

The nature of the British party system combined with the BNP's internal problems mean that it will be difficult for the extreme right to take advantage of the current economic crisis

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At the close of 2011, British Politics and Policy at LSE asked our contributors for their thoughts and predictions for 2012. [Daphne Halikiopoulou](#) looks at the effects of the economic crisis on Europe's far-right groups, including the BNP in the UK.



2012 could witness the rise of the European far right, if the latter successfully takes advantage of the opportunities presented to it by the current economic crisis. The crisis could be more constraining for the British far right however, given internal problems facing the BNP and the nature of the British party system.

In 2011 European far right extremism often made news headlines, whether in the form of outbursts of violence as in Norway, the rise of anti-systemic groups like the Golden Dawn in Greece and the EDL in the UK, the popularity of Marine Le Pen in French election polls, increasing support for radical right-wing parties in Netherlands and, more recently, the inclusion of members of the radical right LAOS party in the Greek coalition government. According to some scholars this is hardly surprising as severe economic crises, such as the one currently facing Europe, tend to be accompanied by a rise of the far right, for example fascism in the 1930s.

Interestingly, the rise of the far right does not appear to be the same across Europe, with more varied results for some groups including the BNP. Largely because of the economic crisis ahead, 2012 presents the far right with both constraints and opportunities.

On one hand the economic crisis is constraining, as far right parties tend to attract support by drawing on problems associated with crime and immigration, while economic crises mean that voters are more likely to focus on economic issues such as unemployment and taxation. On the other hand, the crisis presents these parties with an opportunity: they can capitalise on it by adopting a discourse that associates the socio-cultural issues that form their main agenda with economic issues, nationalism and Euroscepticism.

Thus, the far right is likely to gain support if it can successfully promote a form of nationalist xenophobic populism which links issues such as immigration and citizenship to access to welfare and EU policies, thereby appealing to those affected by a deteriorating economy and capitalising on their fears.

The constraints are greater than the opportunities as far as the BNP is concerned. This is largely to do with internal problems facing the BNP, financial issues, the fact that the party remains largely illegitimate in the eyes of the electorate and the nature of the British party system which tends to exclude extreme parties – at least in national elections. This is especially true since issues concerning immigration, welfare and the EU tend to be appropriated by mainstream parties and the less extreme UKIP.

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