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**BROTHERS IN ARMS? : EXPLORING TRANSNATIONAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN EUROPEAN
POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT AND INDIAN POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT**

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, a transnational alliance between two European populist radical right parties -- Germany's Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) and France's Rassemblement National (RN), which is also referred to as National Rally -- and India's ruling populist radical right, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has evolved. Using the concepts of populist radical right and postcolonial populism alongside transnational networking of the populist radical right and Islamophobia, this thesis analyses empirical evidence that establishes that populist radical right from the Global North and the Global South gain mutual validation and acceptability of their narratives related to Islamophobia, sovereignty and anti-European Union standpoint through the alliance. This research underlines that while the Indian government-led by the BJP is officially making concerted efforts to improve the strategic partnership between India and European Union by branding India's 'growth' story under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it discredits European Union's criticism on the ongoing human rights violations in India. At the same time, the BJP is using the voice of its European populist radical right allies to establish that India needs no 'lecturing' on human rights from the liberal institutions in the West. This research addresses the gap in literature on the evolving relationship between populist radical right parties from Global North and Global South and opens opportunities for deeper research on the impact of such a transnational alliance on European Union-India policymaking, and on the larger democratic and liberal world order.

Keywords: AfD, National Rally, BJP, populist radical right, Islamophobia, sovereignty, EU.

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ACRONYMS

- i) AfD.....Alternative for Deutschland
- ii) BJP.....Bharatiya Janata Party
- iii) RN..... Rassemblement National
- iv) RSS..... Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
- v) UN.....United Nations
- vi) VHP..... Vishva Hindu Parishad

INTRODUCTION

‘It is a well-known paradox that nationalism is transnational: all nations claim to be unique, but in strikingly similar ways’ -- Manuela Achilles & Kyrill Kunakhovich (2018) in ‘Nationalism, Nativism, and the Revolt Against Globalization’.

What is transnational?

The word ‘transnational’ is inspired by the Latin term— ‘trans’, which means ‘beyond’. It is known to have been used for the first time by German linguist Georg Curtius (1820–1895). He used it in his 1862 inaugural lecture at Leipzig University to emphasise that every national language belongs to a broader family of languages that surpasses the boundaries of modern nations (Saunier, 2009: 1). When World War I began and native-born Americans grew wary of immigrant cultures, critic Randolph Bourne (1916) wrote an article titled, Trans-National America in *The Atlantic Monthly*, urging the U.S. to embrace its cosmopolitanism. In the following years, the term surfaced in references to ‘transnational alignment’ of fascist nations, pointing to the common views and shared plans of fascist states and groups, which crossed national limits and usually disjointed nationalisms. By the 1950s, political scientists discussed corporations as ‘transnational actors’, by the late 1960s, scholars began framing ‘transnational relations’ in contrast to ‘international relations’ and in the 1970s, Left activists critiqued ‘transnational capital’ (Saunier, 2009:3).

With the globalisation wave of the 1980s, the term ‘transnational’ entered anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and expanded into history, geography, gender, religion, and political science, especially through ‘transnational movements’ and ‘transnational civil society’ (Saunier, 2009:3 & 5). In international relations, transnational alliance is referred to ‘interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments’ (Keohane & Nye, 1977: 331). Although Keohane and Nye (1977) recognised that states are no longer the sole key players in global politics, they emphasised that transnational relations still depend on the political dynamics between

states and international organisations and vice versa. This means transnational actors operate within shared structures shaped by the spread of ideas and attitudes (Keohane & Nye, 1977: 748).

Increasingly, far-right parties have been forming transnational alliances (Abrahamsen et al., 2024; Sen, 2025) posing a threat to liberal world order and global peace (Riddle, 2024). Populist radical right actors are diverse, and their ideologies also vary, encompassing neo-Nazism, nativism, racism, anti-elitism, anti-system populism, anti-pluralism, and socio-cultural authoritarianism (Berntzen, 2019; Mudde, 2002). Despite this diversity, they all share a belief in nativism or ethnic nationalism and utilise either conventional or anti-democratic, sometimes violent, tactics to pursue their objectives (Mudde, 2019). According to Abrahamsen et al. (2024), Europe's populist far-right groups view globalisation as an assault on national sovereignty and identity. Such groups now share tactics, symbols, and beliefs, honed in the echo chambers of the internet, or, increasingly, through in-person meetings.

Scholars note that a key sign of the radical right's transnationalisation is their shared discourse on global issues and, crucially, their common vision or position, which lay the groundwork for cross-border connections and international collaboration (Caiani, 2018). Mudde (2007) notes that internationalisation is a key element in the rhetoric of the populist radical right, shaping how these groups position themselves in relation to global and regional developments. In addition, disaffection from politics, mistrust of democratic institutions, and anti-establishment sentiments, in the form of opposition toward the European Union (EU), are increasingly considered important (Mudde, 2007) because these are the core elements of nationalism (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023), and as Achilles, Kunakhovich and Shea (2018) note that it is no longer a paradox that nationalism is transnational.

While there is a growing body of scholarly work focussing on the transnational network between populist radical right parties within Europe or the Global North, there is scant literature available to examine the transnational network between populist radical right parties in the Global North and the Global South. In the *World of the Right: Radical Conservatism and Global Order* --which is a rare book that studied the platforms in which different radical right parties and leaders across the world meet -- observed that minimal or no organisational co-ordination is required for the cross-border spread of ideas, concepts, strategies, and tactics between the radical right actors. Instead, they need hegemonic ideologies to find a common cause despite their different contexts and concerns (Abrahamsen et al. 2024).

In this global context of emerging transnational alliances between radical right actors and parties, this thesis will research an understudied transnational alliance between European populist radical right and Indian populist radical right. In the past decade, two European populist radical right parties -- Germany's Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) and France's Rassemblement National (RN), which is also referred to as National Rally -- have formed an alliance with India's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is arguably the most significant populist radical right party outside Europe (Leidig & Mudde, 2023). This research aims to investigate how the alliance between the Eurosceptic populist radical right parties AfD and National Rally, and Indian populist radical right BJP, has shaped over the past decade when India-led by the BJP has been officially making visible efforts to strengthen strategic relationship with the European Union.

Research Question:

In this research, the main question is: Why are the two European populist radical right parties – Germany's AfD and France's National Rally- forming an alliance with India's ruling populist radical right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and how has the relationship evolved over the past decade?

The following guiding questions will be answered to seek an answer to the overarching question:

- i) What are structures, strategies and tactics used by the European populist radical right and India's populist radical right in building the alliance?
- ii) What are the common rhetorics used to build this alliance?
- iii) What are two sets of populist radical right parties gaining in this alliance?

Empirical evidence will be collected from 2019 to 2025 to answer these questions. The time frame has been selected because the empirical evidence shows that 2019 was the first time when a delegation of 27 members of European Parliament (MEPs) consisting of mostly representatives of populist radical right parties including the AfD and National Rally visited India, and 22 members of the delegation visited the disputed region of Kashmir under Indian administration (Leidig, 2020). They engaged with several representatives of the BJP including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in full public view (DW, 2019). The delegation was invited by a controversial non-governmental organisation, Srivastava Group, which was connected to the BJP, and was later found to be part of a disinformation network by an investigation conducted by Belgian non-governmental organisation EU Disinformation Lab

(Alaphilippe et al., 2020). This research is considering the 2019 visit by the delegation of 22 MEPs to Kashmir significant because UN special rapporteurs, journalists and Indian opposition members of parliament were denied access to the region for several months following the revocation of the special status of Kashmir by scrapping Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in August 2019 but the MEP delegation visited Kashmir in October 2019 (Ward, 2020). This revocation aimed to address the alleged 'Pakistan-sponsored' terrorism in Kashmir, Indian home minister and BJP politician Amit Shah claimed (Singh, 2025). But these MEPs backed Modi for his decision to abolish the Article to stop Islamist terrorism allegedly sponsored by Pakistan in Kashmir (Ward, 2020).

This thesis will collect the last empirical data from February 2025 because it was the last time [before the research began], when the European populist radical right parties visited India for another round of engagement with the BJP. They visited India upon the invitation of right-wing think tank India Foundation ahead of the European Commission Ms. Ursula von der Leyen's meeting with Modi on 27-28 February (European Commission, 2025).

Methodology

Since BJP's political ideology is inspired by Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, this research will study relevant literature analysing the history of Hindutva and the perpetuation of the ideology in BJP's politics in the past decade. Additionally, BJP's engagement with populist radical right parties in Europe while projecting India as 'vishwaguru' (global mentor) under Modi (Kugiel, 2024), will be studied.

The characteristics of the populist radical right and the far-right are overlapping. Different literature has referred to AfD, National Rally and the BJP in different terms -- populist radical right, far-right and extreme right. This research will stick to the terms cited in the literature while making references to the respective scholarly work, but it will refer to the three parties as populist radical right in its independent analysis. Journals and books on the ideology of the AfD and National Rally and the commonalities between these European populist radical right parties and the BJP will be explored as well. Since Islamist terrorism in Kashmir has been one of the issues discussed by the BJP with the European populist radical right parties, this research will extensively study India's strategy in relation to the portrayal of Kashmir conflict in front of the West. This research will examine literature that looks at BJP's assertion of India's sovereignty by calling Kashmir conflict 'internal' but also its efforts to garner international support for its Kashmir policy under the garb of countering Islamist terrorism allegedly

sponsored by Pakistan. This research will study BJP's disdain for any criticism on the deteriorating human rights standards in India by the Left-leaning members of the European parliament or international institutions including the United Nations and European Union.

In this qualitative research, empirical evidence will be collected from journals, news reports, social media posts on the visit of the MEPs to Kashmir in 2019 and the visit of the delegation representing Patriots of Europe Foundation – a think tank representing 16 political parties that are constituents of the newly formed European far-right parliamentary group, Patriots of Europe, to India in 2025 upon the invitation of right-wing think tank India Foundation (India Foundation, 2025). In this 2025 engagement that took place ahead of the European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen's meeting with Modi on 27-28 February 2025 in Delhi, there have been discussions on Islamist terrorism, sovereignty and India-European Union relations. This research will collect empirical evidence on the transnational alliance from other points of interactions between the two sets of populist radical right from 2019 to 2025.

Discourse analysis: The primary data will be collected by examining statements and news reports related to the 2019 visit of the European populist radical right delegation to India and Kashmir, a 2021 video message from Lars Patrick-Berg, a then AfD member of the European Parliament, that was posted on Facebook by an Indian diplomat deputed in Germany, and an 8:43 minute-long video consisting of vox-pops from the Patriots of Europe Foundation delegation visiting India in February 2025. The vox pops from the representatives of BJP and its ideological parent body Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) available in the video will be analysed too. This research will conduct discourse analysis of the spoken words in the videos by examining the terms used to construct meaning and social relationships in the context of 'alliance', 'Kashmir', 'Islamist terrorism', 'sovereignty' and 'European Union'. Open access posts in connection with this alliance on X and Facebook will be examined. Any engagement on social media between the two sets of populist radical right that has happened in German and French languages will be translated with the help of Google. This research, however, acknowledges that some disadvantages of machine translation (MT) include lower accuracy especially in relation to 'cultural context, idiom, sentences with metaphor' (Amna, 2022:1).

Significance

The findings of my research aim to alert the policymakers in Europe about India's ruling populist radical right BJP's dual strategy of strengthening partnership with the European Union officially on one hand and forming alliance with Eurosceptic populist radical right, on the other. Recognising the key elements and strategies of the alliance with the populist radical right will be essential for the policymakers to counter the impact of the alliance. Since the Hindu far-right has been forging alliance with the British far-right over the 'common hatred' against Muslims (Taher, 2025), it is important to monitor the linkages of Indian populist radical right with European populist radical right to ensure that peace and stability in Europe is not challenged by this alliance. This project will contribute to the larger sociopolitical debate on how anti-democratic forces are forging alliances to strengthen their network globally and challenge liberal world order to assert their dominance.

Chapter outline

The first two chapters will detail out the theoretical concepts and Hindutva ideology that will be used for analysing the empirical evidence. The third chapter will provide an analysis of BJP's dilemma in dealing with the West while the fourth will look at the European populist radical right parties and their commonalities with the BJP. Chapters five and six will analyse the empirical evidence.

The first chapter will set the foundation for this research by exploring the theories of populist radical right and postcolonial populism alongside transnational networking of the populist radical right, and Islamophobia. These theories will be used to analyse empirical evidence later in chapters five and six.

The second chapter will offer an introduction to the principles of Hinduism and Hindutva ideology. It will explain that the former is a religion while the latter is an extreme political ideology. This chapter will enter into the broader domain of resurgence of Hindutva identity in modern day India that have witnessed many riots and killings of minority Muslims by the Hindu nationalists. In this chapter, there will be detailed analysis of BJP's populist radical right ideology and nativism, its growing Islamophobia and its friction with India's liberal and secular democracy.

The third chapter will explore BJP's dual strategy in foreign policy. On one hand, BJP is making concerted efforts to globalise Modi's image by referring to India under Modi as 'vishwaguru' (global

mentor) by branding its ‘growth’ story, which, however, is contested by economists (Mody, 2023) while on the other hand, it is globalising its larger Hindutva project by forging alliances with the European populist radical right. This chapter will also delve deep into BJP’s assertion of India’s sovereignty by calling Kashmir conflict ‘internal’ but also garner international support for its Kashmir policy under the garb of countering Islamist terrorism allegedly sponsored by Pakistan.

The fourth chapter will look at the populist radical right parties in Europe, who have engaged with BJP over the past decade. This chapter will discuss at length about the way political scientists have defined these two parties – AfD and National Rally. Additionally, it will study their ideology of nativism, their hatred against Muslims, their support for sovereignty and opposition to European Union and liberal democracy. The last section of this chapter will briefly explain the commonalities between these European populist radical right parties and the BJP in terms of their ideology, strategy and conduct.

This research will look at the collected empirical evidence in relation to the interaction between the two sets of populist radical right parties from Global South and Global North in chapters five and six.

In chapter five, the empirical data will be provided on the conversations between the European populist radical right parties and India’s BJP over Kashmir, and Islamist terrorism. This chapter will demonstrate that the European populist radical right has positioned themselves in India’s Kashmir conflict and India’s fight against Islamist terrorism, and India is using this alliance with the European populist radical right parties to build an international pressure against Pakistan for allegedly ‘sponsoring’ terrorism in India.

In chapter six, empirical evidence will be provided to establish that the European populist radical right and the Indian populist radical right acknowledge that an alliance has been built between them. This chapter will demonstrate that the European radical right parties – AfD and National Rally -- and the BJP mutually valid their standpoints on opposing liberal global institutions including the European Union and prioritising their national sovereignty instead.

Conclusion

At a time when India is seen as a strategic partner of the West to counterbalance China, the country's ruling populist radical right BJP is branding its contested 'growth' story at the global stage to strengthen India's partnership with the European Union. But the BJP is not ready to accept any criticism from the European Union about India's deteriorating human rights situation under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As the BJP has formed an alliance with two European populist radical right parties, the AfD and National Rally, this research aims to demonstrate that these allies are validating India's growth story and criticising the European Union for 'lecturing' India on human rights. Although India has always maintained that Kashmir dispute is an 'internal' matter, this research will provide evidence that BJP has garnered support over its repressive Kashmir policy from the European populist radical right allies in the name of fighting Islamist terrorism allegedly sponsored by Pakistan. This research will provide empirical evidence to establish that the European populist radical right also gains support for their rhetoric on Islamist terrorism, anti-European narrative and sovereignty from India's ruling BJP.

But this research lacks the scope to decipher the implications of the alliance in respect to European Union-India policymaking. There is also an urgent need to understand how such a transnational alliance will impact the liberal world order.

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding the key concepts

To examine the alliance between the European populist radical right parties – Germany’s AfD and France’s National Rally -- and their common rhetorics, this research will rely heavily upon the following concepts: i) populism and populist radical right ii) postcolonial populism iii) transnational networking of the radical right and iv) Islamophobia.

i) Populism and populist radical right

Different literature has referred to AfD, National Rally and the BJP in different terms -- populist radical right, far-right and extreme right. This research will stick to the terms cited in the literature while making references to the respective scholarly work, but it will refer to the three parties as populist radical right in its independent analysis. Therefore, this chapter will look at these two concepts – populism and populist radical right to understand the ideological positions of these three populist radical right parties.

Müller (2016:11) defines populism as ‘the permanent shadowy effect of representative democracy’, rooted in a binary between ‘the pure people’ and ‘immoral’ others, such as elites or minorities. Mudde (2019: n.p.) calls populism a ‘thin centred’ ideology 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 ‘general will of the people’. According to Müller (2016:3), populism is in essence ‘anti-pluralistic’ and poses the ‘[true] danger for democracy’, and the populist leaders picture themselves as the sole legitimate symbolic and moral representatives of a homogeneous imaginary people (Müller, 2016: 6).

Since many scholars have identified a ‘populist surge’ (Fukuyama, 2018) and see the ‘populist mobilisation of anti-elitism and anti-globalism’ (Löffmann, 2022) as the driving force for the radical right behind this challenge to the liberal global order, this research will explore the concept of populist radical right.

Mudde (2007) devised the term ‘populist radical right’ for actors, who adhere to nativism, authoritarianism and use of populism. Of these three, nativism is the most important ideology. Mudde (2019: 22) explains, nativism ‘holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native (or alien) elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state’. The ultimate goal of the populist radical right is an ethnocracy – a democracy in which citizenship is based on ethnicity. It wants to (re) create this monocultural state by closing the borders to ‘immigrants’ and giving ‘aliens’ a choice between assimilation or repatriation. Those who are unwilling to assimilate, that is, become ‘native’, must be expelled to the country they (or their ancestors) came from. Mudde (2007:138) underlines that the populist radical right is not anti-democratic in a procedural sense, but the core tenets of its ideological stand is in fundamental tension with liberal democracy.

Populist radical right support is often linked to public anger toward elites, fears surrounding globalisation, resentment toward immigrants and threat from Muslims (Ammassari, 2023; Mudde, 2019). Populist movements are also seen as challenging liberal democratic norms such as pluralism and minority rights (Zulianello & Guasti, 2023). According to Ignazi (2003), Rydgren (2005) and von Beyme (1988), in the 1980s and 1990s, several fascist parties reframed their viewpoints into a more moderate and modern packaging in terms of both economic policy and democracy and reoriented their ideologies towards populism and ethnonationalism. The radical right distracts people from complex systemic relations in economy, society and politics by simplifying and personalising them. Reduction of complexity and simple explanations easily reach the minds of people (Wahl, 2019: 23). Additionally, the radical right ideologies ‘exculpate people’ from their possible own human weakness by accusing scapegoats for causing problems and turning anger, hate, and aggression towards them. The radical right also offers antidotes to all problems: the hope for a better life of the poor, robbed, exploited, native people by closing borders against immigrants, and protection against foreign companies and the

control by supranational institutions like the European Union. Furthermore, they promise law and order, a return to the ‘good old times’ with traditional families and values, the expulsion of a ruling corrupt elite and the resurrection of a proud nation (Wahl, 2019:24).

The European far-right strongly criticises the European Union since they feel that national identities are under threat, not only because of loss of national sovereignty but also due to European Union policies that ‘foster immigration and cultural pluralism an integration’ (Nissen, 2022:2). They oppose European Union institutions, their ethos and their role as main European decision-making polity (Nissen, 2022).

Theoretical expectations: These concepts will be placed mainly in chapters - three and four- where the politics and ideology of BJP, AfD and National Rally will be studied individually, and their commonalities will be explored as well.

ii) Postcolonial populism

Scholars note that like the far-left, the far-right populists express anti-European and anti-Western sentiments under the guise of anti-colonialism, and there is a rejection of all associated with Western values and multilateralism as inherently colonial (Fieschi, 2024).

According to Huju (2024:n.p), postcolonial populism reframes historical narratives of Western victimisation to legitimise authoritarian politics as decolonial resistance. In the contemporary Indian debate, Huju notes the seemingly most enthusiastic decolonisers often profess politics that run counter to the original moral foundations of decolonial scholarship. It portrays the ‘non-Western Self’ as a romanticised subaltern in need of liberation from Western ideals such as secularism and liberal democracy. This concept has guided the analysis of Modi’s efforts to construct a decolonised global image for India by projecting it to be the ‘vishwaguru’ or the global mentor (Kugiel, 2024: 68).

In India, Huju (2024:n.p.) explains that the ‘decolonial Hindutva’ blends nativist ideology with the language of anti-imperialism, once associated with the Left. It draws on resistance to British rule to promote a nationalist agenda targeting perceived enemies—ranging from Westernised dissident academics and journalists at home to ‘imperial’ global human rights bodies. Foreign criticism is framed as imperial interference into the sovereign affairs of ‘Bharat’¹, while domestic dissent is seen as

¹ Bharat is the Hindi name of India, mentioned in the Indian Constitution. Singh (2005:911) explains that the naming of India as Bharat reflected the power of the Hindutva-minded sections in the

evidence of ongoing mental colonisation. This narrative reframes the beginning of colonialism ‘not to the arrival of the British East India Company in the mid-18th century, but the advent of the Mughal courts in the 16th century, allowing Hindutva historiography to subsume anti-Muslim politics under the banner of decolonial nation building’ (Huju, 2024:n.p.). While exhibiting the postcolonial populism traits, the ‘Hindutva’ ideologues also undermine India’s secular Constitution as a relic of colonialism and insist that there is a need to restore the ‘Hindu to majoritarian greatness’ (Huju, 2024:n.p.). According to Huju (2024: n.p.), the decolonial ‘Hindutva’ starts with calls to decolonise the Indian mind but ultimately repositions Muslim citizens, as well as dissenting students, activists, and academics, as internal security risks—labeling them ‘anti-national’ or not truly Indian.

Theoretical expectations: Huju’s concept of postcolonial populism will be used in chapter six to explain why BJP-led Indian government has a disdain for the liberal blocks in the West that criticises the human rights violations under Modi regime.

iii) Transnational networking of radical right

According to Abrahamsen et al. (2024), the global radical right is not bound by a single ideology, theory, or goal, nor does it operate under centralised leadership. Instead, it unites diverse actors through counter-hegemonic ideologies that enable cooperation across different contexts. These groups form transnational alliances based on shared opposition to the global liberal elite, despite geographical variations. They want to contest the cultural hegemony of the liberal elite, and they are against the liberal global order in questions of race, gender, human rights and welfare. They have the objective of global sociological, ideological and political framing, a political economy with capitalism and class at its centre, and a strategic direction. This transnational alliance of the radical right is being formed in more traditional intellectual battlefields of academic publishing, universities and policy think tanks. They mobilise around Islam or immigration, targeting different groups such as minorities or left-wing adversaries, and employing a range of strategies — from discourse to action, and from non-violent to violent methods.

In the contemporary period, since the 2000s, the populist radical right jointly defends a society that ‘transcends the nation-state (for example, the focus of ‘native’ Europeans)’ (Zuquete, 2015:81). This

Constituent Assembly who wanted the name to reflect the ancient pre-British and pre-Muslim era of a 'glorious' Hindu past.

native 'us' refers to culturally and ethnically homogenous European civilisation, whose culture is perceived as, threatened by, especially, the Muslim 'other' (Hirsch-Hoefler & Mudde, 2013).

Additionally, the global networking of populist radical right happens on social media and shaped by commonalities such as authoritarian legacies, youth subcultures, xenophobia, political disaffection, and anti-European Union sentiment (Koopmans et al., 2005; Bjørgo, 1995; Rydgren, 2005; Mudde, 2007). Framed as 'globalised antiglobalists' (Grumke, 2013), these actors use platforms like X to mobilise and amplify messages (Caiani & Kröll, 2014), making real-world influence (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). This research will analyse how the European populist radical right from Global North–Indian radical right from Global South interact both offline and online over Islamist terrorism, the anti-European Union standpoint and national sovereignty.

Theoretical expectations: This concept will be used in chapters five and six to examine the alliance between the European populist radical right and the BJP, which is forged over Islamist terrorism, sovereignty and shared opposition to the European Union, despite their geographical variations.

Islamophobia

Berntzen (2019) explains that the populist radical right has taken an anti-Islamic turn in the last two decades, involving two processes: i) the pre-existing far-right actors have re-oriented their attention towards Islam, and ii) the rise of new initiatives and mobilisations (particularly at the extra-parliamentary level) has led to an expansion of the entire scene. Hafez (2014:496) argues that 'Islamophobia has become a cornerstone for building pan-European right-wing party'. Presently, one can observe 'an emergent anti-Muslim Europeanism' (Denes, 2012:289), which aims to 'assure the survival of a wider, cross-border, trans-state community (Zúquete, 2015:81)

According to scholars, Islamophobia is a 'discourse which facilitates the construction of Muslims as carriers of negative and dangerous traits due to their affiliation with Islam, which, in turn, causes their othering and discrimination' (Kozaric, 2024:909). Kozaric (2024: 909) further explains that Islamophobic discourse makes 'certain identity traits' the 'signifiers' of negatively laden characteristics and Runnymede Trust (1997) argues that Islamophobia has ties to violence.

In the European context, Islamophobia constructs Muslims as the other, portraying their culture as incompatible with Western values to justify disciplinary policies (Sayyid, 2018). Rooted in colonialism

(Meer & Modood, 2019), contemporary Islamophobia also intersects with Hindu nationalist ideologies and colonial race constructs (Wilson, 2024).

Sayyid (2014: 15) argues that there are several ‘manifestations of Islamophobia through attacks on persons perceived to be Muslims’. Giving out details of such manifestations, Sayyid (2014:15) adds that these attacks including shouting abuse, pushing, pulling hijab of women or even murder, can be committed by random individuals or groups but ‘what is common to all these incidents is that they target Muslims, the violence is unprovoked and that they occur in public settings such as the street or the park’. He further adds that Islamophobic manifestations include ‘attacks on property considered to be linked to Muslims: mosques, cemeteries, business premises’ by a number of persons ‘acting in concert to intimidate a population that is perceived to be Muslim or friendly to Muslims’. Sayyid notes that any ‘form of intimidation’ including ‘marches through areas with large Muslim populations’ is a manifestation of Islamophobia as well. While explaining the thought process behind Islamophobia, Sayyid (2014: 19) argues that the hatred or hostility towards Muslims is neither ‘necessarily emotional’ or ‘religious’ or ‘cultural’ but ‘rather political’.

It will be demonstrated in chapters on Hindutva and BJP that Islamophobic hate is one of the basic tenets of Hindutva agenda (Bhatt & Mukta, 2000; Jaffrelot, 2019). Additionally, this concept will be used to articulate the Islamophobic sentiment that the two European populist far-right parties -the AfD and National Rally have exhibited.

Theoretical expectations: The concept of Islamophobia will be placed in chapter three to analyse violence against Muslims by Hindu nationalists backed by the BJP. It will also be used in chapter four to analyse the Islamophobia manifested by both the AfD and National Rally, which frame Muslims negatively.

Conclusion

Populism is viewed as a thin-centred, anti-pluralist ideology opposing elites and minorities, promoting a binary of ‘pure people’ versus ‘corrupt elites’. The populist radical right combines nativism and authoritarianism, posing significant ideological challenges to liberal democratic norms and institutions. The populist radical right in former colonies adopt anti-western and anti-European Union rhetoric as decolonial resistance and reframe colonial histories to justify authoritarianism. In India, ‘decolonial Hindutva’ merges nativism with anti-imperialism, targeting dissenters and Muslims while rejecting secularism as colonial, and thereby legitimising majoritarian nationalism under the guise of

decolonialism. In the current global context, the populist radical right forms transnational alliances through shared opposition to liberal elites, despite having geographical variations. While mobilising online and offline, they unite around anti-globalist, anti-Muslim, and anti-European Union sentiments, promoting ethnonationalism and contesting liberal hegemony globally. Propagating Islamophobia, which means spreading hatred or hostility towards Muslims, is common among populist radical right parties, and the Islamophobia is neither ‘necessarily emotional’ or ‘religious’ or ‘cultural’ but ‘rather political’.

CHAPTER TWO

Hinduism Vs Hindutva

India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a Hindu-dominated party, and its ideology is based on Hindutva. This chapter will explain that there is a clear distinction between Hinduism- the religion- and Hindutva- the political ideology. Additionally, this chapter will look at BJP's populist radical right ideology including nativism, Islamophobia and its friction with India's liberal democracy enshrined in the constitution.

Hinduism – the religion of tolerance

Hindu philosopher Swami Vivekananda called Hinduism the 'religion of tolerance and pluralism' and acknowledged that 'all other religions possess a kernel of truth' (Baier, 2019:238). Analysing the teachings of Vivekananda, the pioneer of Hindu missionary activities in the West, scholars note that Hinduism is about 'the recognition and acceptance of difference', 'pluralism', and 'tolerance between diverse religious and cultural communities' (Huju, 2022: 434-435). Hindu spiritualist and leader of colonial India's non-violent movement Mahatma Gandhi seldom visited temples and alienated himself from the religious-minded Hindus (Lal, 2013) but he saw Hinduism as the most 'tolerant and liberal' religion and found the 'ethical and spiritual outlook of Hinduism' impressive. Gandhi said that 'the chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that all life is one i.e. all life coming from one universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara' (Barua, 1998:3). Gandhi created communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims in colonial India and argued that there was a need for mutual respect, equal regard and tolerance among people of different religions (Barua, 1998).

But Hindu nationalism emerged in opposition to colonial India's pluralist, secular nationalism, and Hindu nationalists made use of religious signifiers to meet political ends (Bacchetta, 2000).

Hindutva – the political ideology

In 1922, Hindu nationalists coined the term Hindutva, in the wake of the Khilafat Movement (Niemeijer, 1972) - a pan-India movement spearheaded by two Muslim men in 1919 against the West's interventional threat to Ottoman caliph -- which was supported by Gandhi (Bhagavan, 2008). On the south-western Malabar coast in India, a group of Hindus belonging to the top socio-religious hierarchical caste system, who managed British-controlled properties, saw the Khilafat movement as a revolt by Muslim peasants working under them and therefore, they initiated the Hindutva movement (Bhagavan, 2008).

In *Essentials of Hindutva*, which was later published as 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?', Hindu nationalist ideologue and the architect of Hindutva Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1922) wrote that Hindutva is not a word but a history, and Hindutva is entwined with a sense of national belonging and devotion to motherland. Savarkar added that Hinduism is only a derivative, a part of Hindutva, and a Hindu means a person who respects this land (Savarkar, 1928). According to Savarkar, historical characters not only participated in ethical warfare against invaders, imperialists, and conquerors in India, but also became Hindus in acts of violence (Chaturvedi, 2022). Savarkar also observed that religion was not even the most important element of Hindu identity and Hindu identity was a combination of sacred territory, race and language (Jaffrelot, 2007), which Leidig (2020) argues was an idea that was influenced by western theories of nationalism. As per Savarkar's definition of Hindutva, a Hindu is an individual driven by the 'geographical-nativist, genealogical and religious factors', unequivocally ousting the Muslims and the Christians from this claim, and thus 'making them liable to be questioned on where their loyalties lie' (Singh & Parihar, 2024:140).

Tracing the history of Hindutva, Leidig and Mudde (2023:361-362) note that it emerged as a political ideology and anti-colonial resistance movement during the 19th century, and it was 'framed in contrast to the Muslim enemy as a "foreigner" and "invader".'

Hindu far-right's Hindutva ideology has been inspired by Nazism (Leidig, 2020). Following the framework of 'racial purity' that the Nazis introduced while striving for a pure 'Aryan' German race,

Hindutva, too, was conceptualised by the idea of Hindu superiority. In 1966, Golwalkar published a book alleging the 'purity' of Hindu blood. In the current context, Modi-led Indian government's Ministry of Culture is establishing a state-of-the-art genetic database to 'trace the purity of races in India' (Singh, 2024: n.p.).

Hindutva movement has received support from the neo-Nazi sympathisers. Savitri Devi, a French writer and neo-Nazi sympathiser, who passed away in 1982, spent time with the BJP's ideological parent body and Hindu paramilitary, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which was established by Hindu nationalist ideologue Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925 (Kausar, 2006:361), alongside other Hindutva organisations during the 1930s. She supported Hindutva beliefs, even asserting that Adolf Hitler was a reincarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu (Margaronis, 2017; Leidig, 2020).

Hindutva in modern India

In modern India, 'Hindutva' is promoted as the religio-political movement by BJP's ideological parent body and Hindu paramilitary, the RSS (Kausar, 2006:361), and its offshoot called Sangh Parivar --a family of Hindu nationalist organisations including the BJP, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) or The World Council of Hindus, Bajrang Dal, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Durga Vahini, Sewa Bharati, Sewa International, Sanatan Sanstha, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, among others (Hindutva Watch, n.d.). With six million members globally (Anderson, 2023), the RSS calls itself a discipline in terms of character-building while scholars have described it as a fascist movement (Jaffrelot, 1993). The prime objective of the RSS is to transform India into a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State) by 'imposing a narrow definition of upper caste Hindu religious and cultural practices on a society that has historically been intensely plural and diverse' (Kamat & Mathew, 2003: 8).

The symbol of Hindutva is the 'bhagwa dhvaj', which means a saffron pennant in Hindi (Roy, 2019: n.p.). Sen (2005:49) underlines that although Hinduism is an ancient religion, the Hindutva movement is 'relatively a new development' in Indian politics, and it has become a powerful force. Singh and Parihar (2024: 140) argue that 'Hindutva provides a political dimension to Hinduism' while Leidig (2020) sees Hindutva as an ideology that deploys both cultural and ethnonational sentiments to develop its political agenda. Scholars argue that the idea of Hindu nationalism as communalism is accommodated as a feature of a linear scale of moderate to radical nationalism, and the two come

together in the idea that communalism is ‘only form of nationalism (in which) a common religion... is imagined as the basis of group identity’ (Zavos, 2000:4). According to Huju (2022: 435), the basic difference between Hinduism and Hindutva is that the former ‘theoretically compatible with secularism and internationalism’ while the ‘latter rejecting them altogether’.

BJP- the populist radical right

The BJP has its origins in the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), founded in 1951 as the political wing of the RSS. The BJS promoted the idea of rebuilding India based on Hindu cultural values and emphasised the creation of a strong, unified nation. After independence, it was the only political party that openly championed Hindu nationalism and represented Hindu interests at a national level (Malik & Singh, 1992; Kamal, 1970). Despite its ideology, during the 1960s, the BJS formed coalitions with leftist and secular parties in various state governments (Baxter, 1969). By 1967, it had secured significant influence in the Hindi-speaking northern regions of India. Following the Emergency rule imposed by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, the BJS merged with the Janata Party coalition in 1977 (Hartmann, 1971). When ideological differences became prominent within the Janata Party, particularly over the participation of former BJS leaders in the RSS, the party split in 1980, resulting in the formation of the BJP. Although newly formed, the BJP retained the ideological stance of the BJS and continued to advocate for Hindu community interests (Bhambhari, 1992; Malik & Singh 1995; Jaffrelot, 2005).

Although BJP was primarily seen as a Hindu nationalist party, under Modi’s leadership since 2013, it has a clear populist dimension and being radicalised further to the right (Chatterjee, 2019; Ammassari et al., 2023). Leidig and Mudde (2023: 372) have dubbed BJP -- a party with more than 100 million members, several auxiliary organisations and both local and global branches-- as ‘the most extreme’ and ‘biggest and most powerful populist radical right party in the world’ for several decades. Scholars now consider BJP as the populist radical right because of the presence of all three PRR pillars: nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Ammassari, 2024; Chacko & Jayasuriya 2018; Chatterji et al. 2019; McDonnell & Cabrera 2019). BJP creates ingroup and outgroup --the ingroup is Hindus, who believe in making India the Hindu rashtra (state) while outgroup is primarily Muslims, considered as the ‘enemy’ (Leidig and Mudde, 2023:361-362). The populist radical right rank and file feel threatened in several ways by the presence of the outgroup -the Muslims- and developed the idea that their

ingroup was treated unfairly by other Indian political parties in comparison to them. These grievances worked as triggers that instilled or fuelled already existent ideological incentives in the form of nativist beliefs within the Hindu nationalists in India (Ammassari, 2024).

As Wahl (2019:24) writes that fear, hate and hope is the winning formula of the populist and extreme right, and these emotions are instigated with xenophobia, scapegoating and creating violence against ‘foreigners’, the BJP as populist radical right too has implemented this strategy. Anand (2011:15) contends that Hindutva ideology instills a sense of fear in the minds of Hindus by use of rhetorics that Muslims are the ‘invaders’, who created crimes of violence, plunder and rape of Hindus when they arrived in India and the Muslims will soon outpopulate the Hindus in India. Although hate speech and incitement have been instrumental in atrocity crimes that have occurred in India, even prior to its independence, they have been systematic, orchestrated and institutionalised under Modi (Jacob & Kanth, 2023). Rather than ‘denouncing this kind of hate rhetoric and diffusing interreligious tensions, Modi has cultivated an environment for such hate speech to flourish’ (Jacob & Kanth, 2023: 209 & 213). Simultaneously, Modi’s populist rhetoric has been illustrated by slogans like ‘acche din aane wale hain’ (good days are coming) or ‘vikas purush’ (man of development) (Mochahary & Nathan KK, 2024) created hope for a better future.

BJP’s nativism

The BJP’s ideology revolves around nativism, embodied in its vision of establishing a Hindu ethnostate. Although India’s current constitutional framework supports inclusivity, multiculturalism, and liberal democracy, the envisioned Hindu state is intended primarily for Hindus. Hindu nationalists include Sikhs within the broader Hindu social and cultural fabric, as Sikhism is seen as closely related to Hinduism, but Islam and Christianity are regarded as ‘foreign’ and ‘forces of disintegration’ (van der Veer, 1994: 656). This nativist perspective intertwines with ethnic nationalism, presenting Hinduism—and related traditions like Sikhism—as indigenous faiths rooted in India before the British colonial and Mughal rule (van der Veer, 1994).

At the core of the BJP’s nativism lies the ambition to reshape India from a secular, pluralistic democracy into a nativist Hindu ethnostate (Jaffrelot 2017). One of the most symbolic ways this is

enacted is through language. The BJP promotes the use of Hindi over English, favouring the term ‘Bharat²’ instead of ‘India’. BJP pursues textbook revisions to rewrite history—downplaying the contributions of the Mughal Empire while glorifying a pre-colonial Vedic golden age (Jaffrelot 2021; Visweswaran et al. 2009). Under Modi, any reference to Muslim contribution to India’s history in school textbooks is gradually deleted to legitimise a thoroughly skewed anti-Muslim version as the one that best captures India’s genealogy (Waikar, 2018).

A key nativist objective emphasised in the BJP manifestos in both 2014 and 2019 national elections was the construction of a temple revering Hindu God Ram in India’s Ayodhya at the site, where a 16th century mosque – Babri Masjid- stood tall till it was demolished by Hindu nationalists in 1992. The demolition of the mosque triggered communal riots killing 2,000 people, mostly Muslims (Vats, 2019), ‘polarisation of the society’ and intensification of the ‘animosity’ between a section of Hindus and Muslims (Bacchetta, 2000:258). The call for the construction of the temple has served as a ‘rallying cry for Hindu nationalists’ stirring up ‘sentiments of Hindu pride’ (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2024:1) for at least three and a half decades. The temple was eventually inaugurated by Modi in 2024 and widely celebrated by Hindu nationalists in India and abroad (Tatke, 2024).

BJP and Islamophobia

Leidig (2020:215) notes that following India’s independence, ‘Hindutva actors played a central role in the violence of nation-building and in creating a majoritarian identity’. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement was one of the prominent political movements in India that targeted Muslims, who comprise 14.2 per cent of the country’s 1.2 billion people (Kramer, 2021), and are the largest minority (Bacchetta, 2000:258)

The basic tenet of Hindutva is the portrayal of Muslims as invaders, ‘re-structuring India as a nation on the principles of Islamophobia, through the disenfranchisement of the Muslim other’ (Dutta, 2021: 4).

² Bharat is the Hindi name of India, mentioned in the Indian Constitution. Singh (2005:911) explains that the naming of India as Bharat reflected the power of the Hindutva-minded sections in the Constituent Assembly who wanted the name to reflect the ancient pre-British and pre-Muslim era of a ‘glorious’ Hindu past.

Hindu nationalists in India got a new lease of life when Modi became the country's Prime Minister in 2014 (Harris, 2012).

While 'the foot soldiers of the Hindutva lobby (the BJP–VHP–Bajrang Dal combine) went village to village, lane to lane in cities mouthing a slogan, 'Musalman ke do sthaan, Pakistan ya qabrastan (Muslims have only two places, Pakistan or cemetery)' during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the Hindutva foot soldiers now lynch and kill Muslims in street violence for allegedly trading in cattle and eating beef (on the argument that cows are sacred to Hindus) and for allegedly converting Hindu women to Islam through marriage prompted by coercion or deceit. According to Human Rights Watch (2019), 44 people were lynched to death for trading cows and for eating beef between 2015-2019, of which 78 per cent were Muslims. There has been 'systematic discrimination and stigmatisation of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims' and the 'BJP supporters increasingly committed violent attacks against targeted groups and the government's Hindu majoritarian ideology was reflected in bias in institutions, including the justice system and constitutional authorities like the National Human Rights Commission (Hassan, 2023: n.p.).

Hindutva actors argue that Muslims are conspiring to outgrow the Hindu population, and rule Hindu-majority 'Bharat' as their ancestors did centuries ago (Jakobsen & Nielsen, 2021; Varshney, 2019: 75). Additionally, BJP's Islamophobia has exhibited in many forms including 'intimidation' through 'marches' carried out by Hindu nationalists backed by the BJP in areas dominated by Muslim populations alongside demolishing their houses on the allegations of owing illegal properties and mob violence to stop Friday prayers and demolishing mosques (Jakobsen and Nielsen, 2021; Ullah Khan, 2025; n.p.; Iyer, 2022). This kind of hatred or hostility towards Muslims is neither 'necessarily emotional' or 'religious' or 'cultural' but 'rather political' as it is defined in the concept of Islamophobia by Sayyid (2014:19).

Despite such large number of killings, Modi never made a statement condemning them. Roy (2019: 17) notes that 'lynchers and others accused in hate crimes, including mass murder, have been rewarded with public office and honoured by ministers in Modi's cabinet' and Modi, who have been usually 'garrulous on Twitter, generous with condolences and birthday greetings, goes very quiet each time a person is lynched'.

In 2024 national elections, BJP leaders including Modi made several inflammatory statements on the campaign trail. One such comment made by Modi was that ‘if the opposition Congress Party wins, it will redistribute wealth among so-called ‘infiltrators’ and communities that have more children. Although Modi denied it, that was an allusion to the country’s 200 million-strong Muslim population (Bajpae, 2024:n.p.).

As explained by Mudde (2019) about the characteristics of populist radical right party, BJP too holds nativist ideology that India should be inhabited exclusively by Hindus –as they are the native group of the country, and the Muslims are the non-native (or alien) elements, who are fundamentally threatening to BJP’s concept of homogeneous ‘Hindu rashtra’ (state). Following Mudde’s concept of the populist radical right, this research observes that BJP aspires for an ethnocracy – a democracy in which citizenship is based on ethnicity, in India’s case, Hindu ethnicity. BJP, who frames Muslims as ‘invaders’, and want them to either ‘assimilate’ like the way a Hindu supremacist wants or must be expelled to the country they (or their ancestors) came from.

BJP at odds with liberal democracy

India is constitutionally an inclusive, multicultural, liberal democracy. Following its independence in 1947 after the British colonial rule, many observers doubted whether democracy could endure in India, given its immense diversity, multiple languages, deep religious divisions, widespread illiteracy, pervasive poverty, and a largely rural population (Guha, 2007). The subcontinent’s partition created two nation-states: a Muslim-majority Pakistan and a Hindu-majority India. While Pakistan adopted an Islamic framework, India embraced a distinct form of secularism. Indian secularism institutionalised multiculturalism as a foundational democratic principle (Jaffrelot, 2011). This constitutional commitment to pluralism has been widely regarded as a key factor in the resilience of Indian democracy amid profound social cleavages (Bolsover, 2022; Lijphart, 1996).

While the BJP has long advanced the notion that the Congress Party and other so-called secular parties in India have engaged in pseudo-secularism and they have cynically engaged in ‘religious pandering’—especially in regard to India’s Muslims—to shore up their political base (Vaishnav, 2019:15), the Modi-regime has challenged the tenets of India’s secular and liberal democracy since it took power in 2014. Scholars note that India’s democracy has been in steep decline under Modi, and this descent is striking as opposed to the other sizable emerging market democracies (Ganguly et al.,2024). Others argue that

India's democracy has already 'eroded to the point where the system can no longer be classified as democratic' (Baba, 2024: n.p.).

Civil society has reported that human rights activists and non-governmental organisations frequently face repression by state authorities, with a growing pattern of harassment, arbitrary detention, and acts of violence directed against them (Calléja, 2020). Tripathi (2023: 61) notes that India has a 'parliament where the opposition is powerless', it has a judiciary, but its courts 'delay judgments on crucial issues, making them pointless, or cast them aside as if they were irrelevant'. Tripathi adds that India has a media – not state-owned – which is now 'eager to demonstrate how nationalistic and patriotic it is and to curry favour with the ruling party'.

In India, journalists, who question violence by Hindu nationalist vigilante and holding public institutions accountable, have faced threats, detention, arrests, abuse and torture by authorities (Siddiqui, 2017). According to Huju (2024:n.p.), the decolonial 'Hindutva' starts with calls to decolonise the Indian mind but ultimately repositions Muslim citizens, as well as dissenting students, activists, and academics, as internal security risks—labeling them 'anti-national' or not truly Indian.

Despite Modi calling India 'mother of democracy' and using this rhetoric as a buffer against western criticism of India under his rule (Venkataramakrishnan, 2023), India has been sliding in international democracy marking. In 2023, Sweden's V-Dem Institute called India an electoral autocracy, citing declining democratic standards, particularly restrictions on freedom of expression. Additionally, India's secular identity has been challenged due to increasing pressure on minority rights and growing concerns over religious discrimination. According to the World Press Freedom Index, India ranks 151 out of 180 countries amid claims of growing 'violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership'. Freedom House has also dropped its ranking from 'Free' to 'Partly Free' amid a deterioration in internet freedom (Bajpae, 2023). UN Secretary-General António Guterres has stated that India's voice on the 'global stage' can only 'gain authority and credibility from a strong commitment to inclusivity and respect for human rights also at home' (Cavanaugh, 2023:n.p.).

Under Modi's leadership, the country has seemingly turned away from its foundational ideals of inclusion and equality, prioritising narrow Hindu nationalist interests instead. India's shift toward 'ascriptive nationalism'—which defines national belonging through fixed social identities—has played a key role in weakening its democratic fabric (Tudor, 2024:84). According to Tudor (2024), Hindu

nationalism has become both the prevailing national narrative and the driving force behind modern Indian politics. On the global stage, New Delhi seldom uses democracy promotion as an overt instrument of its foreign policy. Like many other democratic nations, India often prioritises practical interests over ideological principles in its international relations (Bajpae, 2024).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that India's BJP is rooted in Hindutva, a political ideology that is distinct from Hinduism, the religion. While Hinduism, as described by thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, promotes tolerance, pluralism, and universalism, Hindutva advances a rigid, nationalist agenda. This ideology evolved in opposition to India's secular and pluralistic nationalism and was inspired by European fascist movement - Nazism. BJP's populist radical right ideology stands heavily on nativism, which is manifested in its attempt to make India a Hindu state. In this strategy to build the exclusive Hindu state, it disenfranchises the largest minority, Muslims, by calling them 'invaders' and 'enemy' and fuels Islamophobia, communal violence, and discriminatory practices against Muslims. The party also undermines liberal democratic institutions, curbs dissent and redefines history and national identity along the majoritarian lines.

In the next chapter, there will be a detailed examination of BJP's strategy to globalise the Hindutva project and project India as 'vishwaguru' (global mentor) by promoting the contested story of India's 'growth' (Mody, 2023) and challenging western criticism on India's human rights violations.

CHAPTER THREE

BJP's dilemma with the West

Violence against religious minorities, threats and detention of activists and journalists in India continue under Modi, who has been labelled as both 'uncouth' and 'bigoted' by scholars (Tripathi, 2023: 61). But the BJP projects Modi as a strongman. Scholars, however, note that Modi has risen to power because he made the privileged majority – Hindus – falsely believe that they were persecuted, and he has presented himself as their 'saviour' (Tripathi, 2023:61). But promoting Modi's global image is equally important for the BJP. It projects Modi to be a visionary, who is 'improving India's standing on the world stage as a great power and making a revolutionary change' (Mannathukkaren & MacEachern, 2023: 2370).

BJP's diplomacy dilemma

BJP started propagating the narrative of Modi being a strong and effective leader especially for an international audience since the national elections in 2014, when he proclaimed that his 'Hindutva face' would be 'an asset when dealing with foreign affairs with other nations' (de Estrada, 2019: 257). The 2014 election manifesto of the BJP 'clearly carried his personal stamp', proclaiming a determination to 'fundamentally reboot and reorient the foreign policy goals, content and process', in a manner that locates 'India's global strategic engagement in a new paradigm' (Basrur, 2017: 7). Some scholars argue that the Modi's rise to power can and should be understood within the broader global trend of the emergence of 'strong men' leaders, who promote hyper-nationalist agendas, such as Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Recep Erdogan, and Donald Trump (Miller & de Estrada, 2017:5).

Modi engaged in ‘religious diplomacy’ by visiting religious sites during his foreign trips, and by gifting Hindu religious book, *Bhagavad Gita*, to global heads of state (Hall, 2019: 89). A sum of US\$ 30.40m has been spent on the overseas trips of Modi, who is projected as ‘the torch-bearer of the nation’s pride globally’ (Hall, 2019: 89) between 2018-2023 (Dasgupta, 2023). At the same time, Modi and BJP have shaped a ‘populist nationalist discourse’ by using the foreign policy as a site for asserting itself as the ‘true representative of the people and reimagining India as a Hindu nation’ (Wojczewski, 2020).

While the BJP has managed to evoke mass adulation for Modi and placing him at the highest pedestal of power at home (Varshney et al., 2021), Modi has successfully branded himself as a pro-market reformer on the global stage (Leidig & Mudde, 2023: 360-361). Modi has also continued to pursue a ‘strategy of building social capital for upward mobility by networking bilaterally and multilaterally to gain prominent standing for India in keeping with its self-image as a major player in international politics’ (Basrur, 2017:24).

Khan & Köllner (2018) observe that ever since Modi assumed office as India’s prime minister in 2014, foreign policymaking in the country has experienced notable transformation. While the West is increasingly considering India’s geopolitical positioning significant to counter China, India under Modi portraying itself as ‘vishwaguru (global mentor)’, who can reform the world (Kugiel, 2024).

The BJP advocates for a forceful and assertive foreign policy, grounded in India’s civilisational identity. To date, this approach has mostly been symbolic and rhetorical—for example, calling India ‘Bharat’ and describing the nation as a ‘vishwaguru’ (‘world teacher’) and ‘Vishwamitra’ (‘friend to the world’) (Bajpae, 2024:n.p.). While the BJP’s economic policy has been grounded in wealth creation through accelerating growth and attracting foreign investment, it is focusing on ‘branding and beautification’ exercise of its growth story (Bajpae, 2024; Mody, 2023). Economists have already contested India’s growth story because it is laden with ‘discrepancies’ that hide the growing inequalities and acute job scarcity (Mody, 2023).

In India, there has also been a concerted attempt to merge nationalism signifying the rise of India as a ‘global economic superpower’ and Hindutva signifying the rise of the social ideology of the dominant community as representative of the “culture” of India’ (Chakrabarti, 2020:523). BJP has artfully constructed a false narrative of India’s economic growth under Modi (Linganna, 2023; Mody, 2023), inviting foreign investment from the west. The G20 presidency in 2023 allowed ‘Modi to present India

as a player worthy of a seat at the top table – able to catalyse and contribute to the biggest debates of ‘climate, war and global trade’ (Control Risks, 2023: n.p.).

While the BJP has been seeking to build up strategic relationship with the European Union – which has been critical of India’s rampant human rights violations – it also started forming alliances with the global radical right via conferences, think-tanks and non-governmental organisations. This research will establish this argument with empirical evidence in chapters five and six.

BJP’s dual Kashmir agenda for the West

While Modi projected India’s contested growth story at the global stage, he has also stressed that India’s foreign policy is significantly shaped by the concepts of sovereignty and strategic autonomy, which enables it to make independent decisions, especially in foreign relations, which are free from external influences (Bhaduria, 2025). Kashmir has always remained a core sovereign issue for India (Kaura, 2025), given its historical and political background.

Kashmir – a Muslim-dominated triangularly contested region between India, Pakistan and China, is administratively divided between India and Pakistan. The dispute over Kashmir has sparked three major wars and countless small-scale military actions between India and Pakistan regarding the contest over the region (Aryal & Muneer, 2023). This research is referring to only Indian-administered Kashmir, where Indian government has systematically suppressed the movement of Kashmiris for ‘self-determination’ with militarisation. Kashmir Valley is the most militarised zone in the world (Kanjwal, 2019; Rai, 2019; Kaul, 2020). India often refers to Kashmir as its ‘crown’, and the ‘head’ of ‘Mother India’ and any advocacy for Kashmiri self-determination is perceived as a horrifying threat akin to ‘beheading Mother India’ (Kaul, 2020: n.p.). This fixation on Kashmir is primarily territorial, as reflected in extreme right-wing extremist slogans like ‘we will die or kill but not give up an inch of Kashmir’ (Kaul, 2020: n.p.).

India has always considered the Kashmir dispute as ‘internal’ (Bhan & Duschinski, 2023: 140). In 1948, a year after India’s independence, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) intervened in the Kashmir dispute and advocated conducting a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the people of Jammu

and Kashmir. The Security Council neither upheld India's view of the tribesmen's ingress into Jammu and Kashmir as an 'act of aggression' by Pakistan nor made references to the Instrument of Accession, the basis of Indian claim to Jammu and Kashmir (Ganie & Lone, 2023:32).

Kaul (2013:72) notes that Kashmir remains 'central to India's imagination of its identity', and it is 'widely viewed through its geopolitical framing as an area of "strategic" significance and as an arena for contesting Pakistan's ambitions to destabilise India'. But Kaul (2013:72) adds that Kashmiris are, thus, at the 'receiving end of a governmentality (in the Foucaultian sense) that is sustained through a biopolitics of power structures that function through coercion and suppression'.

India has manifested the exercise of sovereignty over territory in Kashmir by 'overwhelming militarisation and use of force against human bodies, which is backed up by continually extended regimes of legal impunity'. Over time, this has 'required manufacturing the consent of Indian population through carefully maintained blind spots in Indian public discourse on the matter of political motivations, massacres, sexual violence, torture, enforced disappearances, and numerous everyday humiliations' (Kaul, 2020: n.p.).

For Hindu nationalists, Rai (2019: n.p.) argues, Kashmiri Muslims serve as 'contrapuntal symbols – of terrorist violence, illegitimate religious impulses, [and] sedition- for contriving a mythical Hindu nation'. In his several speeches, Modi has invoked the threat of terrorism especially on the issue of Kashmir separatism. For Modi, the youth of Kashmir engaged in separatist activities are 'misguided', who have been assaulting their holy land and 'they needed to be reintegrated into the family of the nation or motherland' (Dutta & Abbas, 2025). Kaul (2020: n.p.) contends that while 'Islamophobia in India works to enable violence, subjugate, and intimidate Muslims as a threat to the nation, in several different registers — Indian Muslims as suspect citizens; Kashmiri Muslims as emphatically problematic always already terrorist Muslims'.

On 5 August 2019, Modi-led Indian government unilaterally changed the legal status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, 'undermining its own constitutional process and completely annexing a territory that remains disputed in the international arena'. It also argued that this move would curb what it deems 'terrorism', a long-standing movement for political self-determination in Kashmir (Kanjwal, 2019:

253). The statehood of Jammu and Kashmir – of which Kashmir was part of – was revoked, and the two were bifurcated into union territories.

Dismantling constitutionally protected autonomy and statehood is described as a ‘constitutional coup’ by scholars, which was carried out without any consultation with, or approval from, Kashmiris in any form (Kaul, 2021: 116). Just before this decisive moment, tens of thousands of additional troops were sent into the already highly militarised Kashmir from India, while tourists and pilgrims were instructed to evacuate (Kaul, 2021).

All channels of communication including telephones and internet were suspended. All educational institutions were shut down, and a military crackdown was launched with random arrest of ‘suspected’ ordinary civilians. People were prevented from visiting prominent mosques for Friday prayers and separatist leaders were under arrest. It was Modi’s first major assault on the freedom of Kashmiri people, and their demand for ‘Azadi’ (freedom) (Sarkar, 2019; Duschinski et al., 2023).

Several international human rights organisations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International criticised the arbitrary arrest of lawyers, shop owners, traders, students, rights activists for criticising Indian government’s move in August 2019 (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Amnesty International, 2024). Both the UK Parliament and the European Parliament debated the ‘deteriorating human rights situation’ in Kashmir (European Parliament, 2019).

In the Indian public sphere, however, Islamophobia has enabled the dehumanisation of Kashmiri Muslims. Using the ‘rhetoric of the War on Terror, Kashmiris who demand freedom are depicted as “Islamist radicals,” and “terrorist sympathisers”’ (Kanjwal, 2019: 261).

But BJP thinkers insist that ‘Kashmir is not a diplomatic sideshow, and it is a core sovereign issue for India—a matter embedded in history, culture, blood, and emotion’ (Kaura, 2025: n.p.). Bajpae (2024: n.p.) notes that ‘New Delhi’s firm adherence to principles of non-interference and sovereignty means that its democracy promotion tends to be pursued more subtly, subsumed under broader development initiatives’. Therefore, it rejects foreign criticism as imperial interference in India’s sovereignty, while local dissent is seen as proof of a colonised mindset. This approach is defined as postcolonial populism

by Huju as it ‘functions on the assumption that there is an uncontaminated pre-coloniality in which to take refuge’.

Despite calling Kashmir an ‘internal’ matter, ironically, the BJP under Modi has been garnering foreign support for the Kashmir issue, this research argues.

As Kashmiris endured hardship under a communications blackout and Indian opposition leaders were barred from entering the region after the revocation of Article 370 in 2019, the BJP invited a group of radical right European MEPs on a tour of the Kashmir through a controversial non-governmental organisation, which Kaul (2021) sees as a calculated act of humiliation serving the agenda of Indian colonial dominance in Kashmir. Chapters five and six will provide a detailed account of the Kashmir visit by the European MEPs while examining the transnational alliance between the European populist radical right and the BJP over Kashmir and Islamist terrorism. At the time of writing this thesis, in May 2025, when India and Pakistan had a four-day-long military escalation following a terrorist attack in Kashmir that killed 26 men, mostly Hindus, Indian government sought support internationally over its military offensive against Pakistan in the name of its war on terrorism (Masih, 2025). Seven separate delegations visited 32 countries, including the European Union headquarters in Belgium (The Hindu Bureau, 2025). This thesis lacks the scope of analysing this event though.

Role of think tanks in BJP’s foreign policy

In the past decade, as foreign policy decision-making became centralised under Modi, there has been an emergence of new foreign policy think tanks. According to Köllner (2018), the expansion of these think tanks has largely fallen into two categories: those aligned with Indian businesses or foreign institutions, typically advocating a liberal internationalist perspective, and those ideologically or personally linked to the ruling BJP, which have played a role in promoting nationalist foreign policy discourses. The latter’s influence is closely tied to their proximity to the current government and its political agenda.

According to 2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (McGann, 2020), India (612) stands third in the number of think tanks after the United States (2,203) and China (1,413). India’s recent think tank expansion mirrors earlier growth in Europe and the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s. Foreign policy think tanks in India have grown significantly, moving beyond their former image as marginal political

actors. While think tank rankings must be approached cautiously due to methodological issues (Köllner 2013), the relatively high placement of several Indian institutions suggests increasing international visibility and influence in global policy discourse (Khan & Köllner, 2018).

While India's rising global profile has further heightened corporate engagement, particularly through the funding of think tanks, the Modi government's proactive stance toward selective think tanks has eased access to policy circles. Modi's 2014 endorsement of think tanks as valuable sources of expertise marked their formal recognition in policymaking processes (Khan & Köllner, 2018; PIB, 2014).

Conclusion

Under Modi's leadership, India has witnessed continued violence against minorities, suppression of dissent, and media restrictions. Yet, BJP portrays Modi as a visionary strongman, who is advancing India's global image through the story of its 'growth'. Modi's image-building involves populist symbolism, and the branding of nationalist foreign policy, and Indian right-wing think tanks play a significant role in promoting the nationalist foreign policy. Modi-led government uses religious diplomacy and national pride, especially around Kashmir, to assert sovereignty and counter Pakistan-sponsored Islamist terrorism in Kashmir. BJP has justified the abrogation of Article 370 and revocation of Kashmir's special status through nationalist and anti-terror narratives, but scholars see it as a constitutional coup that intensified repression in Kashmir. Although Kashmir conflict is projected as an 'internal' matter by India for decades, and the BJP too insists that Kashmir is the core sovereign issue of India, it has been garnering international support over its Kashmir policy in the name of countering Islamist terrorism. One of the ways of garnering support from the West is by forging alliance with the populist radical right in Europe, who were invited to visit Kashmir after its special status was revoked. The details of the visit will be examined in chapter five while analysing the empirical evidence that aims to explore the alliance between the two European populist radical right parties, the AfD and National Rally, and India's BJP.

Before analysing the empirics, the next chapter will provide a detailed account of the ideology, strategy and conduct of the two European populist radical right parties and their commonalities with the BJP.

CHAPTER FOUR

The European populist radical right

In recent years, populist radical right parties have significantly influenced political agendas across Europe. A central tenet of their discourse is the assertion that they alone authentically represent ‘the people’ and offer the sole legitimate alternative to established political and economic elites. These elites are consistently portrayed as corrupt and self-interested actors, who deprive ordinary citizens of what is rightfully theirs—be it economic prosperity or cultural identity (Albertazzi et al., 2025:17; Mudde, 2007; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In contemporary Europe, there is a trend of increased support towards radical right-wing-populist parties in Western liberal democracies. This chapter will primarily focus on the advent of the Europe’s populist radical right AfD and France’s National Rally and their similarities with India’s BJP.

The radical right in Germany

Owing to its history with National Socialism (NS), right-wing parties have long been perceived primarily as successors to National Socialists and were not regarded as legitimate or mainstream political organisations. Certain far-right elements began reorganising shortly after World War II by forming parties such as the German Reich Party (Deutsche Reichspartei, DRP) and the German Party (Deutsche Partei, DP) in West Germany. In the first post-war general elections in 1949, these far-right groups secured only five seats in West Germany. Over the following decades, extreme right-wing parties failed to establish lasting representation in the national parliament (Bundestag) and remained largely on the fringes of German national politics. The most prominent among them was the National Democratic Party of Germany, which achieved electoral success in several German states during the

1960s with a platform marked by nationalism, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, extremism, and elements of anti-capitalism, along with open opposition to the democratic system. Other far-right groups, such as the Republicans in the 1980s and 1990s, and the German People's Union, which saw success in the 1990s, also emerged. Following German reunification in 1990, far-right parties found renewed support in certain states in former East Germany, where radical right-wing activities had previously been banned (Wahl, 2019).

The rise of the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD)

In the 2010s, the right-wing populist party Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), initially founded by Eurosceptic economists, emerged as a new political force. It began by campaigning against efforts to save the Euro and criticising multiculturalism and gender mainstreaming. In the 2013 general elections, just months after its formation, AfD secured 4.7 per cent of the vote—falling just short of the 5 per cent threshold required to enter the national parliament—but succeeded in gaining seats in several German state parliaments and the European Parliament. Despite experiencing internal splits, the dominant faction within the party shifted further toward a radical right-wing stance, focusing on Islamophobia and anti-immigration rhetoric. By the 2017 general elections, the AfD had significantly increased its support, winning 12.6 per cent of the national vote and entering the Bundestag. (Wahl, 2019: 183–184). In the 2021 general elections, AfD moved from being the third largest party in the Bundestag to its fifth largest party, down 2.3 per cent from 2017, consequently losing 11 seats. But it should not be seen as the complete failure for the party because one in 10 German voters in 2021 supported the party, and in Saxony -in south-east of Germany-- the AfD established itself as the state's largest party (Hansen & Olsen, 2022). In a landmark win in general elections in February 2025, the party doubled its share of the vote—from 10.3 per cent in the 2021 parliamentary elections to 20.8 per cent. It has now become the second most powerful political force in Germany. In the eastern states, its support surpassed 30 per cent, nearing an outright majority in some districts (Conesa, 2025).

Some scholars have called AfD a 'radical right' party (Arzheimer, 2019), others have called it 'populist' 'anti- Europe', and nationalistic party with serious tendencies toward 'Nazism' (Klikauer, 2018:78, 95 & 83). In May 2025, Germany's domestic spy agency BfV called AfD an extremist organisation but later paused it following an injunction on this by the party (Rinke, 2025). Over the years, the AfD has evolved from being a Eurosceptic to a radical right-wing party (Berning, 2017)

AfD's nativism

Scholars note that AfD's electoral success reflects the mobilisation of 'deep-seated nativist sentiments' (Schulte-Cloos, 2022). The AfD has strong ties to radical-right parties across Europe, but it stands out as one of Europe's most populist and nativist movements. This likely accounts for its recent alignment with the Identity and Democracy group in the European Parliament. The party's rise can be attributed to its unique mix of populist anti-elitism—particularly focused on the perceived marginalisation and loss of status in eastern Germany—and its nativist fearmongering, both of which have helped cement its powerful position in German politics (Donovan, 2020). The AfD's anti-elite rhetoric is an extremely important element of the party's overall messaging and of its image. Moreover, its populism is not framed around economic issues, corruption, or even the European Union. Instead, it appears to orient itself around more basic people vs. elite framing, with the purported lack of representation and perceptions of betrayal taking center stage. Here, the AfD finds itself in the company of not just far-right parties, but also some other populist, radical-left and regional parties, which claim a similar narrative of disenfranchisement (Guia, 2019). The AfD advocates for sovereign nation-states and rejects both the European Union and the Euro as a common currency. It idealises a version of Germany's past that, from the party's perspective, is quickly deteriorating or facing existential threat (Khan, 2024).

By blending a volatile mix of populism and nativism—emphasising themes of 'eastern' marginalisation and status loss alongside the nativist narrative of 'we are losing our country to outsiders'—the AfD has tapped into deep-seated grievances. Judging by recent election results, the party shows no hesitation in fueling fear, resentment, and racism to advance its agenda (Donovan, 2020:71). The AfD also made a call to 'Dexit'—Germany's withdrawal from the European Union—which stems not only from a rejection of perceived threats to German sovereignty, but also from its nativist ideology, which strongly resists the idea of allocating billions in German taxpayer funds to support other, primarily Eastern and Southern European, nations (Diermeier, 2022).

AfD and Islamophobia

Nearly six percent of the population of Germany ---85 million -- the most populated country in Western Europe, is Muslim, predominantly of Turkish and Syrian origin (Deutsche Islam Konferenz, 2023). The AfD manifesto launched in 2016 states that ‘Islam does not belong to Germany’, and its expansion and the ever-increasing number of Muslims in the country are ‘danger to our state, our society, and our values’ (Khan, 2024:n.p.).

For AfD, Islamophobia is the new scapegoat. According to the AfD, mass influx of Muslims will bring people, who will ‘steal German jobs and German women’ and AfD’s new racism is the idea that ‘Islam should be Islamic and Germany should be German’ (Klikauer, 2018:85). At the core of the AfD’s platform, concerns about Islam are closely tied to anxieties over German identity. Owing to the lasting impact of the Holocaust, any overt link between race and German identity is publicly taboo, even though racial considerations still subtly influence identity politics in Germany. Therefore, the AfD has focused on Islam as the main marker to distinguish what it sees as traditional German identity from a changing, multicultural Germany (Khan, 2024:n.p.). AfD has been accused of inciting violence against a ‘certain section of society’ in reference to their anti-Muslim sentiment reflected on social media (Nasr, 2018).

Muslims are depicted as villains that pose a threat to Europe, while national and European cultures are presented as victims, threatened by Islamic practices, which are cast as irrational, dominant, and violence-prone. The AfD’s stereotypes of Muslims are also reflected in its election posters in which Muslims are ridiculed and shamed. Images of radicalised Muslims contribute to the AfD’s discourse that labels Muslims as invaders and oppressors and the party presents itself as a saviour of Western civilisation from the threat of Muslim migrants (Oztig, 2022; Doer 2021).

While studying AfD's Islamophobia, it is clear that AfD has constructed a 'discourse which facilitates the construction of Muslims as carriers of negative and dangerous traits due to their affiliation with Islam, which, in turn, causes their othering and discrimination' as explained by Kozaric (2024:909). AfD has constructed Muslims as the other, portraying their culture as incompatible with Western values (Sayyid, 2018).

AfD at odds with liberal democracy

Since their arrival in the Bundestag, the AfD has attempted to erode the quality of German democracy, historically and contemporarily considered as one of the strongest worldwide (Herz, 2025). While the rise of the AfD reflects a troubling shift in German politics, it nonetheless confirms that German democracy permits and responds to electoral accountability, as voters dissatisfied with the status quo were able to express their discontent through proper institutional methods. Although accountability may have remained intact within the German democracy, the rise of the AfD has raised questions about the rule of law (Dieter, 2009). German law has been explicitly intolerant to any denial of the Nazi government's persecution of the Jews during the Second World war, but AfD politicians have repeatedly used anti-semitic slogans and conspiracy theories (Kahn, 2022). The 'AfD's reshaping of history, including Holocaust denial, is one of its many dangerous tools used in an attempt to erode the rule of law' (Herz, 2025: n.p.).

This pro-Nazi outlook of the AfD, however, has led to loss of allies in the larger European political playing field.

The National Rally narrative

The AfD and France's Rassemblement National (RN) or the National Rally, were allies, and were part of the European Parliament's Identity & Democracy (ID) political group since 2019 (Karásková, 2024). The two were together even when they visited India, and Kashmir, as part of the MEP delegation. In 2024, however, the National Rally stated that it would no longer work alongside the AfD in the European Parliament, following a comment by AfD's lead candidate in the European Union election, Maximilian Krah, that a member of the Nazi SS paramilitary force cannot automatically become a

criminal. According to the National Rally, the AfD trivialised the Nazi era and its accompanying atrocities (DW, 2024).

France's National Rally – which was formerly known as the National Front -- is called a far-right, a traditional extreme-right wing, and populist radical right party, which focuses on ethnocultural nationalism and propagates that the national identity is facing threat from Islam (Balent, 2015; Zhwang & Tang, 2024). National Rally is a Eurosceptic party – the beacon of illiberal democracy and role model for Western parties that used to be labelled 'extreme right' (Camus, 2022). Founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party first gained electoral traction in the 1980s. His daughter, Marine Le Pen, took over leadership in 2011 and initiated a process of "dédiabolisation," aiming to soften the party's image by shifting from an extreme-right platform to a more populist-right stance to enhance its governing potential. Critics, however, argue that this rebranding has been more cosmetic than ideological. The National Rally has broadened its support base to include women, workers, the petite bourgeoisie, and younger voters. Its core messages remain focused on opposing immigration, Islam, and the Euro, portraying immigrants as responsible for issues like crime, unemployment, and threats to French ethnonational identity (Wahl, 2019: 184).

National Rally's nativism

"Will France remain France?" was a question that Marie Le Pen asked potential supporters in 2021 or be 'brushed aside by the massive uncontrolled torrent of immigration flows that will wipe out our culture, our values, our way of life?' (Mc Adams, 2024:39). Mc Adams note that a more consequential step taken up by Le Pen was to link this challenge to French identity with a theme that resonates well with a majority of French citizens: the purported threat of Islamism. Le Pen comes across as a hardline, law and order politician, who promises, in the words of her party's program, to prohibit 'the exhibition and diffusion of Islamist ideology' and impose harsh penalties on offenders (Mc Adams, 2024:39). Mudde (2007:41) notes that initially, National Rally (erstwhile Front National) was nothing more than 'confederation of extreme and radical right groupuscules'. As a populist radical right, National Rally holds three fundamental set of values nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 2019). Rydgren (2005) observes that the rise of the National Rally initiated a process of cross-national diffusion across Western Europe, where other parties adopted and adapted its messaging to suit their

own national contexts. In Europe, non-natives for the populist radical right tend to be immigrants, especially in recent decades those from Muslim countries (Ammassari et al., 2021).

National Rally and Islamophobia

The ethno-nationalist rhetoric is used by the National Rally to highlight the dangers that its former president Marie Le Pen believes Muslim terrorists pose to French national identity. She portrays Muslim terrorists as ‘rootless wanderers capable of causing irreparable damage to France’, which allows her to present herself as a defender of the French homeland through populist rhetoric. In this way, Le Pen’s narrative fuels fear of hidden terrorists within the French Muslim and immigrant communities, which constitutes the Muslim terrorist—and by extension, all Muslims— framing Muslim terrorists—and, by implication, all Muslims—as significant dangers to national security and cultural cohesion. As a result, she characterises French national identity as fundamentally at odds with Islam in any form (Seitz, 2024:59). The party has called for banning the headscarf in public spaces, and its parliamentarians including Mathilde Androuët – who visited India in 2025 as part of the Patriots of Europe Foundation-- presented the headscarf as a symbol of female oppression (Guerin & Fourel, 2021). There is already a manifestation of their anti-Muslim sentiment on social media as they state there is an alleged ‘islamisation’ of French society (Guerin & Fourel, 2021: n.p.).

The National Rally tried to reform its image as a guardian of secular democracy by referring to protection of *laïcité*, a traditional French concept of secularism whose roots date back to the French revolution. Despite reaching a broader public by speaking about secularism, Islamophobia now occurs behind a cosmetic reframing. Le Pen thus explicitly speaks of defence of *laïcité*, and protection against Islamist terrorism. Simultaneously, the use of contextual cues and ambiguous framing subtly fosters hostility toward an entire group of people—targeting their identity, symbols, culture, and religion. References to Islam are consistently accompanied by exclusionary language such as expelling, closing, forbidding, banning, rejecting, and fighting (Maksic & Ahmic, 2020:10).

National Rally’s portrayal of Muslims as ‘terrorists’ and ‘significant dangers’ to national security and cultural cohesion fits well into Kozaic’s definition of Islamophobia. Kozaic (2024: 909) explains that Islamophobia ‘facilitates the construction of Muslims as carriers of negative and dangerous traits due to their affiliation with Islam, which, in turn, causes their othering and discrimination’ and how

Islamophobic discourse makes ‘certain identity traits’ the ‘signifiers of negatively laden characteristics’.

National Rally at odds with liberal democracy

Although National Rally has been making effort to promote itself as the guardian of secular democracy, its radicalism has come into conflict with the ‘core principles of liberal democracy’ (Maksic & Ahmic, 2020:6). The illiberal force, though not yet as potent or organised as the opposite extreme, has been strengthened at the National Rally’s expense. While populist radical right parties are in friction with the tenets of democracy, they also project themselves as saviour of democracy. Any restriction of their act would be labelled as ‘denial of democracy’ as Marie Le Pen stated when she was found guilty of misappropriating European Union funds and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment and five years of ineligibility for public office in 2025 (Ataman et al., 2025). But democracy defenders call the conviction of Marine Le Pen is ‘undeniable progress for our democracy’ (Rouban, 2025:n.p.).

Politics of fear, hate and hope by AfD and National Rally

As Wahl (2019:24) writes that fear, hate and hope is the winning formula of the populist and extreme right, both AfD and National Rally have demonstrated it in their politics.

Political sociologists argue that the AfD is intentionally fueling public anxiety to advance its political agenda, without proposing genuine solutions to Germany’s challenges. The party heightens social unrest by spreading fear and hostility, particularly by scapegoating immigrants for issues like the housing shortage and rising rental costs (Bohmann, 2025). Initially established as a Eurosceptic and radical free-market protest party (Backes, 2018), the AfD has evolved into a nationalist far-right party with connections to extremist violence and terrorism (AfD Watch Hamburg, 2019). Since the influx of refugees from Syria and North Africa in 2015, the AfD has increasingly pushed a hardline, racist, and anti-immigration agenda, and alongside other far-right groups, the party has worked to shift public discourse in ways that normalise racist narratives (Quent, 2019).

When AfD members face criticism for making racist remarks, they often respond by accusing the media and broader society of authoritarianism and of suppressing free speech—portraying themselves

as victims to legitimise their discriminatory rhetoric (Kuebler & Schopper, 2021). The AfD also crafts a forward-looking narrative rooted in fear and resentment. Driven by anxiety about the future, the party positions itself as a vehicle of nostalgic revival—it provides a hope to return to the good old days -- offering a vision of returning to an idealised past marked by nationalism, traditional family structure within a clearly ordered homogeneity. This imagined future is reserved exclusively for ethnic Germans, excluding others from its vision of belonging. By presenting a hopeful vision for the future, it becomes possible to build majority support for ideas that may initially face resistance. Many voters view the willingness to actively shape the future as a vital quality (Korte, 2023).

In France, although the National Rally won 41.45 per cent of the votes in the 2022-presidential election, it has been accused of inciting racial hatred and violence. At a rally in 2025, National Rally handed over flyers that featured an ‘image of a bloodied knife’ alongside the call for action – ‘French people, fight back’. One line read: ‘French people, today the foreigners come into our arms to slit the throats of your sons and wives’ (RFI, 2025: n.p.). National Rally started making a departure from simple and clean posters of the 1970s and 1980s with political ads that are more vivid and extreme, using sharp slogans to provoke fear and anxiety, in the 1990s onwards. This shift aimed to stir negative emotions—particularly toward immigration—as a strategic move to attract more voters and increase support (Tranberg, 2023). People, who vote for the National Rally in elections, are believed to be those who lament that France used to be one of the biggest countries in the world and have lost their colonial empire, and they have a sense of decadency, longing for the past (Camus, 2024:n.p.). Like other populist radical right parties, National Rally promises to bring back the past as party president Jordan Bardella in an election rally in 2024 stated that he promised to ‘restore faith in France and its greatness’ (Chrisafis, 2024).

Commonalities between the European populist radical right and Indian radical right

After discussing the relevant literature, this research has identified some similarities between the European populist radical right and India’s populist radical right under the themes –encouraging extremism through rhetoric, promoting identity politics, scapegoating Muslims and propagating nationalist promises and traditional values.

Encouraging extremism through rhetoric: Both the AfD and National Rally have contributed to legitimising extremist behaviour in Europe. Their rhetoric has emboldened radicalised youth and violent elements to translate hateful political speech into real-world violence (Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, 2024). Similarly, India's BJP, through its promotion of Hindutva, has inspired fringe groups and vigilantes to act against minorities, especially Muslims, in the name of protecting national and religious identity. The weaponisation of hate speech across all three parties has led to an increase in hate-driven violent actions by their respective supporters in their respective countries.

Promoting identity politics: The AfD and National Rally have crafted nationalist mythologies rooted in cultural nostalgia and ethnic purity, drawing sharp distinctions between native citizens and perceived outsiders. These narratives serve to build a collective identity that excludes minorities such as Muslims and legitimises ethno-religious nationalism. Likewise, BJP's Hindutva, as noted by Anand (2011) and others, draws on a constructed historical narrative that portrays Islam and Muslims as eternal enemies of Hindu India.

Scapegoating Muslims: According to Wahl (2019), the populist radical right simplifies societal issues by creating scapegoats—immigrants, Muslims, or elites—to redirect public frustration. The AfD and National Rally frame migrants and minorities as threats to national stability. This aligns closely with how 'Hindutva plays a game of fear with many strands—Islam by its very nature is fundamentalist ... the history of Muslim rule in India is nothing but a catalogue of crimes of violence, plunder and rape of Hindus' (Anand, 2011:15). All the three populist radical right parties use scapegoating to deflect attention from deeper systemic issues and mobilise public anger. They construct Muslims as carriers of negative and dangerous traits due to their affiliation with Islam.

Propagating nationalist promises and traditional values: Wahl (2019) highlights that European radical right offer protectionist policies, traditional family values, and a return to national greatness, often by opposing globalisation and supranational bodies like the European Union. Similarly, BJP's promise of restoring 'achhe din' (good days) reflects their politics of nostalgic nationalism, presenting itself as a defender of national identity and traditional morals in the face of foreign influence and liberal modernity.

Conclusion

Founded by Eurosceptics in 2013, the AfD began as a protest party but soon adopted radical right positions, particularly Islamophobia and anti-immigration rhetoric. Despite internal splits, it grew electorally by entering the Bundestag in 2017 and becoming Germany's second strongest force by 2025. France's National Rally, formerly the National Front, is a populist radical right party promoting ethnocultural nationalism and warning of Islam's threat to French identity. Despite efforts to rebrand, it remains anti-immigrant, Islamophobic and Eurosceptic. The core tenets of the ideology of the AfD and National Rally stand in fundamental tension with liberal democracy. The political ideology, strategy and conduct of the AfD and National Rally are similar to that of the BJP in terms of encouraging extremism through rhetoric, promoting identity politics, scapegoating Muslims and propagating nationalist promises and traditional values.

The next two chapters will examine the empirical evidence on this transnational alliance between European populist radical right and the Indian populist radical right

CHAPTER FIVE

Empirical evidence -I

The empirical data has been collected from the conversations between the European populist radical right parties including Germany's AfD and France's National Rally and India's ruling BJP over Islamist terrorism in Kashmir, the anti-European Union standpoint and national sovereignty. This research has conducted digital ethnography by studying posts and videos on social media platforms -- X [formerly Twitter], and Facebook, statements and media interviews by politicians of the three populist radical right parties between 2019 and 2025 during their interactions regarding these topics. This time frame has been selected because the empirical evidence shows that 2019 was the first time when representatives of some of the populist radical right parties from Europe including the AfD and National Rally visited India and engaged with the BJP, and February 2025 was the last time [before this research began] when the European populist radical right parties visited India for another round of engagement with the BJP ahead of the European Commission Ms. Ursula von der Leyen's meeting with Modi on 27-28 February (European Commission, 2025).

The empirical data collected from the period –from 2019 to 2015- has been analysed under three themes –Islamist terrorism, sovereignty and anti-European Union narrative - in two different chapters. The fifth chapter will look at alliance over Islamist terrorism and the sixth chapter will look at the alliance over sovereignty and anti-European Union narrative together under one head. While analysing the empirical data, this research aims to solve the puzzle - why are the two European populist radical right parties – Germany's AfD and France's National Rally- forming an alliance with India's ruling populist radical right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and how has the relationship evolved over the past decade?

This research has conducted discourse analysis of the spoken words in the videos by examining the terms used to construct meaning and social relationships in the context of ‘alliance’, ‘Kashmir’, ‘Islamist terrorism’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘European Union’. Open access posts in connection with this alliance on X and Facebook have been examined. Any engagement on social media between the two sets of populist radical right that has happened in German and French languages have been translated with the help of Google. This research, however, acknowledges that there are some disadvantages of machine translation (MT). Some of them include lower accuracy especially in relation to ‘cultural context, idiom, sentences with metaphor’ (Amna, 2022:1).

In this chapter, the interactions between the AfD and National Rally, and BJP over Kashmir and Islamist terrorism have been analysed. This chapter has examined the Islamophobic undertone in these conversations between the two sets of populist radical right –one from Global North and the other from Global South. The four theoretical concepts discussed in chapter one –populism and populist radical right, postcolonial populism, transnational networking of the radical right and Islamophobia has been used as a tool for analysis.

Alliance over Islamist terrorism

Two former MEPs representing the AfD --Lars Patrick-Berg and Nicolaus Fest – were part of the 27-member member of the European Parliament (MEP) delegation, which went to India. Berg was serving in the European parliament from 2019 to 2024 and represented AfD till 2021 before joining Alliance Germany in 2022. Fest was the MEP representing AfD between 2019 and 2024. Fest was expelled from the AfD in 2024 for failing to pay his dues to the party. During the 2019 trip to India, Fest visited Kashmir along with 23 other MEPs (Sundarji, 2019; BBC, 2019).

BJP invited the delegation of mostly representatives of European populist radical right parties including the AfD and National Rally to visit Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, when opposition politicians and foreign journalists were barred from entering Kashmir (Ward, 2020). This was a strategy to show the world that the abrogation did not disrupt the life in Kashmir, and everything was normal (Sundarji, 2019) while a section of Indian independent media and foreign media reported that there was a military crackdown soon after the abrogation (Sarkar, 2019). This researcher, who is also an Indian independent journalist by profession, went to Kashmir in August 2019, and reported the

military crackdown on civilians in Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 (Sarkar, 2019). As discussed in chapter three, after the abrogation of Article 370, all channels of communication including telephones and internet were suspended. All educational institutions were shut down, and a military crackdown was launched with random arrest of ‘suspected’ ordinary civilians. People were prevented from visiting prominent mosques for Friday prayers and separatist leaders were under arrest (Sarkar, 2019; Duschinski et al., 2023). Scholars label the abrogation as anti-Muslim since Kashmir is a Muslim-majority region (Kaul, 2020). Kaul (2020: n.p.) calls it a collective punishment for Kashmiri Muslims by denying them access to necessary means of life and livelihood.

During the visit to Kashmir, in an interview to a nationalistic Indian website, *Sunday Guardian*, Fest, however, supported the abolition of Article 370 by the BJP-led Indian government and parroted BJP’s narrative that this policy decision will end terrorism in Kashmir backed by Pakistan (Ward, 2020; Duschinski et al., 2023). Indian Minister of Home Affairs had claimed that Article 370 sowed the seeds of ‘terrorism’ (Singh, 2025: n.p.). In the interview to *Sunday Guardian*, Fest stated that ‘If Germany had a Kashmir-like situation, it wouldn’t have acted differently’ (Mishra, 2019: n.p.).

Although Lars Patrick-Berg did not visit Kashmir during the 2019 trip to India, he mentioned Kashmir in the European Parliament.

On 28 April 2021, speaking at a debate in the European parliament, the AfD politician Lars Patrick-Berg said:

‘...India is the world's largest democracy and an important trading partner for Europe. It is therefore crucial that we do everything in our power to harmonize [sic] our relations with this country and fully exploit its potential. We must also recognize [sic] that, as a nuclear power in an unstable region—the Kashmir conflict being one example—India is an indispensable partner in security and defense matters.’ (European Parliament, 2021).

Although this statement does not explicitly support India’s Kashmir policy or the abrogation of Article 370, it indirectly refers to the ‘unstable’ nature of Kashmir and he speaks in favour of India as ‘security and defence’ partner.

The visit of the MEP delegation to Kashmir, and the statements by AfD MEP Nicolaus Fest in favour of the abrogation of Article 370, and mention of ‘unstable’ nature of Kashmir by Lars Patrick-Berg demonstrate that the BJP has managed to garner international support for Kashmir. This is in contrast to India’s traditional foreign policy standpoint in which Kashmir was referred to as ‘internal’ (Bhan & Duschinski, 2023: 140).

At the time of writing this thesis, BJP-led Indian government made another attempt to take Kashmir to the global stage after it launched a military offensive against Pakistan following an attack by Pakistan-based terrorist group The Resistance Front in Kashmir on 22 April 2025 (Zehra, 2025). After the terrorist attack, India on 7 May had launched a military offensive titled ‘Operation Sindoor’ against Pakistan (Sarkar, 2025). Seven all-party parliamentary delegations were sent by the BJP-led Indian government across 32 countries to meet officials including members of the United Nations Security Council and the European Union, to convey India’s message of zero tolerance against terrorism (The Hindu Bureau, 2025). BJP called the visit ‘very productive’ and highlighted the strong support India received on the global stage against terrorism (ANI, 2025).

But this research will focus only on the empirical data collected before the military offensive. This research notes that the narrative of Indian government on disputed area of Kashmir is being propagated by the populist radical right European MEPs. After the abrogation of Article 370, the European Parliament debated the ‘deteriorating human rights situation’ in Kashmir (European Parliament, 2019: n.p.), and later, in 2025, the European Parliament expressed concern about the situation in Kashmir, particularly in respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Kashmiri people (European Parliament, 2025). But the European populist radical right parties AfD and National Rally delegitimise the Kashmiri movement by calling the Kashmiri resistance as an outcome of ‘Islamic terrorism’ as framed by the BJP (Gupta, 2023:254). These European populist radical right parties find a commonality with Modi’s Hindutva narrative on Kashmir as discussed in chapter three since they too are Islamophobic as the BJP (Al Jazeera, 2019) and they find a remarkable resonance with their narrative on Islamic terrorism, which they consider to be the biggest threat to the sovereignty of the European countries (Wood & Finlay 2010; Hutchins & Halikiopoulou, 2020).

French politician Thierry Mariani, who has been serving as a member of the European Parliament representing National Rally since 2019, has remained consistent in his party’s interactions with the BJP.

Mariani was part of the 27 -member delegation of MEPs, who visited India in 2019 and later Kashmir during the same trip, and he was also part of the Patriots of Europe Foundation delegation, which visited India in 2025. The engagement in 2025 will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

After meeting Modi during the 2019 trip, Mariani posted on X:

‘India is proud of its accomplishment! We had a fruitful meeting today with @pmoindia @narendramodi. Wishing him the very best for his future endeavours’ (Mariani, 2019).

This research has further studied his defense for Modi through his tweets. To analyse his tweets, this research provides a brief background of the non-governmental organisation that sponsored the trip of MEP-delegation to Kashmir. In 2020, an 80-page investigative report by Belgian non-governmental organisation EU Disinformation Lab revealed that a disinformation network was run by a New Delhi-based entity Srivastava Group, which ‘resurrected dead NGOs’ at the UN, impersonated the European Union and laundered content produced by fake media to real media, and reached millions in South Asia and across the world primarily to undermine Pakistan internationally. The report stated that the same Srivastava Group organised the trip for the delegation of 27 MEPs to India in 2019 (Alaphilippe, Adamczyk & Antoine Grégoire, 2020). A pro-BJP news agency, ANI (Donthi, 2019) which was part of this disinformation network, presented the Kashmir trip of MEPs as an ‘official delegation’ from the European Parliament, which was not the case (Sénécat, 2020).

In 2020, when a French journalist sought explanations from Mariani about his Indian trip being organised by the Srivastava Group, he did not respond (Sénécat, 2020). When Mariani was tagged by the journalist on X, he complained about being contacted at the last minute but he insisted that ‘as a parliamentarian’, he is ‘perfectly happy to support #Inde and #Modi against #Pakistan and its policy favouring Islamists’ (Mariani, 2020).

In other times too, Mariani has made references to ‘Islamists’ in relation to Pakistan.

In 2019, after 40 Indian soldiers allegedly killed by a Pakistan-based Islamist terrorist group, Jaish-e-Mohammad, in Kashmir’s Pulwama, four MEPs - Thierry Mariani, Julie Lechanteux, Virginie Joron, and France Jamet – representing the National Rally urged the President of European Commission,

Ursula von der Leyen, to immediately consider sanctions on Pakistan and seek an investigation into its involvement in other similar attacks of terrorism in Europe (Sarkar, 2019).

On January 2, 2021, while tagging a 2020 report headlined – ‘Pakistan: Hundreds of Muslims set fire to Hindu temple’ (Actuelles, 2020), Mariani on X posted:

‘Those who spend their time being indignant about the policy of #Modi in #Inde , should especially look at the situation of #Pakistan where religious freedom is daily called into question by the #islamistes in general indifference’.

On 17 January 2024, Mariani called India a ‘major player in the multipolar world’. He praised Modi for establishing India as an ‘essential interlocutor for our future’ and called for strengthening their ‘partnership and support’ India’s fight against #islamisme #Cachemire’ (Mariani, 2024)³.

In response to this tweet, an account named @PreciousRing_ responded with this tweet:

‘Thank you, Mr. Mariani, for denouncing the attacks of many MEPs against India, for highlighting the real reasons for the problems in J&Kashmir through Pakistani networks’ (TheOneRing, 2024). There is no bio of this account, but it repeatedly retweets posts that propagate Hindutva content generated from Indian accounts. But this lone tweet does not establish any mass support for the alliance online.

Since the populist discourse of the National Rally carries references to Muslims as an ‘Islamist’ threat to French people (van Djik, 2024:16), Mariani creates anti-Muslim sentiment through his statements in reference to Kashmir and Pakistan. National Rally’s building up of anti-Muslim narrative is similar to that of the BJP, which demonstrates that Islamophobia is ‘transnational glue of the far right, bringing together extremely heterogeneous organisations operating in different political systems’ (Froio & Ganesh, 2018). The ‘depiction of Muslims as villains and European culture and society as victims’ gives the European populist radical right parties an ‘opportunity to create a “hero” character for themselves’. The ‘right-wing, populist parties have increasingly positioned themselves against Muslims and Islam to the point of becoming anti-Islam parties’ (Oztig, 2023:225). A similar narrative has been

³ In French, Islamism is called ‘Islamisme’.

created by BJP, which call Muslims ‘invaders’, ‘foreigners’ and ‘enemies’ (Leidig, 2020: 215; Golwalkar, 1966).

As existing literature argue that there is no unitary ideology of the radical right but rather strategic political positions on attitudes based on various ideologies already extant in society, especially racism (including xenophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia and nationalism (together usually called nativism’). This ideologically based attitude did not develop new and original ideas of the radical right but it comes in the form of a backlash that is a reaction to the growing acceptance of ideologically based liberal attitudes (Norris & Inglehart, 2018; van Dijk, 2024: 7).

The empirical evidence demonstrate that European populist radical right is connected over their positioning on Islamist terrorism with the populist radical right in India. Although the empirical evidence does not demonstrate any explicit hate speech against Muslims, referring to terrorism as ‘Islamist’ itself reinforces that their narrative on terrorism has an undertone of Islamophobia. This narrative of Islamist terrorism with undertone of Islamophobia has been already demonstrated by the two European populist radical right parties, the AfD and National Rally, during their transnational networking with the radical right within Europe as well (Zuquete, 2015; Hafez, 2014). Froio & Ganesh (2018: 513) note that a transnational far right discourse is built around ‘interpretative frames of Islamophobia’ and ‘nativist interpretations of economic program’.

Building global consensus on its policy on Kashmir under the garb of combating Islamist terrorism (Masih, 2025) allegedly sponsored by Pakistan is a strategy of the BJP to reiterate its support and participation in the West’s ‘global war on terror’, which was initiated in response to the 9/11 attacks (Toros et al., 2025). In 2001, when Indian government was led by BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), India had shown exemplary support towards it (The White House, 2001). Ironically though, India is critical of the West’s criticism of human rights standards by calling itself a victim of colonialism, but India has supported West’s war on terror – which is an ‘imperial project that draws upon, renovates and perpetuates ideology from earlier colonialism’ (Vieten & Poynting, 2022:64-65). Islamophobia in India under BJP is part of the global Islamophobia that was manifested in both Global North and Global South after the global war on terror was announced (Chak, 2022; Jakobsen & Nielsen, 2021). The empirical evidence has proved what scholars like Berntzen (2019) argued that the populist radical right has taken an anti-Islamic turn in the last two decades and Froio & Ganesh (2018:

513) observed that the transnational far right discourse is built around 'interpretative frames of Islamophobia'. This chapter underlines that while radical right alliances at the international level are legitimised through state diplomatic efforts by elected representatives, the alliances are characterised by 'a trend of weaponising Islamophobia' (Leidig, 2020:n.p.)

Conclusion

While conducting digital ethnography to examine interactions between European populist radical right parties--France's National Rally and Germany's AfD--and India's BJP between 2019 and 2025, focusing on Kashmir conflict and Islamist terrorism, this chapter establishes that they have formed a transnational alliance over these issues. Despite calling the Kashmir dispute 'internal' for decades, BJP has gained validation and support from the AfD and National Rally over its repressive Kashmir policy in the name of countering 'Islamist terrorism' allegedly sponsored by Pakistan. The European Parliament debated the deteriorating human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Kashmiri people, but these two European populist radical right parties have positioned themselves in alignment with BJP's narrative that the abrogation of Article 370 was important to end Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir. India is using these European populist radical right allies to build an international pressure against Pakistan for allegedly sponsoring Islamist terrorism in Kashmir. As BJP gains western legitimacy from the European populist radical right for its Kashmir policy in the name of countering Islamist terrorism, the European populist radical right also finds it appropriate to reinforce its anti-Islam standpoint indirectly by supporting BJP's policy on Kashmir under the guise of co-operating with India in its fight against Islamist terrorism.

CHAPTER SIX

Empirical Evidence -II

In this chapter, this thesis will focus on another set of empirical evidence that demonstrates the transnational alliance between the European populist radical right parties – AfD and National Rally- and the BJP -- over their common standpoint on the European Union and national sovereignty.

Alliance over sovereignty and anti-European Union narrative

While India has grown rapidly to become the world's fifth-largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity and projected to become the world's third-largest by 2030, it is keen to play a larger global role and engages constructively with a diverse range of partners including the European Union (Chandrasekar, 2025). The European Union too recognises that there is a need to develop the strategic partnership with India (European Parliament, 2025).

But the European Union also looks at India beyond its much-celebrated 'growth' story, which, however, is contested by economists (Mody, 2023). The European Parliament has condemned 'acts of violence, increasing nationalistic rhetoric and divisive policies and [called] on leaders to cease making inflammatory statements in order to resolve social conflicts'. Several members of the European Parliament have expressed serious concern about 'laws that discriminate on grounds of religion, and they encouraged India to guarantee freedom of religion'. In 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution denouncing 'in the strongest terms nationalistic rhetoric deployed by leading members of the BJP' in relation to the violent clashes between the Meitei and Kuki ethnic communities in India's north-eastern state Manipur that killed more than 258 people dead, displaced 50 000 people and destroyed

over 1,700 houses, over 250 churches and several temples and schools. It also called on federal and Manipur state authorities-led by the BJP to allow unhindered humanitarian aid to those affected and independent monitors to carry out investigations. It asked the political leaders to stop making inflammatory statements to re-establish trust among people (European Parliament, 2023; European Parliament, 2025:10; Amnesty International, 2025). But BJP-led Indian government condemned the European Parliament resolution on the ethnic clashes in Manipur state, calling it an 'interference' in its internal affairs (BBC, 2023: n.p.).

While the BJP wants the West to recognise India's 'growth' story under Modi, it disdains any 'interference' from the West in the matter of human rights violations either in Manipur or Kashmir. It, however, sees the Eurosceptic populist radical right in the West as its ally. This empirical evidence demonstrates that Germany's AfD is one such ally of the BJP, which urged the Germany's federal government to focus on trade agreement with India and not look at India through the lens of human rights. The AfD parliamentary group in 2024 called on the German federal government to take India's foreign policy conception 'as a model' and to strive for a 'comprehensive German-Indian partnership' (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024: n.p.). It also sought the federal government to 'work for the rapid conclusion of the EU-India Free Trade and Investment Protection Agreement without "excessive environmental and human rights standards" in order to "increase investment in the world's largest single market and diversify German economic relations"' (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024: n.p.).

In 2021, the Left-leaning members of the German parliament, however, had expressed its concerns over the human rights violations against the religious minorities including Christians and Muslims in India (Regi, 2021; Walkenhorst, n.d.). The German diplomatic missions and the European Union delegation in New Delhi had taken up issues with the Indian government on a case-to-case basis (Regi, 2021).

In the same year, Lars Patrick-Berg made public statement praising India's development under Modi. Patrick-Berg curated a special video message on India's 75th Independence Day, which was posted by a Germany-based Indian diplomat Mohit Yadav on his personal page on Facebook. The post received about 3.8K views. In the video, Patrick-Berg was seen speaking in favour of the bilateral trade worth 20 million Euros between India and Germany (Yadav, 2021). Additionally, he said that his region, Baden-Württemberg, is the driver of 'strong economic ties' with India as many of the German

companies operating from the area invested in India, and Indian companies including Tata and TCS invested in Baden-Württemberg (Yadav, 2021).

Although Patrick-Berg's message did not use the Hindi phrase 'AmritMahotsav' used by Indian government to celebrate '75 years of independence and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements' (Government of India, 2023), the Indian diplomat Mohit Yadav, who posted the video on his personal Facebook page (Yadav,2021) used the phrase 'Amrit Mahotsav' in his post while sharing Patrick-Berg's video.

'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' is a nationalistic phrase used by the BJP-led Indian government for peddling the grand narrative of national history and nation's achievements over the past 75 years (Kaur, 2022). As Huju (2022) has noted that India's diplomatic pedagogies, too, are acquiring hues of saffron –the colour of the Hindu nationalists -- tagging the phrase along with the Patrick-Berg's message by an Indian diplomat in German demonstrates the 'saffron' hues in diplomacy.

While economists highlighted the growing inequalities and acute job scarcity in India and contested India's 'growth' story, which is laden with 'discrepancies' (Mody, 2023), BJP has been using its propaganda machinery to tell the story of 'new India' (PIB, 2025) to India's strategic partners, and its populist radical right allies in Europe, as well. Ahead of the European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen's meeting with Modi in February 2025, one such initiative was taken via an Indian right-wing think tank India Foundation, which invited a five-member delegation of Patriots of Europe Foundation – a think tank formed by members representing the 16 political parties, which are constituents of the newly formed European far-right parliamentary group, Patriots of Europe (Soler, 2025).

India Foundation presents itself as independent, but its members and programmes closely align with that of the BJP's (Köllner, 2018). Scholars note that a transnational alliance between the radical right parties across the globe is enabled by diverse and un-coordinated, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and policy institutes. They provide legitimacy and acceptability for the radical right (Abrahamsen et al., 2024). India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has significantly blurred the lines between power, ideas, and their proponents by funding think tanks like India Foundation aligned with the ruling BJP and its ideological parent body, the RSS (Khan & Köllner, 2018). These institutions help shape foreign policy through a Hindu nationalist lens. India Foundation, for instance,

describes itself as a body that ‘believes in understanding contemporary India and its global context through a civilisational lens’ and aims to ‘articulate [an] Indian nationalistic perspective on issues’. India Foundation stands 88th in the list of Top Think Tanks in China, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea (McGann, 2021). The expansion of foreign policy think tanks in India has largely been confined to two main categories: those aligned with Indian corporate interests and/or international think tanks, and those ideologically affiliated with the ruling BJP and its parent body, the RSS (Khan & Köllner, 2018:7; Sajjanhar, 2023).

In February 2025, upon the invitation of India Foundation, the five MEPs including representatives of National Rally, who were part of the Patriots of Europe Foundation delegation to India, interacted with representatives of Indo-German Chamber of Commerce, the largest German bi-national Chamber abroad, the Federation of European Business in India, the official EU Chamber of Commerce, students of a premiere Indian college, pro-BJP think tanks, pro-BJP intellectuals and BJP politicians, to understand the work ‘behind the scenes to bring about this new India’ (Mariani, 2025).

It is noteworthy that both sets of populist radical right – from Europe and India - have been criticising democratic and liberal values. Like India’s BJP, which has been opposing democratic values of Indian Constitution (Poddar, 2023), the Patriots of Europe’s manifesto reveals an ‘unmistakable commitment to dismantle European democracy’ (Hoeksma, 2024: n.p.). According to the manifesto, this group has three political priorities: ‘sovereignty or taking back control, diplomacy instead of democracy, and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs’ (Hoeksma, 2024: n.p.). These priorities are similar to what this research has discussed so far in the context of BJP’s politics, strategy and conduct as the ruling party in India, both in terms of India’s domestic affairs and foreign policy.

This research studied an 8:43 minute-long video that consisted of vox pops from both the visiting MEPs and representatives of the BJP that was produced by the Patriots of Europe Foundation and posted by Mariani on social media platform X on March 12, 2025. This video has vox pops from Barbara Bonte of Flemish radical right Vlaams Belang, Tiago Moriera Di Sa of Portuguese radical right, Chega, and Nicola Bartůšek of Czech right-wing populist ANO, as well, who were part of the delegation. But this research will analyse statements made by the National Rally and BJP and other Hindutva representatives only since this research has limited scope of examination of politics of the other radical right parties.

In this video, Mariani said:

‘The five members of the European Parliament went to India to participate in a dialogue with those, who alongside Modi are transforming the country since 2014. Despite criticism from the world including the European Union, Prime Minister Modi achieved one success after another since 2014. His party won the election in New Delhi⁴, which was never under its control before. We wanted to understand the secrets of its success. Indians are proud of their achievements, but they are also somewhat frustrated because they do not understand why the European Union continues to lecture them. As one senator of Uttar Pradesh puts it, the European Union can sometimes be outright hypocritical. In short, as you can see, Indians know how to adapt. But beyond this observation, their nation’s true success lies in having overcome immense challenges. Despite criticism, they have lifted hundreds of millions of Indians out of poverty over the past decade’.

The European Union has remained a centrepiece of discussions between the European populist radical right and India’s BJP in this empirical data. This research has highlighted in the first and fourth chapters that the European populist radical right opposes European Union institutions, their ethos and their role as ‘main European decision-making polity’ (Nissen, 2022:2). European populist radical right feels that national identities are under threat, not only as a result of loss of national sovereignty but also due to European Union policies that ‘foster immigration and cultural pluralism and integration’ (Nissen, 2022:2).

The empirical evidence shows that the European populist radical right, National Rally, has found an ally in the BJP over its anti-European Union standpoint.

In reference to the statements made by Mariani on India-European Union relations, this research argues that the French populist radical right politician has targeted the European Union, and precisely the

⁴In February 2025, BJP won the Delhi state elections after 22 years. Mishra, S. (2025), ‘BJP has finally won Delhi, but for AAP, the battle may have just begun’, 9th February. Available at: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/politics/delhi-assembly-election-results-2025-bjp-wins-aap-kejriwal-loses/article69198874.ece> (Accessed: 26th March 2025)

liberal world, for criticising Modi. Mariani disparaged the European Union as ‘hypocritical’ for ‘lecturing’ Indians under Modi’s leadership. Additionally, Mariani cited India’s growth story under Modi by stating that it has lifted hundreds of millions of Indians out of poverty ‘over the past decade’. In this context, it is important to highlight that although the Indian government, citing data from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23, claimed that poverty has declined to just five per cent between 2011-12 and 2022-23, a separate independent study using the same data estimated the poverty rate at 26.4 per cent (Abraham, 2025). This research lacks the scope to analyse the data.

While popularising India’s ‘growth’ story under Modi globally, the BJP has been making concerted efforts to construct a decolonised global image for India by projecting it to be the ‘vishwaguru’ or the global mentor under Modi (Kugiel, 2024:68). The BJP has advanced ‘globalisation’, specifically neoliberalism, akin to other rising right-wing parties elsewhere (Kaul, 2019:16) and Modi exhibits a disproportionate focus on cultivating favour with Western powers (Ashok, 2025). Establishing a transnational network with the radical right in Europe is one of the strategies to cultivate favours, this research has observed. This would be discussed in this chapter further while analysing the empirical data.

Mathilde Androuët, French MEP representing National Rally and member of the office Patriots of Europe Foundation, who was part of the delegation to India in February 2025, said in the 8:43-minute-long video:

‘Obviously, many geostrategic issues were discussed during this visit, along with several meetings in a country full of dynamism experiencing rapid economic growth and looking toward Europe with friendship. It is therefore essential for us to reflect our relationship with India but also how we can build bridges and strengthen ties with this rising power which can serve as a counterbalance to the growing bipolarisation of the world between the United States and China. India looks at European Union somewhat curiously, struggling to fully understand it. But then many people across our continent feel the same way. As a result, India tends to focus more on national and sovereign trajectories. We share many commonalities with India including facing similar threats such as Islamist radicalism, which disrupts democratic and political processes. At the same time, India is a nation that approaches the world with a certain goodwill fully aware of its significant geostrategic and economic influence. It

is now up to us to establish more connections and strengthen our ties. India has much to teach us and we have learned great deal from this visit. We hope that this is just the beginning of a great intercontinental alliance’.

Androuet’s statement indicates that there is an undertone of anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia while referring to the common concern of ‘Islamist radicalism’ in this alliance between European populist radical right and India’s BJP that has been discussed in the previous chapter.

While analysing another statement by Androuet --‘India has much to teach us and we have learned great deal from this visit’ – this research argues that the BJP has convinced its European populist radical right allies that India is a ‘global leader or a reformer and teacher to the entire world’ under Modi’s leadership (Kugiel, 2024:68). Additionally, this indicates that the BJP has successfully projected India under Modi to be a rapidly growing economy, a favourable destination for western investment (Mody, 2023), and a representative voice of the Global South (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024; Kaur, 2020). Additionally, Androuet’s acknowledgment that this is a ‘beginning of a great intercontinental alliance’ is proof that a transnational alliance has been established between the National Rally and the BJP.

This transnational alliance between the European populist radical right and the Indian populist radical right is also highlighted in the statement made by Ram Madhav, the president of India Foundation, who also served as the general secretary of the BJP in the past and has been a member of the ideological parent body of the Hindu radical right, the RSS.

In the same video of vox pops, Ram Madhav said:

‘We are seeing the rise of European political right as a strong political force that is standing up to liberal agendas on issues like immigration and national sovereignty. As a think tank, and also as a political ideology, we are also very sympathetic to the causes that you are all standing up to. European Union is a very important partner for India, and we are working on a free trade agreement between the European Union and India, and we are hoping to conclude it sometime in 2025 so that countries in European Union can work closely with India in terms of economy, trade and business.

The worldview of the radical right is inextricably linked to sovereignty, and the European populist radical right who are identified as Eurosceptic -- have projected themselves as opposition to closer European integration, which they believe is a threat to the sovereignty of individual member States (Abrahamsen et al., 2024; Sondel-Cedarmas, 2022). BJP too has projected itself as a keeper of Indian sovereignty (Vaishnav, 2019). The issue of sovereignty has been all the more critical for BJP in framing the dispute on Kashmir as an 'internal matter of Indian sovereignty, which has obfuscated the decades old struggle for Kashmiri struggle and their right to freedom' and denying the people of the Kashmir the right to resist, and delegitimising resistance movement as 'mere acts of terrorists/rebels' (Gupta, 2023: 253-254), which has been discussed in the previous chapter.

While National Rally has criticised the European Union for 'lecturing' India under Modi's leadership, this research underlines that the BJP is also extending its support to the Eurosceptic populist radical right over their long demand for maintaining distinct identity and sovereignty without EU interference. Madhav's statement makes it clear that both ideologically and also as a think tank, they are 'sympathetic to the causes' that these representatives of the Eurosceptic populist radical right stand for. Madhav's statement further indicates that India's engagement with European Union has to be done more in terms of economy, trade and business.

In the video, Anil Jain, a former BJP parliamentarian, said:

'Europe should understand the global situation because nowadays this UN and international agencies are not doing its [sic] job properly. So European Union should be people-centric, peace-centric and the identity of different states should be maintained. India is for that'.

Jain's statement criticising the liberal international agencies including the United Nations (UN) is not unheard within the BJP as Modi himself slammed the UN and called it 'almost irrelevant' as there is 'no reform' left in it (Chitre, 2025:n.p.). It is significant to note that the UN Secretary-General António Guterres too criticised India's deteriorating human rights standards by stating that India's voice on the 'global stage' can only 'gain authority and credibility from a strong commitment to inclusivity and respect for human rights also at home' (Cavanaugh, 2023: n.p.). BJP targets international institutions because it labels such scrutiny as a fallout of the West's colonial thought process as noted by Huju (2024). Huju (2023) contends that foreign criticism is framed as imperial interference into the

sovereign affairs of 'Bharat'. Ironically, Modi used the UN stage to popularise yoga, which is one of India's most ubiquitous cultural exports, and used as a Hindu nationalist symbol by the BJP (Kedkar, 2020). In 2015, Modi petitioned before the UN to urge the United Nations member States to declare 21 June International Yoga Day. Yoga is increasingly utilised by Modi-led India in its diplomatic efforts to advance its foreign policy goals (Otto, 2025).

Conclusion

In summary, this chapter demonstrates that a prominent Indian right-wing think tank is instrumental in shaping this alliance between the European populist radical right and Indian populist radical right. The unwavering support from the MEPs of radical right parties of Germany and France individually and also as representatives of the Patriots of Europe toward Modi and BJP stands juxtaposed to the criticism that the BJP has received from the Left-leaning parliamentary members in Germany, the European Union and the United Nations on deteriorating human rights standards and democratic backsliding in India (Regi, 2021; Bhaumik, 2023; Lakshman, 2023). This chapter further analyses that the BJP targets international institutions critical of India's human rights situation under Modi because it labels such scrutiny as a fallout of the West's colonial thought process. The European populist radical right adopts BJP's narrative by dismissing the international criticism of India's treatment of minorities and erosion of human rights as 'lecturing'. BJP's broader distrust toward liberal international bodies like the United Nations is similar to the anti-globalist rhetoric promoted by the European populist radical right. By advocating for a 'people-centric, peace-centric' European Union that respects national identities and national sovereignty, the BJP aligns itself with European radical right parties that delegitimise the European Union and oppose the immigration and cultural integration promoted by its policies. The two sets of populist radical right – one from Global North and the other from Global South – receive mutual validation and acceptance of their standpoints on the European Union and national sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

At a time, when India is seen as a 'rising power' by the western nations, which are increasingly considering its geopolitical positioning significant to counter China, India's ruling populist radical right BJP rooted in Hindutva ideology has been making a concerted efforts to project the country as a 'vishwaguru' or global mentor. BJP under Prime Minister Modi has been branding India's contested 'growth' story while engaging with a diverse range of strategic partners including the European Union. The European Union too recognises that there is a need to develop the strategic partnership with India because India has projected to become the world's third-largest economy by 2030. But on the sidelines, BJP is also forging alliances with the European populist radical right parties – Germany's AfD and France's National Rally – which are known for being Eurosceptic. With the help of empirical evidence, this research has established that AfD and National Rally from the Global North and the BJP from the Global South are admitting that they have forged an alliance. In this alliance, they are getting validation from each other over their common rhetorics on Islamophobia generated under the garb of dealing with Islamist terrorism alongside their anti-European Union standpoint and national sovereignty. There is an exchange of ideology, ideas and discourse over these key issues between them. Since the European populist radical right parties often espouse nationalist and anti-globalist ideologies, it is increasingly common to see them form alliances with ideologically similar groups within the region. But this research demonstrates that a transnational alliance has evolved between European populist radical right and Indian populist radical right.

A key strategy and tactic used for building this transnational alliance is similar to how transnational alliances between the radical right parties across the globe are forged – which is – with the help of diverse and un-coordinated non-governmental organisations, think tanks and policy institutes. As Modi has been increasingly focusing on his global image, BJP has been using the right-wing think tanks and policy institutes to forge alliance with populist radical right in Europe. In 2019, when the BJP, for the

first time, publicly displayed its alliance with a set of radical right members of European parliament (MEPs), it invited a 27-member delegation of MEPs through a controversial non-governmental organisation, Srivastava Group. The Srivastava Group was later found to be part of a disinformation network by Belgian non-governmental organisation EU Disinformation Lab. In 2025, another delegation of European populist radical right – precisely five-member delegation of Patriots of Europe Foundation – a think tank formed by members of European far-right parliamentary group, Patriots of Europe -- was invited by an Indian right-wing think tank, India Foundation. While assuming a growing role in shaping elite discourse and organising Modi's high-profile diaspora engagements during his international visits, India Foundation presents itself as independent, but its members have close connection with the BJP.

These three populist radical right parties –AfD, National Rally and the BJP --although hail from two different regions – have commonalities in their ideology, strategy and conduct. This research has demonstrated that all three populist radical right parties encourage extremism through rhetoric, promote identity politics, scapegoat Muslims and propagate nationalist promises and traditional values. Additionally, all three invoke fear, hate and hope. These similarities are noted as a key binding factor in this alliance.

Despite projecting a promising 'growth' story, Modi's leadership is facing a backlash from the liberal blocks in the West including the European Union for deteriorating human rights standards in India including Kashmir, increasing prevalence of hate speech, and violence against religious minorities. But BJP under Modi has been using the historical narrative of victimisation at the hands of the West to 'dress up contemporary authoritarian politics' and wants to be liberated from western impositions like secularism or liberal democracy (Huju, 2024: n.p.).

The European populist radical right parties – the AfD and the National Rally -- however, have positioned themselves in alignment with BJP's abrogation of special status of Kashmir and imposition of military crackdown in the strife-torn region to fight Islamist terrorism. This research argues that India is using this alliance with the European populist radical right parties to build an international pressure against Pakistan over its alleged sponsor of the Islamist terrorism in Kashmir. One such evidence is that the National Rally MEPs in 2019 urged the European Union to impose sanctions against Pakistan and investigate any involvement of Pakistan in terrorist attacks in Europe. The populist

radical right's referring to terrorism as 'Islamist' reinforces that their narrative on terrorism carries an undertone of Islamophobia. The Islamophobic mindset has been already demonstrated by the two European populist radical right parties – the AfD and National Rally -- during their transnational networks with the radical right within Europe (Nissen, 2022; Zúquete, 2015; Hafez, 2014).

As van Dijk (2024: 6) notes that the populist radical right discourse structure involves emphasising 'our good' things and 'their bad' things, the AfD, National Rally, and the BJP have successfully employed this strategy in their discourse. Both the AfD and National Rally have been advocating for India's unprecedented 'growth' and 'success' story under Modi as scripted by the BJP and urging the German government and the European Union to enhance trade relationship with India. At the same time, while citing India's 'growth' story under Modi, the European populist radical right has disparaged the European Union as 'hypocritical' for 'lecturing' Indians under Modi's leadership.

The alliance is an example of how the radical right uses nativism and anti-European Union standpoints as answers to equality, diversity and pluralism propagated by the United Nations, European Union and international human rights institutions. Opposing the European Union has remained a strategy of populist radical right parties, who oppose democratic and liberal values (van Dijk, 2024:8), and they have demonstrated it through this alliance as well.

Since the empirical evidence shows that the BJP representatives have explicitly extended their support to the Eurosceptic populist radical right parties and what they stand for, this research contends that gaining support from India's ruling BJP for their rhetoric on Islamist terrorism, anti-European narrative and sovereignty at a time when India is seen as a strategic partner of the West, could be key motivations behind the European radical right parties to form this alliance. This research further notes that forging alliance with the populist radical right in the Global South could also be a strategy to normalise their narratives on the European Union and their assertion of national sovereignty.

This research has demonstrated that both sets of populist radical right parties – from Global North and Global South – are speaking in chorus against the European Union since the new global order that the radical right globally is scripting is both less liberal and more sovereigntist as stated by Ambramhansen et al. (2024). This research has demonstrated that both the European populist radical right and the Indian populist radical right look at the global liberal elite as a common enemy.

Limitations of this research

This original piece of research on the transnational alliance between European populist radical right and Indian populist radical right makes a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on transnational networking between the populist radical right in Global North and the Global South but it has its limitations too. While this research has answered the question related to the key offline strategies and tactics used by the European populist radical right and Indian populist radical right in building the alliance, it had limited scope on exploring how this alliance is being strengthened on social media, and how the alliance is mobilising support online. This research could trace only one account on X that occasionally retweets Hindutva content generated from Indian accounts interacting with the National Rally MEP Thierry Mariani. This account was found to be thanking Mariani for ‘denouncing the attacks of many MEPs against India’ in respect to India’s stand on Kashmir. But this lone tweet does not establish any mass support for the alliance online.

This research also lacked the scope to decipher the implications of the alliance in respect to European Union-India relations. This research could not establish the reaction of the liberal western institutions including the European Union on this alliance.

More questions

Viewed against the backdrop of the ongoing strategic rivalry between the US and China, western governments have so far prioritised concerns about China’s one-party rule over worries about the trajectory of India’s deteriorating democracy. There is a need for scholarly work to investigate how the decline in India’s democratic standing could lead western nations to reconsider the scope and boundaries of their partnership with India (Bajpae, 2024).

Since the populist radical right parties are nativists, questions arise on how effective this alliance will remain in the long run and what are the tensions that exist now or may occur in the alliance in future. Extensive research on the tensions within the alliance will give the policymakers the opportunity to

look at the gaps in this transnational relationship and frame policies to counter such an alliance using their weakest links.

Indian populist radical right BJP has been making efforts to globalise the Hindutva project (Thobani, 2023; Dutta, 2024) by forging ties with radical right worldwide including the British far-right groups and the American white supremacists (Truschke, 2022; Taher, 2025). This original piece of research has established that the BJP has formed an alliance with the European populist radical right parties, the AfD and the National Rally. It is important for policymakers to monitor any violent impact of such alliances since all parties and actors have been accused of inciting racial hatred and violence in their respective countries and regions. There is a need for the law enforcement agencies in Europe and largely the West to note that the Hindutva groups have been accused in at least 25 terrorist attacks in India (Puniyani, 2015). Additionally, the Indian government led by the BJP is accused of being involved in killing of a Canadian Sikh leader in 2023 (Tasker, 2023).

In the end, this research concludes that there is a requirement for deep academic investigation on whether India is losing its credibility as a democratic and liberal country on the global stage because of the deteriorating human rights standards under Modi. In this context, there is a need to answer another question, to what extent the western powers, who see India as a strong strategic partner to counterbalance China, would tolerate the ruling BJP's alliances with anti-democratic and Eurosceptic elements since such alliances may disturb the larger liberal world order, which is already under threat (Muggah & Owen, 2018).

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