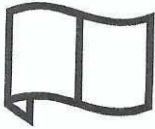


Global Politics in a Post-Truth Age

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European Crises and Right-Wing Populism: The Case of Lega Nord

Written by Irene Viparelli and Evanthia Balla

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/10/10/european-crises-and-right-wing-populism-the-case-of-lega-nord/>

IRENE VIPARELLI AND EVANTHIA BALLA, OCT 10 2022

This is an excerpt from *Global Politics in a Post-Truth Era*. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.

The link between post-truth and right-wing populism has been investigated under various lenses, such as through populist discourses, social media and global politics. In the European Union, populism, despite not being a new phenomenon, has gained an alarming share of the electorate during the continent's long period of crises and distress in recent years following the Eurozone crisis, the refugee crisis and the Brexit disintegration challenge. Under this prism, a series of questions arise: What is the relationship between the rise of right-wing populism and the European crises? How has the post-truth contributed to the increase of right-wing populism in Europe? This chapter first demonstrates the legitimacy gap, and the related distrust of the European project, which heightened during the aforementioned crises and offered a 'fruitful field' for right-wing populism to gain greater relevance and influence by openly using anti-EU rhetoric. Secondly, it argues that while in a 'regime of shared truth', right-wing populism never succeeded in gaining a broader consensus. Yet, in the post-truth age, it offered an array of unrestrained 'truths', extensively using social media as a key platform for direct communication with the public, threatening democracy itself.

This study adopts a threefold narrative. Firstly, it offers a conceptual analysis of right-wing populism in a post-truth age. This section focuses on the definitions and links between European right-wing populism and the post-truth age. The second section discusses the relationship between the crises, the rise of populism and the post-truth age. It shows that since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the European Monetary Union's (EMU) weaknesses, as well as the financial and refugee crises were capitalised by right-wing populist parties. Populist right-wingers thus took advantage of this decline of trust to mobilise economic polarisation and nativist sentiments, spreading a particular anti-EU rhetoric. However, in a post-truth environment, right-wing populist parties have been able to spread their political rhetoric as never before, extensively using social media as a platform for direct, yet unrestrained, communication with the public. This has resulted in unprecedented electoral success at national and European levels – further challenging democratic values and the European project itself. The third part focuses on a case study of the Italian Lega Nord – which was not originally a right-wing populist party, instead belonging to a populist and ethno-regionalist party family rooted under a pro-EU and anti-statism ideology. However, in order to respond to the challenges of European integration, the party has progressively loosened its original features and joined the right-wing populist party family. Therefore, Lega Nord's transformation helps shed light on the link between the accretion of right-wing populism and the European crises. Lega Nord's Matteo Salvini has been the European leader that has used social media the most in his political campaigns over recent years, reaching more than 3,000,000 followers in 2018 (Cervi 2020). Such a successful strategy has allowed Lega to reach the best electoral results in its history in the national election of 2018 and in the European elections of 2019. In this vein, Lega shows how the post-truth age has allowed the spreading of right-wing populist ideology as never before, threatening European democratic values and the European Union political project.

Right-wing populism in a post-truth age: A conceptual analysis