the list of strategies above, please select those that your organisation uses:

A **8** (50%)
B **11** (68.8%)
C **12** (75%)
D **12** (75%)
E **14** (87.5%)
F **7** (43.8%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all of this question's respondents chose that option)
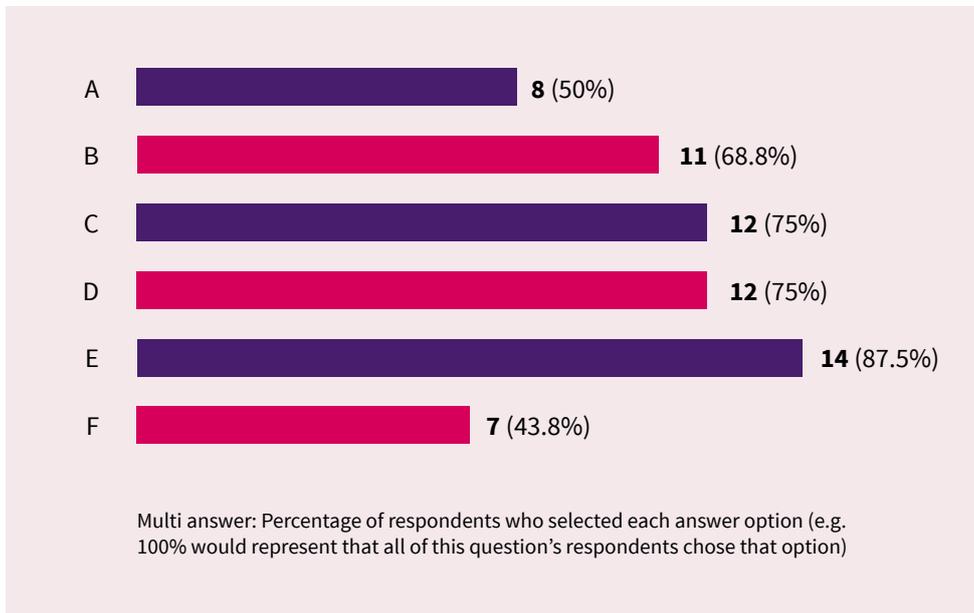
Returning to Mudde's (2019) typology of CSO anti FR counter-strategies of Demarcation and Confrontation, in our survey CSOs that did have an anti-FR strategy were found to endorse both with an emphasis on the latter. However, we also find evidence of a third approach, identified above, in relation to Krasteva el al (2019), whereby CSOs actively offering imaginative inclusive alternatives through citizenship practice to counter negative, degrading and violent FR discourse and action. This is done primarily through providing policies, protocols and training to support staff in countering FR discourse and actions and supporting their client populations who might experience it.

Regarding Demarcation, just about half of the CSOs who had an anti-far right strategy opted for option A, that is to ban and forbid staff or members to be members of or associate with far right groups. Confrontational approaches were more common, with 68.8% of respondents indicating attending proactive counter protests, marches and demonstrations. Approaches C and D, responding more to the third strategy outlined above, received equal (higher) percentages (75%) related to both policies and protocols to combat online harassment and trolling and providing legal or social support to victims of far right abuse and attack. Similarly, the majority of those CSO's with anti-FR strategies (87.5%) indicated that approach E, that is attending trainings and real world or online courses on anti-far right action or anti-racism, as their current course of action for addressing issues of racism and the far right. Finally, 43.8% of these CSOs indicated other approaches (Option F) used to counter the FR.

Survey respondents were given opportunities to identify some of the initiatives in Option F. Survey response 3, for example, spoke of their organisation *"Joining relevant coalitions to take action on combating the rise of the far right"* as well as *"Seeking resources as a sector to employ a dedicated staff person to this task- watchdogging; lobbying; building alliances and coalitions to challenge and change the narratives".* This respondent then, points out the importance of collaboration with other CSOs to countering the far right, particularly by way of resource sharing and building a collective knowledge base. Additionally, this respondent suggests that a formalised role of a 'watchdog' within particular CSOs is useful, that is someone who can monitor hate and extremism within local contexts.

Other responses echo such strategies, pointing to their emphasis on collaboration and knowledge and capacity building with other CSOs and local group organisations in order to collectively build resistance and awareness of far right tactics of division, manipulation and propagating. Survey response 23, for example, declares that their organisation: *"supports other organisations in many ways, [such as] running internal and external Unity over Division campaigns."* Survey response 27 says that their organisation provides *"training discussions and tools to other NGO and grassroots organisations affected [as well as] publishing analysis of far right organising in Ireland."*

Survey response 22 highlights the negative effects that such a role can have on staff who take it on, especially the mental health and wellbeing of that person and how CSOs have to acknowledge this: *"As some in our network monitor fascists and neo-nazis online, they have to be members of darkness groups too. We make certain they take frequent mental health days off, as it can get intense and angst provoking to see extreme far right chats".*

Finally, Survey response 9 speaks to how demarcation actions are effected in CSOs by having a values statement of their core values and standards that all members must adhere to, and which they *"...read out prior to any groups / courses commencing. This is so people are clear that we will not tolerate any sort of racist or discriminatory behaviour. We are an inclusive, pro-choice organisation"*

CSO strategies: Examples of successes:

The survey also gave CSOs who had an existing anti-far right strategy an opportunity to identify examples of successes in anti-FR strategising. Those identified were in terms of strengthened collaboration against hate crime with other like-minded CSOs and with the Gardaí (Survey Response 3); organising protests (Survey Response 5); lobbying government on policies, such as Direct Provision, seen as contributing to an atmosphere conducive to FR action (Survey Response 12); and instituting early warning systems with other groups at home and overseas of FR movements, hence building solidarity (Survey Response 22) among other initiatives.

- Survey response 3: *"The successes thus far have been in stronger and increasing collaboration with others in the coalition against hate crime; also, stronger collaboration with An Garda Síochána's Diversity and Integration Unit which has recently launched an online reporting mechanism for hate crime and hate incidents; a H on the Garda PULSE system to collect data on the issue and to sensitive AGS on what hate crime and incidents are"*
- Survey response 5: *"Organising protests against far-right policies both at home and abroad - including one recent protest outside the Hungarian Embassy in opposition to its homophobic legislation"*
- Survey response 12: *"The organization has successfully nudged the Irish government into taking a more responsible stance on ending direct provision, a system that we think is racist and definitely pandering towards far-right impulse and sentiments"*
- Survey response 22: *"We've managed to warn people of coming attacks on them, warn people in other areas or countries if Neo-Nazis are on their way, we've helped people see how dangerous the far-right are. But also helped each other stay sane and strong against it all".*

Surveyed CSOs who did not have an anti-far right strategy were asked in Q17d to choose options from the listed approaches in Q17 above that they could envisage being included in a potential future strategy for their organisation. The majority of survey responses echoed those which did have an approach with an

emphasis on approaches C (53%) (policies and protocols to manage online harassment and trolling) and more resoundingly (84.6%) approach E (anti-far right and anti-racism trainings).

17. d. If your organisation does NOT have a strategy but would envisage having one in the future, which of the options listed above would you choose? Feel free to choose more than one.

Option	Value
A	**9** (34.6%)
B	**14** (53.8%)
C	**18** (69.2%)
D	**12** (46.2%)
E	**22** (84.6%)
F	**1** (3.8%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all of this question's respondents chose that option)
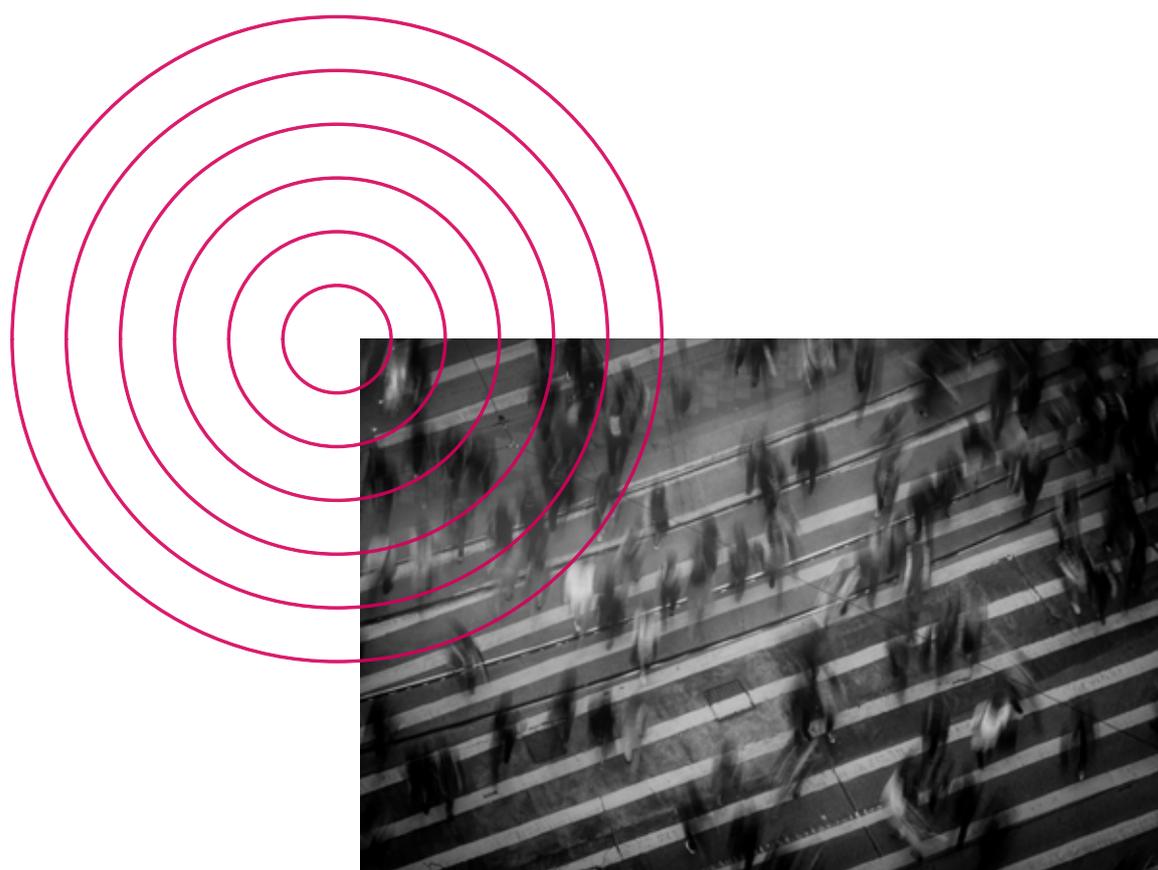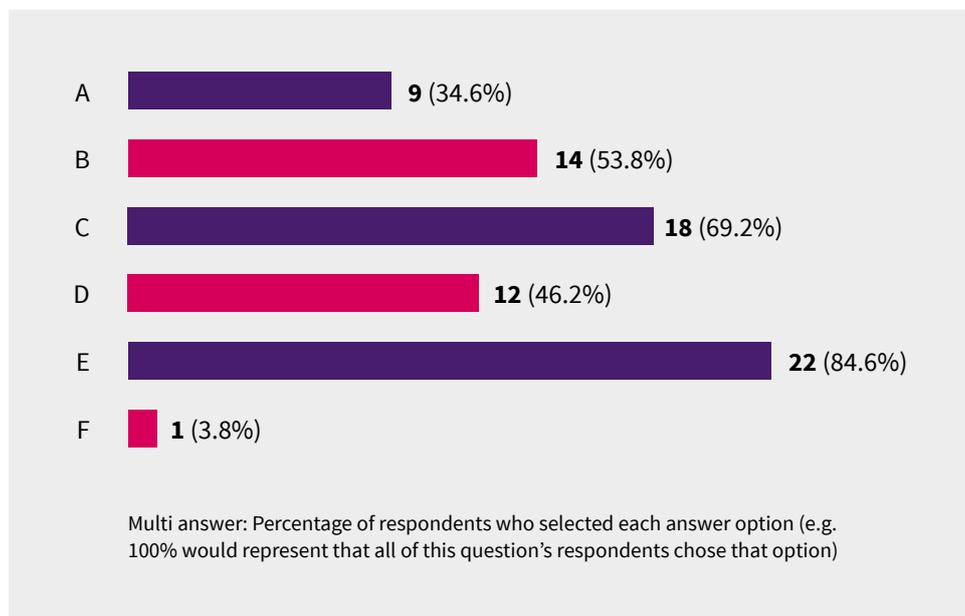
# Nature and content of possible national anti-far right strategy:

Question 18 asked CSOs whether there should be an agreed national anti-far strategy among state, political party and civil society actors. **A majority of 64.3%** thought this would be useful, with 31% of respondents being unsure and only 5% opposing it.

18. Do you think that there should be an agreed national anti-far right strategy subscribed to by all the above mentioned groups: state, political parties and civil society actors, including your organisation?

Yes — **27** (64.3%)
No — **2** (4.8%)
Don't know — **13** (31%)
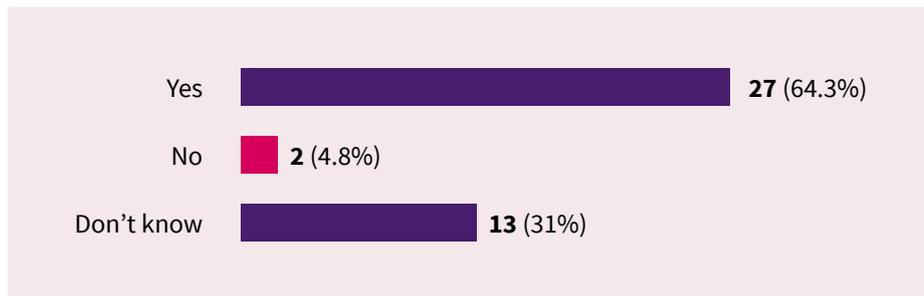
Respondents who answered positively to this question were then asked in Q18a how tolerant this strategy should be, referring back to Mudde's model of a Permissive Liberal (PL) approach or an intolerant Militant Democracy (MD) approach. Using a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being extremely intolerant of far right groups and ideas and 5 being extremely tolerant, a majority of respondents chose either 1 (40.5%) or 2 (45.2%), that is close to an MD approach, echoing responses to Q4a above, regarding state responses to the FR.

18. a. If such a strategy were to have a common position to what degree should it be tolerant of far right ideas, groups and personalities?

(Intolerant) 1 — **17** (40.5%)
2 — **19** (45.2%)
3 — **6** (14.3%)
4 — **0**
(Tolerant) 5 — **0**
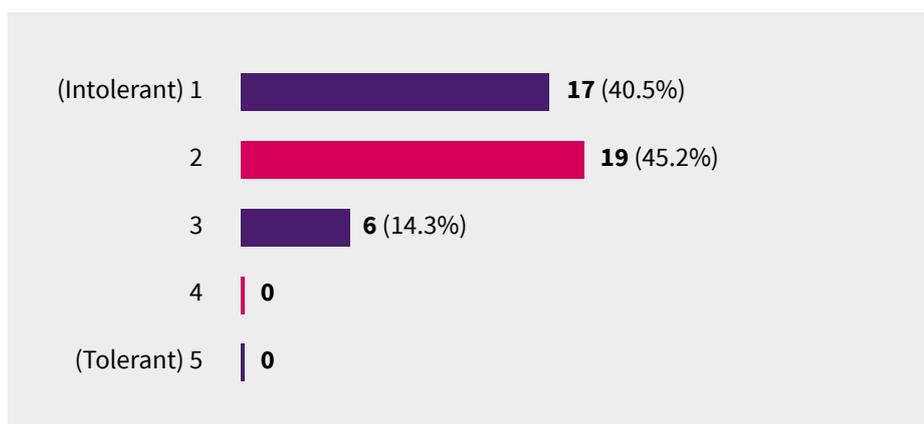
Survey respondents were also given the opportunity to elaborate on their answers, with interviewees also bringing up similar responses. Overall, an impression is given of a national anti-FR strategy which has a bottom up, community involvement, approach to its construction, places education and awareness building at its centre, includes strategies to tackle inequalities which leave marginalised communities vulnerable to FR exploitation, and which finely balances the rights of freedom of expression and freedom from threatening behaviours.

One common theme emerging was the need for careful balance in restricting speech and expression. Survey response 3 suggests that *"clear red lines"* need to be established identifying what sort of speech is and is not permissible *"and if these are crossed then enforcement happens".* This respondent also suggests that *"public education and citizenship education in our schools should create awareness of the issues and the red lines and why the red lines matter. It shouldn't be a total shut down. However, it shouldn't be a total free for all with no costs, except those at the receiving end of the hate".*

Interviewee 1 also argues for awareness and education campaigns so that the tactics of the FR are rendered ineffective: *"And I think some of the things we talked about are all part of how we make that happen, you know? That we do regulate, that we do educate, you know and that's probably then where it [referring to far right influences] kind of hits the rocks, you know? And not make it to the shore".* Similar to interviewee 1, Interviewee 6 spoke of the importance of prevention but instead of education and awareness, prevention was linked to the socio-environmental conditions which make fertile ground for the FR. A strategy would have to take this into consideration, Interviewee 6 emphasises, the need to *"bring it back to the conditions that leads to the growth in the far right so inequality, insecurity, poverty, and marginalization, you know, the very real anxieties and struggles and the stress that people live and experience in their everyday lives. That would make some people vulnerable to reaching for far- right ideas as an answer to these things".*

Interviewee 5 echoes this concern, suggesting that a national strategy would need to establish pathways to dialogue and outreach to vulnerable groups and sectors of society susceptible to FR disinformation, hate and influence. Interviewee 5 argues that *"you can't not engage in dialogue. You have to dispel myths, you can just say no to everything, and it's not about not allowing a platform, but it is allowing some dialogue around it. And for people to be able to hear other people's experiences and understand why, what's happening, what's the root cause behind someone going down either path, you know? What led them to have those beliefs? If you're not having that dialogue, you can't act on it, you can't see where it's coming from".*

Survey respondent 21 expressed concern for adverse effects if restrictions were too intolerant. This respondent warns that if strategies and regulations were too restrictive, it runs the risk of creating narratives of victimhood and oppression by far right figures, which could equally lead to state authorities becoming more restrictive and authoritative in other aspects of societal structures: *"Again there needs to be some balance as complete intolerance may in fact make victims of certain far right figures, and also may push the State towards being more intolerant in general and bringing in draconian legislation and practices. Maintaining an open tolerant society is challenging, when faced with intolerance, hatred and the threat of the far right".* Survey respondent 12 echoes this fear that a highly intolerant strategy would only embolden the FR: *"Strategies would give the fringe groups credibility. They are best parodied and left to eat themselves. Putting the spotlight on them only serves to give them exposure"*

As well as emphasising the need for careful balance, survey response 29 expressed the need for a holistic approach. This respondent argues against an overly state-led approach, but that civil society groups should also be involved, with education as a fulcrum of such a strategy: *"I feel there needs to be a degree of intolerance but a reliance on the Gardaí, political class, judiciary and state alone to tackle this is naive. There needs to be community resilience, education and mobilisation included also and media attitudes challenged. Marginalised and targeted groups need to be centred, situations improved and protections put in place".* Interviewee 4 agrees on the need for a bottom-up, community centred approach to building such a strategy as: *"There is a danger of a disconnect between the community itself and their representative organizations and government bodies that, you know, can be restricted in terms of their ability to be political and advocate".* Survey response 12, however, underlines the importance of collaboration with the

authorities also: *"I believe that fashioning strategies for combating anti-far right threats should be a policy matter rather than the largely lip-service approach currently in place."*

Interviewee 2 emphasised the need for care and consideration in relation to how such a strategy is publicised, and which partners would participate in building it. These issues need to be thought out and participating groups need to be prepared for backlash from FR groups. Interviewee 2: *"One has to be very careful how this is negotiated. Are the controls, are the issues thought out? Who's to be involved? …. we live in a very liberal world and so people like to say: 'It's my opinion. Oh, I have the right to do it and say this' but forgetting your right stops where mine begin. You know?"* Another point of note from interviews was in relation to establishing consensus among strategy partners whereby, Interviewee 7, for example argues that *"there'd be so many compromises that you'd end up having like one of these policies or statements that everything just signs up to and just doesn't think about".* Hence, a comprehensive national strategy against the FR must go beyond good intentions and must have clear policies which are effectively implemented by all.

Chapter 4
Webinar Summaries

Introduction

This chapter provides summaries of a series of five webinars carried out over the lifetime of the project with concerned national and international academics and CSO representatives. The purpose of these webinars was to gather expert opinion on some of the main themes of the project. These themes were: far right misinformation strategies; European anti-far right strategizing; International anti-far right strategizing; the FR and racism in Ireland; and, community strategizing against the FR in Ireland. The content of each of these webinars are summarised here in the same order. All webinars are available to view at the Maynooth University, Centre for the Study of Politics webpage.

Webinar 1:
Far Right Misinformation Strategies

Introduction

The first seminar was held online on Wednesday 20th October and looked primarily at the role of misinformation in Far-Right strategies at the international and Irish level, discussing and exploring strategies to counteract them. Seminar Participants were:

- Eileen Culloty, Dublin City University co-author with Jane Suiter of *Disinformation and Manipulation in Digital Media* (2021) and participant in an EU H2020 funded project on countering disinformation.
- Aoife Gallagher, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, working on the intersection between far right extremism, disinformation and conspiracy theories. Aoife also co-authored a report on Irish far right activity on Telegram, with her colleague at ISD Ciaran O'Connor.
- Owen Worth, University of Limerick, who has published extensively on the theme of the far right, including his most recent book *Morbid Symptoms: The Global Rise of the Far Right (2019).*

The seminar was moderated by Joseph Munnelly, who was working as research assistant to the STOPFARRIGHT project. Themes that were covered were: Far right action and strategies; the threat of the far right to Irish democracy; and possible state, political party and civil society responses to that threat.

Far Right Action and Strategy

This seminar looked at one of the main strategic tools of the far right: disinformation, defined by Eileen Culloty as "information that is false", an important part of far right mobilization strategies or manipulation strategies, which for Culloty mean "how the far right and other actors promote and push their agenda". However, such strategies also involve "presenting facts in a slanted or biased way", rather than simply false information. Hence, she argues, it's important to focus on the overall strategy as well as its parts. A key part of this strategy is to latch on to people's general concerns and reinterpret these along far right ideological lines. The COVID 19 pandemic is an excellent example of this strategy, whereby, as Aoife Gallagher points out the so-called QANON online movement in the United States "essentially became this kind of disinformation vehicle for vast amounts of COVID conspiracy theories throughout the pandemic", "piggybacking" on it as Culloty puts it. Moreover, as Gallagher points out, COVID 19 also acted as a unifying vehicle for a variety of far right groups which often have conflictual relations. Another example in Ireland is the housing crisis, with far right actors in the country trying to frame this problem as an immigration problem. Worth also points to how many far right actors, both at home and abroad, try to hijack and change popular notions of Irish nationalism, giving examples of political actors such as Nigel Farage, the ex-UKIP leader or Tommy Robinson, the English far right activist, who try to utilise Irish national pride or identity to spread their ideas in Ireland, even as they court radical Northern Irish Unionists. The ultimate aim of such tactics is to 'mainstream' these frames, that is that they are picked up and repeated by mainstream media and politicians, hence becoming more generalised rather than fringe interpretations of these concerns. Worth, for example, points out that a lot of the "characters who perpetrate a lot of this information…often…have prominent columns in prominent newspapers, not necessarily in Ireland, but elsewhere, certainly within the English-speaking world."

Indeed, this strategy has got two facets, or sub-strategies, as Gallagher points out. On the one hand identifiable far right figures publicly state their interpretations of key issues. On the other hand, she

continues, there is a "deeper…side to it as well", which is mostly anonymous posting on the internet making the same points. The overall aim is simply to stir "any kind of hatred that they can…and normalizing this". Moreover, tactics and strategies can be shared between groups, and across jurisdictions due to the internet, rapidly making them more generalised. Another tactic used is to exploit differences and disagreements among academics and policy makers over how to interpret social issues. Culloty gives the example of how far right actors attempt to draw a relationship between immigration and crime, with no real consensus among experts on the relationship between the two. However, crime, inequality, housing are all real problems, she warns, and shouldn't be dismissed simply because they have been hijacked by the far right. Worth draws our attention to the historical origins of such strategies, as "far right parties and far right discourses have always managed to mobilize at a time where economically things haven't gone well." Both Culloty and Gallagher agree adding that discussion on the far right can sometimes supplant necessary discussions on issues around inequality, although Gallagher points out that solutions to such social issues are "the hardest thing that needs to be solved here".

Perceived Threat to Irish Democracy

One of the key questions in the survey and interviews was the perception of the threat posed by the far right to Irish democracy. Contributors to the first webinar agreed that while on the one hand far right groups are rather insignificant and hence do not pose a particular threat at the moment, caution should be exercised as this situation could change quite quickly and unexpectedly. Worth, for example, points out that there is a well of potential support for far right parties in Ireland, on say issues such as immigration. Nonetheless, the Irish far right is not yet as sophisticated or effective in their strategizing and still highly fragmented. Hence, he does not see any far right political party in Ireland that could "break through to the wider level".

Nonetheless, speakers also warn against complacency. Culloty, for example, points out that the far right do have real mobilisation capacity, as the large demonstrations against COVID 19 health measures seen in Ireland and elsewhere show. Gallagher warns against the threat of far right violence and how it is always present as a threat despite far right mainstreaming strategies. All speakers warn that the emergence of a unifying leader could possibly change the fortunes of the far right in the country. Gallagher envisages such a leader as someone who has the ability to "gather ideas together", and Culloty sees such a leader as someone well read, perhaps emerging from the universities, and who can make cogent arguments which could be more plausible and hence harder to refute. In this vein, Worth gives the example of Pym Fortuyn, the deceased founder and leader of the Dutch far right party, Pym Fortuyn List, who had the "ability to engage with some of the liberal ideas and discourses that existed in the Netherlands" achieving impressive electoral success.

Policy Responses:

Panellists commented on possible anti-far right strategies by the State, political parties, and civil society groups, including mainstream and social media, as well as concerned Civil Society Organisations and NGOs.

STATE

Most panellists agreed that the state can promote greater media literacy among the public, and especially in schools, so that the public themselves can recognise and counteract far right discursive strategies. Culloty mentioned Media Literacy Ireland, facilitated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, a network of third level institutions, state institutions, media companies and voluntary organisations aiming to

promote media literacy in the country. She also mentioned European Union proposals for European Digital Media Observatories (EDMO), being set up to provide better supports for online media literacy for journalists, researchers and CSOs. She pointed to reform of Ireland's restrictive defamation laws as one potential area for state action, which would make it easier for media to hold people accountable at an earlier stage. [7]

Another big area for state action is putting greater regulation on social media companies. Culloty pointed out that the EU has a Code of Practice on disinformation for social media companies, but it is voluntary and very ineffective. Gallagher felt that social media algorithms are one of the key areas for regulation, as these promote very divisive content, which "kind of feeds into the worst parts of human nature". She admits, however, that such regulation will probably have to come from Europe. She would be hesitant about removing online anonymity, however, as "there are a lot of very good reasons for people to be anonymous online", despite others using it "a very, very nefarious way".

Worth discussed the issue of banning far right parties and felt that this may not be feasible in contemporary politics. Gallagher felt that one key area for state action is to provide clear, effective solutions to problems created by inequality, such as, for example, access to housing, which could help "restore people's trust in…institutions".

POLITICAL PARTIES

Culloty and Worth brought up the issues of consensuses among parties either to refrain from disinformation or misinformation and/or not work with the far right. Culloty gave the example of the Fair Play pledge among Irish political parties for the 2020 elections as a model, "where parties were asked not to engage in disinformation and to just play fair." Worth gave an example of parliamentary consensuses against using certain types of discourse on particular issues, such as immigration, but these can sometimes create backlashes around elitism. Such initiatives, he felt, require "a lot of thought, a lot of consensus and a lot of consideration".

CIVIL SOCIETY

A major area of discussions was about strategies to reduce the harm caused by social media's facilitation of far right ideas and discourses. On a macro level, Culloty argued that "the public in general have to push more for a review of how the digital world is managed". She also advised that any incidents of hate messaging or other type of harassment should always be reported to the social media companies, as "it is important to keep filtering that back and highlighting it" to them. She also spoke of an "inoculation" strategy, whereby organisations, particularly those working on climate change, anticipate "what the false narratives and the false claims are likely to be and clarifying that beforehand" to the public. In this way, when the public "see those false claims, they're more likely to know to reject them."

Gallagher questioned the effectiveness of deplatforming as an "overall solution" to how to deal with online attacks, but in the absence of convincing social media company action on it, it may be the only solution for the moment. She also warned against sharing of far right material, no matter how outraged one might be by it as by sharing it "you're still increasing people's exposure to those claims". Finally, Worth suggested that civil society itself needs to be strengthened, in order to "marginalize these voices." By this he means not only "creating institutions" but also "greater inclusion within civil life".

7. Indeed, this proposal is currently being considered by government. See: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/proposed-changes-to-defamation-law-set-to-be-accepted-by-government-1.4814618

Webinar 2:
European anti-far right strategizing

Introduction

The second seminar was held online on Thursday 23rd October, examining European perspectives on the far right and how that threat is being confronted across multiple jurisdictions. The seminar participants were:

- Anna Krasteva, founder and director of CERMES (Centre for European Refugees, Migration and Ethnic Studies), professor at the Department of Political Science at the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- Aurelien Mondón, senior lecturer at the University of Bath, UK.
- Simone Rafael, journalist and editor-in-chief of www.belltower.news and head of the Digital Project area for the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in Germany.
- Aaron Winter, associate professor of Criminology at the University of East London, UK.

The seminar was moderated by Prof. John O'Brennan, senior lecturer at Maynooth University Sociology Department, Jean Monnet Chair in European Integration and director of the Maynooth Centre for European and Eurasian Studies.

The themes that were covered in the seminar were: Far right action and strategies; the threat of the far right to Europe; and possible state, political party and civil society responses to that threat.

Far Right Action and Strategy

The seminar covered the various forms of far right action that are taking place in the context of Europe. Anna Krasteva noted that in some post-Communist democracies the "mainstreaming of far right topics, frames and discourses," has increased even in the absence of far right representation in parliaments, causing challenges for "civic agency, civic activism and citizenship". Aaron Winter points out that much work on the far right does not acknowledge that racism and xenophobia have long been "mainstreamed" into liberal democracies. The issue then is eradicating racism from liberal democracies, not just eradicating the FR. He added that the far right is "against civil rights for historically powerless or disenfranchised groups", and as such represent the interests of the powerful, possibly in capitalism, but "definitely in patriarchy and white supremacy". This dynamic is evident online, as the ideological interests of social media companies is served well by far right activity on them.

John O'Brennan posed a question to the seminar participants of the "extent to which online platforms facilitate, amplify and encourage hate". Simone Rafael responded, stating that far right extremism and hate speech has existed on these platforms for a long time. She argued that far right members use the online world "to spread their propaganda, their hatred, their racism and everything they are doing". From her perspective, "the invention of social media was really a gamechanger for the far right extremist scene or all anti- democratic scenes" as social media provides a space for them to "spread their propaganda, to celebrate their hateful lifestyle online….to recruit new followers" and to try to influence public and media opinions. Simone highlighted the danger in this, as the hate and violence taking place online can easily transfer into the offline world.

Participants also touched on the relationship between populism and the far right. Among politicians, there is an increased tendency to use what is called a "populist platform", yet this is often a euphemism for immigration controls, Islamophobia, racism and other far right ideas presented in a more moderate form. Krasteva, using Bulgaria as an example, pointed out how the online world there "is really poisoning the public sphere by conspiracy, by fake news, by mistrust in every institution".

Perceived Threat to European Democracy

A massive threat of the far right to European democracies is that of the spread of far right propaganda, ideology and hate via online platforms. Simone highlighted the lack of legislation that is in place to tackle the spread of the far right online, as this responsibility is put on the companies themselves, rather than the justice system. There is also a lack of regulation or transparency of online algorithms, nor "any improvement for the victims of online hate based violence". In Germany, at any rate, she observes, "a lot of these sites are not very well moderated or not moderated at all". Far right figures are amplified and often given air time as a form of 'clickbait' as "it gets the dollars, pounds, whatever currency, and it also gets the attention". Furthermore, the online activities of far right personalities and groups fit with the ideological positions of many broadsheets and tabloids. This mainstreaming of far right actors onto mainstream media platforms is dangerous as "even if you get them on to play the fool, the far right stooge, they do so in ways that legitimise these ideas". Post-communist Eastern European states are, according to Simone, particularly vulnerable to the far right, as there is "still a lot of work to do dealing with democracy and instabilities". She points out that in these societies, "a lot of people have a feeling that they could stabilise themselves and make themselves feel better if they act as racists" as a means to reject the current system.

Winter argued that in some ways, the far right is seen as extremist, but can also be "legitimised through so-called populist narratives or euphemised by the term 'populism'". This practise ends up attributing blame for the phenomenon to a white working-class demographic or 'the people', legitimising the mainstreaming of far right ideas and policies by mainstream politicians for fear that "the far right will take over". This leads to the introduction of "more acceptable or moderate forms of immigration control, for example, or banning the burqa in some cases". Additionally, he argued, the main threat of the far right is not to democracy but rather to the victims of the racism that the far right promotes. These people, he argues, are "at the sharp end of that racism and are also the targets and the victims of state racism", including in the police and criminal justice systems. In his view, then, the far right is already entangled in liberal democracies in the forms of colonialism, racism and other forms of inequality, injustice and discrimination. He expressed his shock that the task of tackling the far right is handed to "the same agencies that deny and fail to address institutional racism or institutional Islamophobia".

Rafael discussed the threat of the far right in Germany, using the street protests organised by 'pandemic deniers' as an example. The people who attended these protests "were not beforehand all supporters of the far right or of right populist parties". This causes a threat, as people who never previously identified with far right ideology were turning to these protests organised by far right activists to channel their anger and disbelief around the pandemic. Protests that initially were based around conspiracy theories and a denial of the COVID 19 virus, very quickly led to complete conspiracy ideologies, claiming that Jewish people created the virus, and the government could not be trusted and so on.

Policy Responses

Seminar participants commented on possible responses for tackling the far right that the State, political parties and civil society groups can adopt. Overall, they argued that there are many actors who have a role to play in tackling the far right.

STATE

The state must challenge the media giving far right actors a voice as this legitimises their views and provides them with a platform to promote hate speech and violence against marginalised groups.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Rafael argued that there must be a focus on strengthening democratic civil society. She explained how the Foundation she works for tries to develop strategies for civil society to help counteract the far right, including "advocacy, trainings and fundings for civil society organisations or smaller clubs all over Germany". They also do lobby work and work with companies, particularly social media companies to try to develop strategies against online far right racism and antisemitism. She highlights the need for engagement with digital civil society and with social media companies.

Winter argued that although we do need to tackle the far right, his work with Mondon highlights the need to tackle the far right in a way that addresses issues of colonialism and institutional racism. Additionally, he argues that analysis "conducted by think tanks, NGOs, academics, needs to not validate and legitimise this complete compartmentalisation and feed systems that are institutionally racist themselves in the fight". In other words, they must recognise the institutionalised origins of many far right themes, such as racism and xenophobia, and not simply compartmentalise them as something unique to the far right.

Furthermore, citizenship must be legitimised as something that depends also on citizens and is created through the activism and commitment of citizens. As Krasteva argued, "citizenship is not only in the hands of the state but also of the citizens". She emphasised the importance of individual agency in tackling the far right, as "individuals….create alternatives". She offers a few examples from the European context, such as a clinic in Finland where doctors and dentists treat undocumented migrants for free, despite this being illegal. In the context of a migrant crisis, this can be an effective way to help those who may be victims of far right hate.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties must discuss and consider why citizens feel neglected by political parties and why they turn to far right parties to support them. Rafael gives the example of Eastern Germany, where there is a complete absence of solutions for this problem as citizens only have hatred for the system and for democracy itself. Additionally, she argues that politicians must promote regulation of the online world, particularly with regard to the online spread of far right hate speech.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

The panelists argued that there are many strategies that need to be adopted by social media companies. They must be urged to change their current harmful business models, or at least improve moderation strategies to detect hate groups or very explicit far right material online and take it down. There are many toxic, hateful narratives online which are currently not illegal and do not even contravene the community standards of social media companies. Rafael highlighted how there is a serious lack of transparency with online spaces, for example, with how algorithms work, using YouTube and TikTok as examples. These sites have strong algorithms, which can recommend increasingly more brutal or violent content to users. This is a massive problem, which needs state intervention. Civil society organisations, such as her organisation, The Amadeu Antonio Foundation, can, however, work with "big organisations, big media outlets, parties, [and] big actors in public discourse who have a role, a voice which will be heard" to help ensure that their voices are used responsibly, promoting democratic values online.

Webinar 3:
International anti-far right strategizing

Introduction

The third STOPFARRIGHT webinar on anti-far right strategizing was held on 15 November 2021. This webinar had three New Zealand based academics as participants: Emily Beausoleil, Senior Lecturer of Political Theory; Chamsy el-Ojeili, Associate Professor of Sociology, both at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington; and Sean Phelan, Associate Professor from the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University. The main themes which emerged from this seminar were the centrality of listening as an anti-far right strategy (Beausoleil); critiquing the concept of extremism as a categorisation of the far right; the need to identify the utopian thinking behind FR thinking (el-Ojeili); and far right thinking as critique (Phelan).

Oblique Listening

Beausoleil argues that hegemonic cultures, notably those of European descent, take their cultural identity as universal and that of others as aberrant. This contributes to an inability of many within those dominant cultures to assume critique and protest from non-dominant cultures in a positive manner. Minority oppressed groups respond to this by increasing voice and protest, yet this does not guarantee that advantaged groups will listen and indeed may have the opposite effect. This necessitates more refined, but complimentary strategies to gain advantaged groups' attention and assume such critiques. Beausoleil identifies oblique listening as part of a strategy "for enabling transformation where we're most entrenched". She gives an example from New Zealand of the ActionStation listening project, Tauiwi Tautoko, which "trains volunteers to engage with strangers who leave racist comments online to see if they can facilitate more caring, thoughtful and informed dialogue." This project responds to research showing that 'calling people out' for racism can actually increase polarisation, and that "fact-checking and myth-busting does not work for shifting hearts and minds." Volunteers for this project instead were trained in listening and transmitting values-based messaging, which together, research showed, helped move previously closed people to more progressive or open views.

El-Ojeili questions the concept of extremism as useful for categorising the far right. He argues that the concept is 'murky' in that it is used to label highly heterogenous organisations and movements with very differentiated objectives – the far right and the far left, fascists and anti-fascists, radical Islamist groups and radical ecologists, critical race theorists – anyone indeed seen to challenge the so-called 'mainstream'. El-Ojeili finds the extremist label "smug about the achievements of liberalism", which are identified as unproblematically positive, and a "conformist prohibition on critical thinking". Indeed, he argues that its' important to identify and valorise the critical element of far right thinking, particularly around capitalism, as well as its utopian aspects. He identifies five aspects to far right utopian thinking: appeals to identity and meaning, to a new type of politics of strength and decision making; anti system and conspiracist mappings of the world and the power and desire to cleanse society, to obtain redemption from a present that is seen as full of decline, conflict and confusion; a politics of change that encompasses both appeals to charismatic authority, and to democracy; an absolute obsession with left organizations and left values, both opposing these, but also drawing energy from them; and, appeals to military values of strength, violence, courage, power, virility and youth. He argues that we can't really combat the far right without a proper understanding of those ideological and utopian dimensions to its thinking.

Far Right Thinking as Critique

Phelan is interested in two areas of work. First, he is intrigued by online campaigns and comments against so called Social Justice Warriors (SJW) and in general what is referred to as 'wokeness' – that is contemporary progressive movements organised around identity and values of tolerance. He notes that while this can be found among specific far right online communities it is also in so-called 'mainstream' media. He notes also, that while much of the language and motivations of 'wokeness' is adopted by more 'progressive' elements of contemporary capitalism, these same companies (and indeed public universities) adopt anti-progressive working conditions – such as short-term contracts. Here he points to convergence between neoliberal theory and the far right in their shared rejection of the very concept of social justice. Secondly, with regard to critique, he defines this "a certain hermeneutics of suspicion". He outlines how this initially was a key hallmark of the left – particularly of the Frankfurt School - but that it came to be appropriated by the far right, becoming "hyper-reactionary forms of suspicion". This far right critique turned on the very originators of critique, such as the current moral panic in the United States around critical race theory, bringing us back to his original concern with anti-'wokeness'. Hence, Phelan draws our attention to the constant exchange between far right and mainstream media and politics centred on anti-left discourse.
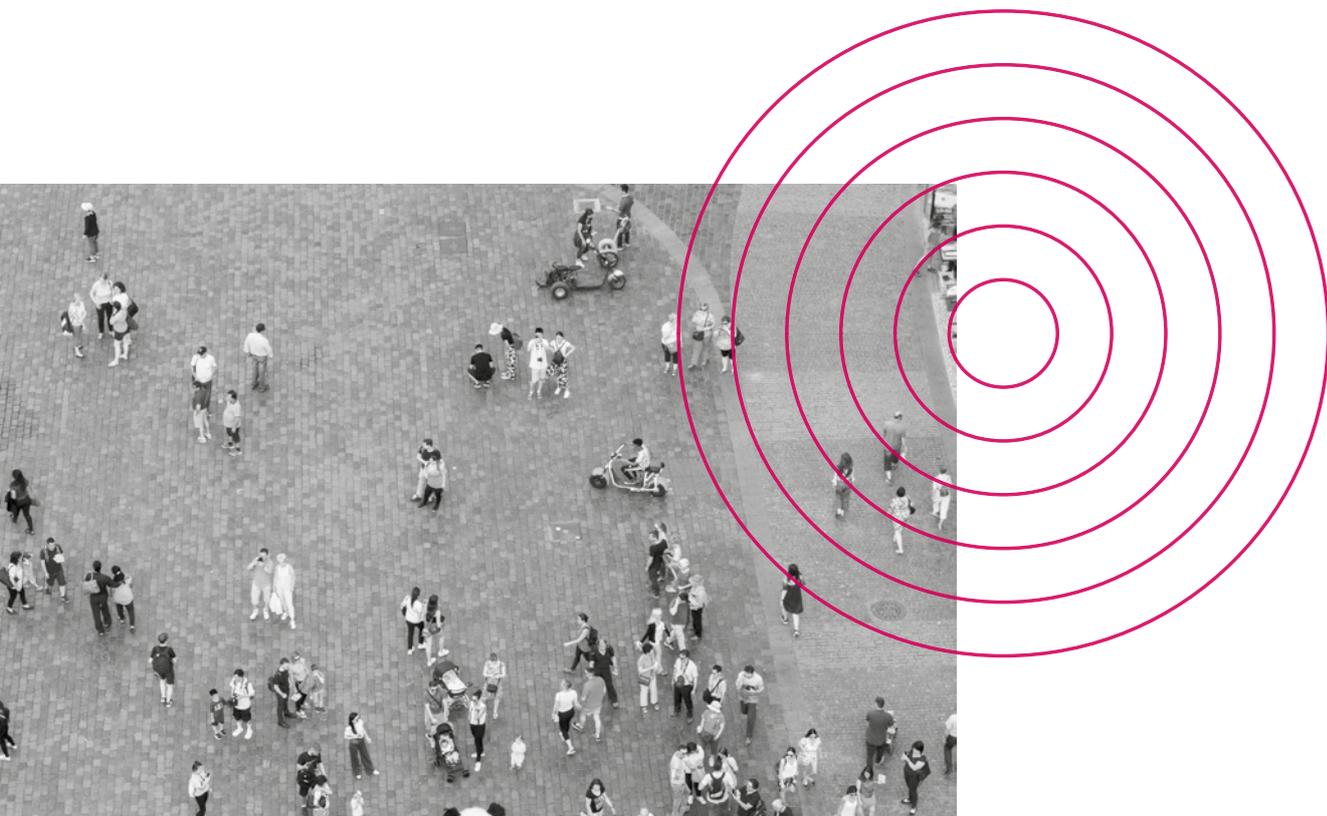
Webinar 4:
The FR and racism in Ireland

Introduction

The fourth seminar was held online on Monday 29th November, examining the far right and racism in Ireland. The seminar participants were:

- Bryan Fanning: Professor of Migration and Social Policy at University College Dublin
- Rhona McCord: Anti-racist and anti-fascist organizer, at the Trade Union, 'Unite'.
- Gavan Titley: Senior lecturer in the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University and docent in the Swedish School of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland.

The seminar was moderated by Pranav Kohli, assistant lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Maynooth University. The themes that were covered in the seminar were: the far right and racism in Ireland; the threat of the far right; and possible state, political party and civil society responses to that threat.

The Far Right and Racism in Ireland

According to Brian Fanning, "we have a range of different far right groups in Irish society", with some of these being modelled on earlier forms of Irish isolationist nationalism. However, there are other kinds of far right activists in Ireland, "who seem to be waging their own kind of battle with modernity and secularism and if you will, the cosmopolitan turn in Irish society". Rhona McCord pointed out how the far right "categorize people into groups", making it easier for these groups to be exploited. McCord identifies working class people as a group who can be targeted by these FR tactics, capitalizing on the emotions, anger and fear that people have, and then building trust and solidarity with these people face to face.

Gavan Titley highlighted how the far right in Ireland have "racialized targets, particularly in their campaigns around direct provision". In Ireland, the far right has been known to target Muslim prayer and religious spaces as well as LGBTQI+ events. Titley detailed how far right groups approach the direct provision system, claiming they want to protect people who should not have to live in the poor conditions of direct provision, yet simultaneously arguing that migrants should not come to Ireland in the first place. Titley qualifies such tactics as a "scavenger logic which allows them to sort of piggyback on what's going on in the political system or in a society at a given moment". He identifies a definite presence of far right ideas in Irish politics and Irish political culture. He relates this to the aftermath of 9/11 and the so-called "clash of civilizations" theory, making it more acceptable to circulate radicalized ideas of a particular kind in Ireland. Travellers were used as an example of a minority group who experience racism from the far right in Ireland and it was highlighted by various seminar participants how there is a lack of acknowledgement of this by the state and a lack of conversation around it within civil society.

Threat of the Far Right

Throughout this webinar, participants drew attention to the possible threat of the far right. Titley discussed how social media is used as a weapon by far right activists, as it gives "the space and the possibility for people to become far right actors in the absence of established movements." Titley also noted that in recent years there has been a proliferation of movements that resemble political parties of the extreme right.

Along with the threat to racial and ethnic minority groups, the COVID 19 pandemic was used as an example of the threat of the far right. Titley illustrated how throughout the pandemic, "we have seen the capacities of far right actors to integrate themselves into various forms of social discontent and dislocation" around it. Far right actors have partly been able to do this with the "architecture of the internet and the architecture of social media". Therefore, we find ourselves at a crucial point for gaining an understanding of the ways in which various forms of far right action are facilitated by the deep integration of social media into our everyday lives.

The seminar participants also highlighted the threat of the spread of misinformation, particularly around the pandemic. Titley highlighted how although there is a lot of misinformation circulating online, it does not necessarily mean that there is a desire to misinform. However, the pandemic did provide an opportunistic framework for the far right in Ireland. Under the conditions where there is something spectacular, there is a chance of something disruptive, as well as a chance to target particular spaces, communities or symbols.

Policy Responses

Seminar participants offered possible responses for tackling the far right in Ireland that the State, political parties and civil society groups can adopt.

STATE

McCord argued that migration is not going to stop and will continue due to wars and climate change. The best way we can ensure that this is not used by the far right as a means for racism is to organize those workers. According to McCord, "that means organizing them on an equal level where people inside the workplace, no matter where they come from, have the same right to progress, to become managers, or whatever, as anybody else". This may ensure that migrant workers are not used by the far right to promote racism.

Titley highlighted the important role that the media play in far right politics. He argued that we cannot understand contemporary far right movements or actors and even far right ideology and the circulation of far right ideas without considering the role various kinds of media currently play in these. As Titley argued, "these days we can't understand the far right without talking about media, but we can't understand media systems in many countries without thinking about the far right". Therefore, it must be considered how there are different ways in which the media facilitates the spread of the far right.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Titley argued that when it comes to counter strategizing, marginality must be taken seriously. It should not be assumed that marginality does not affect or have consequences for individuals, nor should it be assumed that marginality does not have the capacity under various sorts of circumstances to grow in particular ways. A counter-strategy to the far right involves countering the specific movements of the far right as well as standing in solidarity with the people targeted by them, which involves doing so politically. It also involves consideration about the best ways to counter far right ideas "without being sucked onto the terrain they would prefer us to play on", which Titley argued is very difficult.

In Ireland, there is a lack of public discourse on the role of the far right and the presence of far right politics, nor is there any meaningful political discourse around far right protests in Ireland. It is therefore necessary to have increased political discourse around the far right. Titley highlighted how far right politics is particularly complex in its current form and ideology. Therefore, a narrow definition of the far right is not helpful for conceptualising the phenomenon.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Fanning argued that it is necessary for civil society to engage with particular ideas that the far right put out and offer rivals to these ideas. For example, "if there is an idea of us as a nation or a Republic, let's not leave that to the (far) right to populate what that means. Let's think more positively and more inclusively about that". It is necessary, therefore, for civil society to produce rival narratives to those put forward by the far right and offer more positive alternatives that are more inclusive.

McCord mentioned how we must consider who the far right is and what we are talking about when we discuss the far right. She also highlighted how sometimes it is necessary to separate anti-racism work from monitoring of the far right. We must be aware that when we are talking about the far right, we are talking about organisations that play a historical role in attacking people and being incredibly divisive. McCoy highlighted the amount of anti-traveller racism in Ireland that's perpetrated by the far right and how this is not recognised by many people, nor are there enough people willing to do something about it. Titley also noted that in Ireland "we don't talk about the far right outside of these kinds of meetings and outside of a handful of committed groups." Therefore, it is necessary for society to engage in increased discussion around the far right. This also extends to political discourse.

McCord used the example of the Water Charges campaign in Ireland, "which was very much a class-based campaign" to highlight how the far right can be forestalled through mobilization and solidarity. She argued that we often forget to talk about social class when we are talking about racism. She highlighted how in Britain, the far right targeted the working class during the Austerity period and then Brexit, and equally in Ireland the far right attempted, but failed, to encroach on working class people during the Water Charges campaign. The reason for this was because "there was such a huge mobilization and sense of social solidarity around that campaign, particularly in working class communities". McCord also discussed how from her perspective it is a matter of communicating directly with people, as the far right does not have the "personal reach" that a Trade Union can have. However, she highlights how the far right take advantage of social media "and in a way, we kind of fight a losing battle" as it is easy to spread false information and gather followers online. McCord argued that we need to acknowledge that society is changing, as is technology and the media, so it is necessary for us to update how we approach the far right.

Webinar 5: Community strategizing against the FR in Ireland

Introduction

The fifth and final seminar was held online on Wednesday the 8th of December, examining the impact of the far right on civil society and how local communities and civil voluntary groups can strategise against the growing influence of the far right in Irish communities. The seminar participants were:

- Mark Malone, Communications Officer, Far Right Observatory
- Theresa O'Donohoe, who facilitated a community response to a proposed Direct Provision centre in her local community of Lisdoonvarna.
- Sarah Clancy, poet, activist and community worker, Coordinator of Clare Public Participation.

The seminar was moderated by Shane O'Curry, director of the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR). The themes that were covered in the seminar were: Far right action and strategy; the far right in rural Irish communities; and civil society responses to the far right in Irish communities.

Far Right Action and Strategy

The seminar covered the various ways in which the far right operate and organise within communities. Mark Malone discussed the ways people engage in far right organizing, explaining that it can take place through publications and online trolling, as well as through political organisation. Malone explained how the far right attempt to recategorize civil society actors and campaign groups "as being adjuncts of the state".

Sarah Clancy argued that the far right use tactics such as "trying to masquerade as a human rights campaign in order to rope people in". She also commented on the emergence and overlap that exists between far right anti-vax/anti-mask discourse and the "wellness" community. Clancy revealed how the same individuals who are organizing against migrants "are now organizing against vaccines", COVID 19 restrictions and 5G. There are new wellness alternative communities emerging who "have already chosen to forge their own path and may have a higher distrust of official information than other communities have".

Theresa O'Donohoe explained how the far right can spread misinformation to people who aren't educated on topics such as race and racism. She also touched on the tendency of the far right to "simplify" issues that are actually very complex and complicated. She discussed how in her local community, citizens were not provided with information on what was happening in the community in relation to the opening of a direct provision centre, and the far right used this as an opportunity to spread false information within the community. According to O'Donohoe, a tactic that the far right use is to create "inclusion, emotion, dynamism and enthusiasm", which the left also wants to do, however, "the right is managing to do them in certain circumstances where the issues are too complicated for us to have a simple position". Clancy also touched on the infiltration of far right language and ideas into the rural community of Lisdoonvarna, with local citizens starting to use language they would not normally use as it was pushed on them by the far right. As O'Donohoe explained, "this whole new language erupted in Lisdoonvarna and online and sharing videos of fighting and abuse and things like that. It was all brought in and fed to people". This highlights the influence that the far right can have on a community, which is perhaps experiencing a lack of education and information around certain topics or phenomena.

The Far Right in Rural Irish Communities

The influence that the far right can have on rural communities in particular was a clear theme of the seminar. O'Donohoe and Clancy drew on their experience of Lisdoonvarna to demonstrate how the far right can influence citizens in a rural community. Clancy identified how "rural isolation, the under serving of communities by government" creates a "void into which the far right will attempt to get a foothold". Nonetheless, rural communities can have a strong ability to mobilise in self-sufficient ways and foster human decency and solidarity.

Malone highlighted the relative lack of success that far right groups have had in Ireland. Nonetheless, O'Donohoe drew on her first hand experience of the far right infiltrating the community of Lisdoonvarna, when far right actors hijacked locals' worries over a direct provision centre that was to be opened in the area. As O'Donohoe explained, she was oblivious to what the far right was doing and, in her eyes, "most of the community were oblivious too". O'Donohoe identifies what she calls "the democratic deficit" as being a big problem in that situation. As she argued, "the democratic deficit across this whole country is allowing radical people to come in and claim ownership of people". O'Donohoe revealed how the Gardaí did little to combat the situation as her and her colleagues were worried about what far right actors might do. She also felt let down by the government as they allowed a direct provision centre to open in the local community without informing local residents on what was happening or providing any information, which O'Donohoe argued created a space for the far right to infiltrate with false information.

According to Clancy, the 'democratic deficit' is "very successfully exploited by people with power", who step into that void "with pre-prepared answers" in order to "drive a wedge between people and very quickly create the conditions where activists with a humanitarian impulse are intimidated" and "find themselves on a hit list". O'Donohoe discussed how the complicated circumstances that emerged from that situation made it difficult to distinguish between those who opposed the direct provision centre on the grounds of the human rights of migrants, from those who opposed it on anti-migrant grounds. This really proved to be an issue in the case of Lisdoonvarna. However, Clancy explained how the far right were unsuccessful in Lisdoonvarna, Kinvara or Ennis as "they only really managed to mobilise one or two people in the community".

Civil Society Responses to the Far Right in Irish Communities

The seminar participants offered several suggestions that civil society can adopt to tackle the far right in Irish communities. Malone discussed how it is necessary for us to "understand the sort of processes of dynamics" of far right organizing and what we're talking about when we're talking about the far right. We should approach the threat of the far right by "taking a step back and removing ourselves", specifically from the question of 'who are the far right actors?' It is necessary for us to have a "variated understanding" and an approach that will allow us to tease out the dynamics of the far right and give us a richer analysis that will allow us to take action.

O'Donohoe highlighted the importance in rural Ireland of naming far right behaviour because "people need to know what to look out for" so they can identify what is happening in their community. It is necessary for civil society to "inoculate people against the tactics that are going to be used (by the far right) before those tactics are experienced", such as the spread of misinformation. O' Donohoe explained how in her local area, a lot of the misinformation that was being spread on the flyers circulated by the far right was "debunked" by her group. This was facilitated through the use of social media and even on local radio and newspapers. Once she and her colleagues were able to get a platform to share the correct information, they could "debunk" the information that was being wrongly spread by the far right.

O'Donohoe highlighted the need for us to "start addressing the democratic deficit", particularly when it comes to rural isolation, to avoid citizens become involved in the far right and then becoming isolated. In her words, "the more open we are and the more democratic we are in our own communities, the more we're aware of this happening". Clancy reinforces this argument, adding that rural communities have the ability to mobilise quickly in ways that are more self-sufficient than urban areas as rural communities can make something happen if they want to. O'Donohoe returned to her experience in Lisdoonvarna to further highlight this capacity within rural communities: "the amount of well-meaning, caring people that came forward and mobilised behind…the situation was just amazing. And I would agree about having a safe space for people to do that. How we create those safe spaces, comes back to the democratic process". O'Donohoe argued that we need a better democracy to be able to cope with this.

Clancy highlighted how it must be considered how those on the ground in rural communities can ensure that the far right cannot infiltrate those communities. Additionally, she argued that "the government strategy of isolating migrants and asylum seekers is feeding into the lack of spaces within which people can show their solidarity", so this space must be built. Clancy also argued that we must "remove ourselves from the politics of competing for scarce resources" as neoliberal capitalism is fostering an environment where far right movements can thrive. Citizens are fighting over resources when the government is spending massive money on funding marketised forms of social housing such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and paying hotel owners to operate direct provision centres.

Drawing on her own experience, O'Donohoe also stressed the important role that An Garda Síochána should play in making those targeted by the far right feel safer. There is a need for a hate crime legislation to protect those being attacked online or physically. From her experience, "we felt under attack in our own community and we felt worried that we were going to be targeted". Clancy added that there should be "some form of ombudsman system which is effective and provides redress and provides a remedy" for victims of the far right. O'Donohoe offered a simple example of what civil society can do to stand in solidarity with groups targeted with hate speech by the far right. In Lisdoonvarna, residents of the area donated Christmas presents to the new residents of the local direct provision centre. As she explained, "the promotion of that, the PR around that immediately started to drown out the rest of it" as it was a simple project that hundreds of people were able to get involved in.

Conclusion:
Anti-FR policy
recommendations

Introduction

This project primarily sought to gather information on CSO opinion on anti-FR strategizing at the level of state, political party, civil society and within that, and most importantly, CSO level. It also canvassed expert opinion on the FR in general and on strategizing by state, party and civil society against the FR through its webinar series.

The main theoretical frame used was drawn from Mudde's (2019) typology for each of those entities that is:

- **State:** Militant Democracy to Liberal Permissive models.
- **Political Parties:** Demarcation, Confrontation, Co-optation, and Incorporation.
- **Civil Society:** Demarcation and Confrontation, with a third Citizen based model identified drawing on Krasteva et al. (2019).

We found that survey participants, interviewees and experts in Ireland concur that while there is not an immediate and urgent threat to Irish democracy from the FR, this could change quite rapidly, and Irish society should prepare itself for this possibility. A wide range of specific policy initiatives regarding each of these entities to help prepare for such an eventuality were suggested by participants.

State Responses

There was a clear emphasis from participants in the project, be they respondents to surveys, interviewees, or experts who participated in the webinars, that the State should be more cognisant of the threat of the FR to democracy and more militant in the latter's defence. Some policy recommendations made were:

- Limitations to speech which incites hatred or violence against another social group causing social division, which would involve the reform of laws on hate speech and hate crime.
- More educational and community-based initiatives, among minority and majority groups, facilitating social and knowledge exchange between different communities.
- Support for community groups, among minority and majority groups, to counter-act discriminatory discourse and actions.
- Addressing inequalities and hardships in Irish society which cause disillusion about democracy among citizens, leaving them vulnerable to FR discourse and organising.
- Diligent monitoring of far right groups by state organisations, including disclosure of funding and revenue sources and possible banning of overseas funding of FR groups.
- Increased controls and regulation of social media companies, holding them legally responsible as publishers for content they facilitate and provide.
- Media literacy initiatives for children and adults to help them recognise FR misinformation and disinformation.
- Recognition of and action on the institutionalised origins of many far right themes, such as racism and xenophobia, and their colonialist origins.

Political Party Responses

In survey responses, respondents identified demarcation and confrontation as the main approaches political parties should take towards the far right. Some of the policy responses identified by survey participants, interviewees, and webinar participants using the two identified categories are:

DEMARCATION:

- The need for non-far right parties to clearly demonstrate their values of inclusion, respect and equality.
- Seeking consensuses among parties either to refrain from disinformation or misinformation and/or not work with the far right, although these need to be constructed carefully so as not to permit the FR portraying them as a source of victimisation.
- Excluding parties from their dealings of parties which promote or advocate hateful, divisive politics.
- Greater discussion and consideration as to why citizens feel neglected by political parties and why they turn to far right parties to support them.
- Providing original policy responses to far right talking points which undermine rather than reinforce them.

CONFRONTATION:

- Being vocal and steadfast in challenging the various forms of hate and discrimination when they appear.
- Political parties must promote regulation of the online world, particularly regarding the online spread of far right hate speech.
- Standing in solidarity with the people targeted by the far right.
- Increased political discussion about the far right and how to respond to them.

Civil Society Responses

The survey notes that most responding CSOs do not have an anti-far right strategy. Those that did had primarily demarcation and confrontation type strategies, but also capacity building strategies. Example of initiatives provided by respondents, interviewees and webinar participants along these lines, were:

DEMARCATION:

- Banning and forbidding CSO staff or members to be members of or associate with far right groups.
- Having a values statement of core values and standards that all members must adhere to.

CONFRONTATION:

- Attending proactive counter protests, marches and demonstrations against the far right or far right linked themes (e.g. racism, anti-immigrant).
- Early warning initiatives on far right activities to affected communities.
- Strengthened collaboration against hate crime with the Gardaí.
- Using "inoculation" strategies, whereby organisations anticipate false narratives and false claims made on an issue and clarify them beforehand to the public.
- Having a consistent policy of reporting online abuse to social media companies and refraining from sharing far right online material to other users.
- Lobbying social media companies to try to develop strategies against online far right racism and antisemitism.
- Lobbying against the institutionalised origins of many far right themes, such as racism and xenophobia.
- Mobilising broader civil society to act in support of vulnerable populations and against far right, racist and other hate motivated actions.
- Producing rival narratives to those put forward by the far right and offering more positive alternatives that are more inclusive.
- Mobilizing and organising people against the far right and its ideas, particularly in working class communities, especially through trade unions, but also in rural areas through local community groups.
- Becoming more organised in challenging the far right online.
- Fostering increased discussion on the far right among the public and how to tackle it.
- Lobbying for more transparency from the state on actions which can be capitalised on by the far right, such as the location and installation of direct provision centres.

- Policies and protocols to combat online harassment and trolling.
- Providing legal or social support to victims of far right abuse and attack.
- Attending trainings and real world or online courses on anti-far right action or anti-racism.
- Coalition building to take action on combating the rise of the far right, including resource sharing and building a collective knowledge base.
- Seeking resources to employ a dedicated staff person to act as watchdog of far right activities, lobbying, building alliances and coalitions to challenge and change the narratives.
- Sharing training, discussions and tools with other NGO and grassroots organisations affected.
- Mapping and publishing analysis of far right organising in Ireland.
- Seeking to understand the reasons why some populations are attracted to far right ideas and engage with these populations, especially online.
- Fostering more integration and solidarity between minority and majority groups to help make communities more resilient to far right organising and discourse.

From the various activities of the project listed above, an outline of a possible national strategy can be envisaged. Overall, CSO's appear to be arguing for a national anti-FR strategy which has a bottom up, community involvement, approach to its construction, places education and awareness building at its centre, includes strategies to tackle inequalities which leave marginalised communities vulnerable to FR exploitation, and which finely balances the rights of freedom of expression and freedom from threatening behaviours. Within this, policies are needed to help strengthen democratic civil society including advocacy, trainings and fundings for civil society organisations.

Such a strategy is predicated on a much more militant State, preventing and even outlawing the facilitation of hate speech and FR bigotry through social media in particular, tackling the social and political issues which are used by the FR to further their political aims, including institutionalised racism, and providing increased support to communities and CSOs to help combat the FR and ideas associated with the FR on the ground. As part of this overall strategy, political parties should lead by example, refraining from using FR talking points, vocally rejecting bigotry and hate where it appears, refusing to cooperate with the FR, seeking solutions to the socio-economic contexts which the FR uses to further its political aims, and conducting business in a civilised, respectful manner. Wider civil society equally should adopt an intolerant attitude to the FR and the contexts and ideas that it thrives on, with the media and social media companies in particular having a key role to play. CSOs meanwhile need to build on existing strategies of confrontation and demarcation, while also developing a comprehensive citizenship based approach which aims to build resilience against the FR within their specific communities and among the wider community, and which should be supported and facilitated by the above mentioned entities, but in particular the State.

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