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Economic crisis and political extremism in Europe: from the 1930s to the present

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Economic crisis and political extremism in Europe: from the 1930s to the present

ARTICLE

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Abstract The Great Depression of the 1930s greatly affected political developments in Europe. Economic stagnation proved beneficial for far-right parties, which generally saw their influence increasing. Authoritarian regimes became established in most European countries at the time, the most important being the Nazi regime in Germany. In recent years, the global financial crisis has also increased the appeal of far-right extremists. All over Europe anti-system political parties that are anti-liberal, racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and Eurosceptic are gaining ground: the European Parliament elections held in May 2014 offer the latest example of this. Historical experience shows that when economic conditions remain bad for a significant period of time people tend to become more radical as far as their electoral behaviour is concerned. However, no matter how strong the linkage between economic crisis and the rise of political extremism might be, economic crisis is not the only factor to be taken into account when analysing the phenomenon of political extremism, as other parameters (historical, social and so on) are also important.

Keywords Economic crisis · Political extremism · Far-right · Democracy · Europe