

### THE ANTIMIGRATION FRANCHISE

### HOW XENOPHOBIC POPULISM SPREADS IN EUROPE

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a recent interview given to a Spanish newspaper, the recognized leader of modern national-populism, Steve Bannon, describes the implementation strategy of The Movement: "The details change in each country, but the philosophy is the same: bring decision-making close to the people, sovereignty, security and economy. (...) That's what I call placing the product. "

Bannon describes with these words the logic at the base of the successful expansion model of this movement, which we have defined as the [Antimigration Franchise](#). A franchise is defined as the concession of rights of exploitation of a product, activity or commercial name, granted by a company to one or more persons in a certain area. A practice that allows to scale up a business designed centrally by the franchisor and adapted by the franchisees for marketing in various scenarios. The "product", in this case is an ideology: we call it McPopulism, the merge of this business model and xenophobic populism. Its influence in today's politics has become one of the greatest challenges of our time.

In the XXI century, xenophobic populism has combined old ideological foundations and new fears and uncertainties to form a version of the alt-right and neoconservative logic that reigns in places as diverse as the US, Brazil, Hungary, the Philippines and Australia. In each of these countries, political parties, think tanks and civil society organizations have managed to bring a discourse to power that questions the values of liberal democracies, multilateralism and a model of globalization that they consider a threat to their identity and interests.

The Antimigration Franchise is driven by a network of ideologists, financiers and organizations who promote a consistent political logic from different platforms and geographical corners, the tactical use of networks and a coordinated strategy that translates all this into electoral muscle and institutional power. From the Brexit referendum to the US presidential elections, through the financing of media and related NGOs, the creation of new political parties or the activation of allies in churches and religious groups; the scope of this movement is unprecedented.

The antimigration narrative constitutes a main element of the discourse, especially insofar as it helps to effectively prop up fear, insecurity and the sensation of exceptionality:

Antimigration exploits economic arguments (migrants steal jobs and abuse public services), identity (diversity destroys our culture and traditions) and security (threat comes from external enemies, such as crime and terrorism).

The rejection of the newcomer is magnified in the case of some immigrants. Specifically, the Franchise repeatedly exploits three resources: Islamophobia, aporophobia (hatred of the poor) and 'crimigration' (the migrant, especially if irregular, as a suspect). Human mobility is generally seen as a failure of the countries of origin. This includes the emigration of the nationals themselves, who respond in this way to the economic and political dysfunctions of a system that must be demolished. Nationalism becomes the electoral means to recover the sovereignty and control of the States.

The product has marketing channels and tools that the Franchise uses strategically. Misinformation (lying, telling a part of history or magnifying marginal academic positions) has become a hallmark of the movement, which amplifies its actions through social networks, the micro-segmentation of messages and the questioning of the social and environmental agenda of the liberal democrats. It is also common to use disruptive narratives that transcend the politically correct to attract the axis of public debate, establish the framework for discussion and contradict the facts with conspiracy theories. Sometimes, these narratives are transformed in an open way into hate speech.

Few fronts of this war have such priority as Europe. For the Anti-migration Franchise, the ideal of globalization and integration within the diversity proposed by the European Union (EU) represents everything that must be transformed into the new global order. The national-populist movements have managed to establish themselves strongly in the governments and parliaments of almost a dozen member states - from the executives of Hungary, Italy or Austria, to the control of the opposition in Germany or Sweden - determining fundamental debates such as immigration and contaminating the traditional parties' discourse in all political landscapes.

This report has identified more than 20 political groups with parliamentary and/or European representation, operating in around twenty EU countries, which fit the profile defined in the Antimigration Franchise. Only Luxembourg, Ireland and Portugal escape its presence.

For these reasons, the Franchise has established the European Parliamentary elections as its prime objective, in order to influence the resulting institutions. A myriad of political groups of this spectrum are willing to put aside their differences to form a minority block in the European Parliament which controls the future of Europe. The most reliable projections give the Antimigration Franchise one out of every four seats at stake, which could influence the composition of the Commission and facilitate the veto of more progressive proposals.

This report offers a detailed analysis of these arguments and a list of their most prominent influencers, which allows us to dissect the functioning and scope of the antimigration political movement in Europe. It also dismantles its myth about the conflict between people and elites, to describe a very different political operation: the substitution of one elite for

another. The analysis is completed with three case studies in which the logic of the franchise is already a reality:

- In the Netherlands, pioneers in xenophobic populism, the franchise's discourse has two partners: one leads the opposition in the lower house and the other leads the Senate. The two parties coincide in their anti-immigration positions, their Islamophobia, the defense of identity discourse and a more liberal view in social and moral debates. Populism is their only way of communicating and undertaking politics. Both compete for the same electorate and have managed to break the tolerant tradition of a country of deep democratic conviction and religious tolerance.
- In Italy, the Franchise is already in power. The condition of the Southern Border and the migratory pressure of recent years have boosted the Italian government to pure populist ideologies whose most xenophobic representative has turned antimigration into public policy and electoral flag.
- Spain was part of the so-called "Iberian exception" for years. Despite the fact that the crisis left unbearable rates of unemployment, poverty and corruption, the anti-migratory discourse had so far remained institutionally marginalized. But political polarization, territorial crisis, increase in the arrival of immigrants along the Southern Border and the openly populist treatment of these factors have led to its introduction into the electoral struggle. Today VOX is a model pupil of the Franchise, who, in a few months, have managed to contaminate traditional parties' campaign and control part of the public debate.

The "*Antimigration Franchise: how xenophobic populist spreads in Europe*"

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