

Department of Politics & Public Administration

Hegemony or Barbarism –

A Case Study of the "Ireland Says No" Movement Focused on Its Ideological Construction within Neoliberalism

Mireia Castells March

22238026

Supervisor: Dr Owen Worth

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the ideological and structural character of Ireland's emergent grassroots far-right mobilisation through a case study of the recent "Ireland Says No" movement. While Ireland has long been considered an outlier in European radical right tendencies, recent protests against asylum accommodation sites and intensified anti-immigration rhetoric indicate a shift in its political dynamics. Framed within Critical International Political Economy and neo-Gramscian theory, the study examines whether the movement constitutes a counter-hegemonic challenge to neoliberalism or if it reinforces it. Using mixed methods of Critical Discourse Analysis to interpret social media posts and qualitative research of secondary sources, such as official reports, media articles, and party manifestos, the analysis identifies recurring narratives that depict immigration as a crisis, construct an ethno-nationalist Irish identity, and expand conspirationist believes that frame political elites, NGOs, and media as betrayers of the nation. Findings reveal that while the movement rejects the culturally liberal aspects of neoliberalism (like multiculturalism) and presents itself as anti-systemic, it inevitably reproduces neoliberal logics of individual responsibility and deservingness, among others, that place blame for precarious material conditions on immigration rather than class. The analysis concludes that the "Ireland Says No" movement is counter-hegemonic in form but hegemonic in function in that it simply culturally rearticulates neoliberalism instead of rupturing from it.

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1. Introduction

Europe has witnessed a renewed surge of radical right-wing mobilisation in the last decade that has been impossible to ignore. From street protests and online networks to party formations that oppose immigration, denounce the "globalist agenda", and benefit from resentments produced by economic struggle which become dislocated into cultural anxieties (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2022; Aktas, 2024), the current political landscape has undergone a rapid development whereby far-right ideology has entered the mainstream (Brown et al., 2023). Ireland, however, has long been treated as an outlier in comparative scholarship as it has sustained an electoral failure for the far right (Garner, 2007; O'Malley, 2008), which currently has virtually no parliamentary presence.

Nevertheless, recent years have shown that the country's exceptionalism may be at its end. Local campaigns against asylum accommodation, large national anti-immigration demonstrations, and a growing ecosystem of disinformation have become increasingly harder to counteract due to new technologies becoming a salient feature of Irish politics after 2022-23 (Gallagher et al., 2023). Media reporting and expert investigative reports document a pattern of violent protests, public disorder and arson attacks at proposed asylum accommodation sites, and, most recently, unprovoked racist assaults on the street, which have often been incited due to hubs of coordination of disinformation propagating conspirational propaganda (McCarron et al., 2024; O'Connor, 2024).

These recent developments raise a number of questions regarding Ireland's political climate as it has begun to exhibit dynamics more commonly associated with European and American post-crisis far-right mobilisation. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to examine the structural and ideological formations of the new Irish far-right

through the analysis of the "Ireland Says No" movement that prevails in both street protests and online discourse. The question that encases the analysis undertaken is: Is the "Ireland Says No" movement counter-hegemonic, or does it reinforce the neoliberal status quo?

This question is framed within a Critical International Political Economy framework, which pertains to the broader Critical Theory school of thought. The analysis throughout the study also integrates a neo-Gramscian approach of abstract conceptions such as "hegemony". Worth (2015) argues that there should be a distinction between far-right movements that propose a counter-hegemonic economic project, usually taking the form of a reactionary mercantilism, and those that build their ideological framework "in a manner that complements market economics and in some ways seeks to extend its hegemony" (p.154-5). In that case, the objective of the study is to locate the movement in relation to the historic bloc that structures political possibility in contemporary Ireland, by uncovering the hegemonical nature of the newly awoken "grassroots" far-right movement in Ireland through a case study that will focus on the "Ireland Says No" protests that occurred during 2023, 2024 and 2025.

The relevance of this analysis lies in foreseeing the political trajectory of the movement that, in turn, can allow us to know what steps we can take as an oppositional force to the far right. If the Irish far right is hegemonical, it may serve to stabilise neoliberalism by channelling dissent into identity-based forms of politics, instead of class-based ones, thus defusing systemic critique. Contrastingly, if counter-hegemonical, it could signal an opening in the neoliberal consensus, hence potentially creating a political opening for alternative progressive movements, or, for worse, authoritarian post-neoliberalism.

In order to acquire an exhaustive account of the phenomenon in question, it is important to contextualise Ireland within its historical and economic current position, and to note that the country's post-Celtic Tiger trajectory has been chiselled by economic volatility and crisis responses that have rolled out a policy paradigmatic of neoliberal governing. Following the 2008 financial collapse, the Irish state implemented harsh austerity measures, cut the provision of public housing, and further deepened the country's integration into global financial markets, especially with its economic ties to the United States (Kirby, 2010; Mercille & Murphy, 2015). The resulting housing crisis, exacerbated by financialisation and speculation, persists to this day, with the Central Bank noting that structural planning constraints remain an important barrier to meeting supply targets (Byrne & Norris, 2022; *Reuters*, 2025). These material conditions form the backbone against which "Ireland Says No" became mobilised, presenting immigration and the welcoming of refugees as the primary driver of scarcity and framing the Irish government as betraying "its own people".

Understanding far-right mobilisation as a politico-economic phenomenon embedded in the dynamic of neoliberal restructuring and hegemonic production, in opposition to a reactionary cultural shift (Bruff, 2014; Saull, 2015a), enables a heuristic analysis that goes beyond sociological or cultural approaches. Thus, this case study will use material historical interpretation to interrogate the movement's role in the current late capitalist society.

The dissertation is structured as follows. First, a review is done on the existing academic literature on the far right and its apparent current success, what we understand by "far right", and what relationship it has with the neoliberal system. Then it examines with particular attention the Irish context and its historical divergence from extended European trends. The fourth section develops the theoretical framework that presents the

central concepts used in the analysis, extracted from Critical International Political Economy and neo-Gramscianism, that establish a theoretical rubric. Section five outlines the methodology, justifying the use of a qualitative case study and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to deconstruct the movement's rhetoric and narrative strategies in detail. Section six presents the empirical findings, which identify the dominant discursive patterns and ideological functions of the "Ireland Says No" movement. Then, in the discussion, these findings are contrasted with the theoretical framework, thus identifying the movement's hegemonic or counter-hegemonic character, its internal contradictions, and its implications for Irish and European politics. Finally, the dissertation concludes by summarising the argument and by reflecting on the broader significance of the study, all while suggesting avenues for further research, and particularly, the need for counter-hegemonic strategies that address the material bases of class struggle.

All things considered, this dissertation intends to contribute to the study of the far right in two ways: first, empirically, by providing one of the most recent in-depth analyses of a contemporary Irish grassroots far-right mobilisation, and second, theoretically, by integrating discourse analysis with a critical political economy approach to assess the relationship between far-right rhetoric and neoliberal hegemony. Understanding this connection is an academic task as well as a political one, as diagnosing how exclusionary politics capture and redirect discontent is a necessary step in designing strategies capable of contesting (and ultimately dismantling) both the far right and the economic order it so often, albeit inadvertently, sustains.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Far Right

Few phenomena have grappled contemporary political science students and scholars like the global emergence of the radical right. Nevertheless, there seems to be a considerable amount of disagreement on its definition, denomination, and causes that goes back to the very emergence of far-right studies after the Cold War (Mudde, 2007). While it being abstract in nature, the far right – as it will be largely called in this paper from now on, and interchangeably with populist right, radical right, right-wing extremism – can be broadly defined as a political position that encompasses a diversity of ideologies such as ultraconservatism, authoritarianism, nativism, and ultranationalism (Mudde, 2002, p.11). In the case of the paper at hand, exact terminology is not of crucial importance, as it is a single-case study of a relatively newly formed group/movement that does not have a strict and coherent set of views yet, however, clear definitions would be needed on the account of comparative research (Mudde, 2007, p.12).

Studies of the far right, especially comparative ones, have a tendency to focus on political parties in opposition to grassroots movements and activism (Pirro, 2022, p.102; Brown et al., 2021). It could be argued that this over-engagement in electoral politics when dealing with the discussion of far-right support from the masses can hinder the research of the cause of such emergence. That is, while the political elite has a specific set of views usually clearly stated in a manifesto, some voters of a far-right party might not share the entirety of the expressed values. Then again, it has been the economic turmoil produced by neoliberal globalisation that took over at the end of the 20th century that has steadily collected all the conditions for this mobilisation of the far right (Mudde, 2007; Jacobs, 2011; Saull, 2015b).

The past decade has shown that in Europe, there has been a growing distrust of the establishment (centre-right, centre-left) parties, especially after the 2008 financial crisis, which saw the deterioration of the welfare state, coupled with seemingly endless austerity, and the rise of "new" mobilisations focused on anti-immigration, cultural nationalism, and Euroscepticism. This sequence of events brought scholars to evaluate how this contemporary form of populism functions as a reaction to the deficiency of the neoliberal system, and how it might reinforce neoliberal rationalities such as moralised individualism, border securitisation, and punitive welfare policies (Brown, 2015; Fraser, 2019).

The study of such a reactionary surge in Western politics must be done within the understanding of the historical context that allowed it. While this paper will not indulge in a detailed portrait of the history of the far right, it will illustrate the enduring ties of nationalist and extreme politics to the capitalist system to form a proper conception of the role of the far right in the face of hegemonic powers. The way right-wing populism interacts with the current neoliberal hegemony is a contested debate. First, the contemporary movements of these, often incohesive, ideologies are, by nature, contingent to the regions they emerge from (Mudde, 2007), and second, different political parties or movements with no electoral representation from the same state or region often diverge in their economic stances (Dalton & Berning, 2022). Nonetheless, I argue that a critical study on the hegemonic (or counter-hegemonic) nature of specific far-right movements is not in vain, as such findings will allow us to more accurately map and understand the social and structural, forces that play a part in this rehashed development of Western politics.

Richard Saull (2015b) argues that there has been a scholarly gap in the conception of how the global capitalist socio-economic structure has shaped the conditions from

which the far right has emerged. His historical and economic material analysis concludes that while the contemporary far right has thrived due to the innate instabilities and faults that neoliberal hegemony brings, it paradoxically latches onto it, thus reproducing and reinforcing it. Nevertheless, even if historically in the face of economic trouble, radical and reactionary forces have taken hold of the political landscape by presenting itself as a viable alternative that often went in hand with the interests of the capitalist class, Saull (2015b) contends that the contemporary nature of neoliberal globalisation diminishes the incitement of alliance between the nationalist and protectionist far right and the capitalist ruling class.

In opposition to an economic reading of the surge of right-wing reactionary forces, Joppke (2021, pp. 257-64) claims that, ideologically, European radical populist parties rely further on cultural signalling rather than economic principles. With a mantra at the forefront that blames an abstract "globalist class" whose aim is to "destroy Western values" with (often Muslim) immigration, they offer no tangible proposal to undo the inequalities brought on by neoliberalism apart from opportunistically assuring the endowment of an exclusionary welfare system. Therefore, it could be argued that an economic and cultural reading of this phenomenon can concur in that, while a resurgence of popularity of the far right can originate from economic instability, this ideology might not actively challenge the foundations of the system whose failures owes its initial success, because what perpetuates its prosperity is the preservation of class inequality disguised as a social and cultural conflict.

2.2 Ireland, Late Bloomer?

Most scholarship on far-right studies in Europe has historically overlooked Ireland. This, however, is not due to academic negligence, but the fact that the Republic of Ireland has

not followed the same political tendencies as its neighbours. One could argue that Ireland's post-colonial condition could be an explanation for the political divergence from its European (post-)imperialist counterparts; nevertheless, the country's rapid economic expansion and adherence to neoliberalism at the end of the 20th century show that it quickly adapted to Western hegemony.

O'Malley (2008, p.961) contends that Ireland had fertile ground for radical right parties to grow, that is, increased immigration, rising inequality, job displacement, weak left-right divide, and a candidate-based electoral system, but no such party took the reins of opportunity. While O'Malley's analysis is almost 20 years old and Ireland's political landscape has developed since then, his work is still relevant, as it contributes to the understanding of the inception of Ireland's far right. According to O'Malley (2008), Sinn Féin acted as an escape valve for voters who have an ideological profile that tends to support radical right parties, as the party's strong nationalist and anti-system views, and community activism can attract such support, even if it openly portrays itself as leftist and pro-immigrant rights.

Nevertheless, Dillane et al. (2016) suggest that Irish politicians from both the left and the right sides of the spectrum contributed to the marginalisation of the immigrant population by problematising immigration. In addition, they find that even if immigration was not specifically framed as a problem, mainstream parties' rhetorical construction of immigrants was made only on transactional economic grounds, which can more easily create a perception of resource competition among the local population.

In sum, there has been a dynamic academic debate over the lack of a far-right party in Ireland with mostly two competing positions, one that maintains that the critical position toward immigration from mainstream parties absorbs the potential radical right-wing electorate (Fanning & Mutwarasibo, 2007; Garner, 2007), and another that claims

that Sinn Féin's Irish nationalism – which is an ongoing endeavour, and historically left-wing and anti-colonial – acts as a magnet for voters who, in the event of being from another country with a different history of nationalism, might have opted for a radical right-wing anti-establishment party (O'Malley, 2008; Fattibene et al., 2024). However, the debate has changed its direction since around 2020, an endemic movement that can be considered the Irish far right has surfaced (Day & McCormack, 2023; Fattibene et al., 2024). While it is not coherent or united, the various existing factions share the core principles of Mudde's (2002) definition of the far right.

Although this dissertation will mostly focus on the civil far-right movement in Ireland, it is relevant to consider and differentiate between two parties that have made their way into media focus and the political landscape, albeit not electorally. On the one hand, the National Party (NP), led autocratically by Justin Barrett, supports mass deportations of immigrants, the "restoration of capital punishment", the illegalisation of abortion, among others (NP principles). The party's manifesto also states the will to withdraw from the Eurozone, the EU, and to implement a protectionist economy, in opposition to "communism and international finance capitalism", thus reinforcing "the right to private property and home ownership". Therefore, it could be argued that the NP is not aligned with neoliberal hegemonic powers.

On the other hand, the Irish Freedom Party (IFP) has an apparent commitment to liberal and democratic values, in that it supports "all democratic endeavours" to achieve a united Ireland and strives for "Irexit". In contrast to the NP's wish to leave the EU for protectionist reasons, the IFP's reason for withdrawal would be to "fulfill both our democratic and economic potential" (IFP Principles), that is, to engage in the global economy without EU restrictions, aligning the party with neoliberal hegemony. The

existence of these parties enables the speculation that some "Ireland Is Full" protestors could sympathise with one or the other, the movement in itself being hegemonic or not.

Despite the relevance of party politics, currently, Ireland's far right is more powerful in its grassroots movement than electorally, making academic analysis more fruitful at the non-electoral level. Besides multiple in-person protests on the street level, the Irish far right largely organises through social media (Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, even YouTube…), where extreme right-wing and conspiratorial discourses proliferate and increasingly go through a process of mainstreaming (Fattibene et al., 2024). The empirical study of social media and internet discourse is extremely arduous, and the nationally inextricable nature of the internet, coupled with anonymity, makes the analysis of any specific country's discourses virtually impossible. Consequently, the scope of the dissertation will fall onto the study of the actual protests, which are likely the result of social media mobilisation.

2.3 Positioning the Dissertation in the Literature

Gramscian and post-Gramscian frameworks have been relatively extensively used in political research to understand how neoliberalism has maintained ideological dominance through a hegemonic and "commonsensical" fashion (Hall, 2021; Jessop, 2015). On the one hand, this perspective has been utilised in the study of leftist movements from the first decade of the 21st century (e.g., Occupy Wall Street, Syriza, 15-M) to investigate their political development (Katsambekis & Kioupkiolis, 2019). In the case of the Spanish 15-M, what seemed like a counter-hegemonic radical left-wing movement was rapidly absorbed within elite party politics and stalled with the creation of Podemos (Cancela & Rey-Araújo, 2023). On the other hand, a great amount of critical scholarship has

examined the far right's allyship to neoliberalism, as well as its potential to break through the hegemonic power of neoliberalism (Bruff, 2014; Fraser, 2017; Mouffe, 2018).

However, there has been a section of academics who have further questioned this symbiotic relationship by evaluating the position of new far-right movements as being defiant toward the neoliberal establishment (Rupert, 2000; Worth, 2002). Following this debate within the study of the far right from a critical theoretical framework, in addition to the current lack of research on grassroots far-right movements in Ireland, I aim to delve into an apparent gap in the literature by expanding our knowledge of the newly awoken Irish far right through a critical analysis that will shed light onto the nature of the "Ireland Is Full" protests before neoliberal hegemony.

In short, there is limited work on whether these movements represent a genuine ideological rupture from neoliberalism. In the Irish context, there is an underrepresentation of case studies of the far right's relationship with the economic establishment, and it is often excluded from European overviews due to its distinct historical and post-colonial dynamics. Additionally, this dissertation will tackle the lacuna present in some research by critically distinguishing rhetorical opposition to neoliberalism, in the form of anti-EU or anti-elite discourse, and substantial ideological alternatives.

3. Social Context

The current mobilisation of reactionary social forces in Ireland, with the "Ireland Says No" protests at the forefront, cannot be detached from the historically far-reaching structural crises and ideological displacements brought on by the new neoliberal economic current of the increasingly internationalised Irish state. The erosion of post-

WWII welfare consensus, intensified by austerity measures in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, central to the Western current political economic condition, has provided the material and symbolic grounds for such ideological flourishment (Mudde, 2007; Jacobs, 2011; Worth, 2018). In this context, far-right mobilisation is, potentially, a symptomatic expression of neoliberal rationality, rather than a deviation from it. The addition of this section, which lays out the contextual complexities that brought parts of Irish civil society to engage in radical right-wing politics, is crucial in that it mentions the specificities of the cultural and historical geopolitical dynamics of Ireland as a post-colonial country that might have no applicability within the already extensively studied European and American far-right movements.

3.1 The Celtic Tiger and Neoliberalism in Ireland

Ireland's role as a paradigmatic case of neoliberal convergence became most visible during the Celtic Tiger period of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the Irish state aggressively pursued deregulation, privatisation, and corporate tax competitiveness (Kirby, 2010; Allen, 2007). This model, while initially showing hefty GDP growth, embedded Ireland within the global financial system in a manner which exposed it to any external shocks. The fallout of the 2008 financial collapse uncovered the internal weaknesses of Ireland's property-based growth model by hitting the housing and construction bubble, which was fuelled by negligent lending and speculative financing.

In response to the collapse of the global neoliberal market, which left Ireland in one of the most severe economic contractions in the Eurozone (Regan, 2012), the state adopted an austerity regime under the terms of the 2010 EU/IMF bailout (Breen, 2012). Rather than confronting the structural conditions of financial capitalism, the Irish government internalised market discipline, socialised private debt, and imposed substantial cuts on public services and welfare programs (Mercille & Murphy, 2015). This

pattern of crisis resolution was emblematic of what Crouch (2004) deemed as "post-democracy", wherein state institutions remain formally democratic, but policy outcomes are determined by the comings and goings of transnational capital and the technocratic ruling class. Consequently, Ireland became the ideal ground for the reproduction of neoliberal hegemony through what Gramsci (1971) conceives as "passive revolution". Though there are different academic conceptions for the term, the one adopted in this dissertation is the "revolution from above" one, in which "existing political elites instigate and manage periods of social upheaval and transformation" (Thomas, 2018, p.119; Davidson, 2010). While the Irish state expanded its coercive and fiscal capacity in response to the crisis, it did so without expanding citizen participation or social protection. Instead, it intensified commodification in crucial infrastructural areas such as housing, healthcare, and education, which reinforced the neoliberal assumption that it is individuals who are responsible for their well-being, instead of the existing system that actively works against the working class's interests (Fraser et al., 2013; Brown, 2015; Fraser, 2019).

Over time, this recalibration of the economy fostered deep and spatially uneven disillusionment with state institutions, with an emphasis on communities that were experiencing intergenerational deprivation, disinvestment, and exclusion from the supposed financial recovery. Thus, the socio-economic costs of this economic reintegration were disproportionately felt by the working class. Saull (2015b) argues that the crisis and its aftermath intensified the contradictions within neoliberal capitalism, producing the ideal material conditions upon which far-right mobilisation can thrive. Crucially, however, said contradictions were not interpreted through class struggle, but rather, in the absence of a coherent and appealing left-wing counter-hegemonic project,

popular discontent has been increasingly articulated through ethno-nationalist and exclusionary narratives (Virdee, 2025).

3.2 Housing and Austerity

Perhaps the most notable legacy of post-crisis neoliberal governance in Ireland has been the housing crisis that has had a grip on the country since the early 2010s. While supply and demand imbalances are often blamed, the outcome of the housing disaster comes from a deliberate political economy. The retreat from public housing provision, in addition to financialisation and the privileging of Build-to-Rent and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), has made housing increasingly unaffordable for low- and middle-income groups (Byrne & Norris, 2022). Thus, what emerges is a form of "austerity urbanism", in which housing precarity is embedded into the geography of everyday life (Peck, 2012). Consequently, social reproduction is restructured by the placement of pressure on household units, while collective mechanisms of redistribution are reduced.

In these conditions of governmental neglect, narratives of resource scarcity find traction. While inequality and dispossession are structurally produced, they are also often experienced in proximity to apparent symbols of difference, that is, immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, who become hyper-visible and racialised through both media representation and state policies of dispersal and Direct Provision (Lentin & McVeigh, 2006; Loyal & Quilley, 2016; Lentin, 2022). The result of generalised austerity thus becomes a localised sense of injustice that, although materially rooted, is discursively mirrored through logics of cultural threat or competition for welfare entitlements.

From a critical lens, these perceptions of "unfairness" do not represent a failure of rational cognition, but rather the ideological success of neoliberalism in naturalising markets and individualising responsibility (Joseph, 2013). That is, the systemic drivers of

inequality, especially labour precarisation, housing commodification, and welfare retrenchment, are occluded, while social antagonism is territorialised at the community level. Stuart Hall (2021) illustrates this dynamic as the success of hegemonic ideologies in their capacity to organise lived experiences into politically legible narratives.

3.3 Migration, Racialisation, and Capitalism

Immigration has become the central symbolic terrain through which many of the working class's anxieties have been articulated in the past two decades, from all sides of the political spectrum, as the problematisation of immigration has not exclusively emerged from far-right circles (Breen et al., 2006). Ireland's increasing ethnic diversity is structurally entangled with the dynamics of European integration, labour market restructuring, and demographic transitions. While the country's immigration policy has largely aligned with the EU's free movement and mobility regimes, its implementation in Ireland has shown a dual logic of openness for capital and high-skilled workers, and securitisation or containment for the racialised poor (Fanning, 2018; Joppke, 2021).

Migration policy and governance are reflective of neoliberalism's contradictory needs, that is; to sustain this economic system, a mobile and flexible workforce is demanded on the one hand, while a delimited national imaginary is drawn on the other. The migrant population of Ireland often occupies basic, necessary positions in the economy, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, food services, and logistics (Hughes, 2008). Thus, the material dependence of the Irish economy on migrant labour rests uneasily upon public discourse that constructs migrants as burdens or threats (Anderson, 2010; De Genova, 2010).

Therefore, what surfaces is a system based on differential inclusion, wherein migrants are incorporated into the economic system, but under conditions that limit their

political agency and social rights. According to Bhattacharyya (2018), this contradiction serves capitalist accumulation through which a process of racialisation works as a mechanism of labour control. Additionally, the far right, by demanding border closure and national preference, reifies this dynamic, presenting the social stratification produced by capital as a matter of cultural hierarchy or civilisational defence.

3.4 Social Media, Social Class, and the Shift of Public Discourse

The global cultural consolidation of such narratives has been accelerated by the structural transformations in the public sphere brought about by social media. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok serve as organisational tools and discursive amplifiers for the far right, and they facilitate rapid dissemination of ideology outside the constraints of traditional media or institutional politics (Fattibene et al., 2024). These digital infrastructures have significantly shaped far-right mobilisation in Ireland, in that they have allowed the creation of ideological cohesion and tactical coordination to an otherwise decentralised group.

Critical media scholars have noted that far-right actors often exploit platform dynamics through the use of "strategic essentialism" and affective mobilisation through the production of content that is deliberately transgressive, conspiratorial, and emotionally resonant (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Brown et al., 2023). In doing so, it could be argued that a "subaltern counterpublic" is created, a concept coined by Nancy Fraser (1990) that invokes spaces of oppositional meaning-making that challenge mainstream discourses[1].

[1] According to Fraser (1990), "subaltern counterpublics" only refer to instances where the dominant discursive trend is contested, which can take a liberatory or an antidemocratic and antiegalitarian form.

Most importantly, these platforms also reconfigure class-based political subjectivity. Processes of deindustrialisation, wage stagnation, and social fragmentation representative of late capitalist, post-industrial societies, leave many working-class people atomised (or alienated), with an increasingly diminished access to collective identities such as labour unionism or leftist activism (Harvey, 2020). It could be argued that social media fills this void by offering coherent, albeit misleading, explanations for lived socio-economic grievances. In the Irish context, this has led to the emergence of an online "counter-hegemonic common sense", in which governmental betrayal, globalism, and multiculturalism have become interchangeable explanations for economic hardship and perceived cultural loss.

From a neo-Gramscian perspective, one could claim that the far right's digital strategy functions as a war of position, that is, one that does not seek immediate institutional capture but rather aims to reshape the cultural terrain upon which political legitimacy is constructed, thus constructing a new hegemony (Pabst, 2018; Abrahamsen, 2024). This represents a challenge to both liberal democracies and the possibility of a potential progressive counter-hegemony, insofar as it rearticulates anti-systemic sentiment within reactionary frameworks.

What is distinctive about the Irish case is the role played by the self-proclaimed "citizen journalists" and far-right influencers, many of whom operate under anonymity or pseudonyms. Figures such as Philip Dwyer, Michael O'Keefe, and Rowan Croft, among many others, have leveraged social media to produce alternative narratives that merge anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric, anti-lockdown and Covid denial conspiracies, and ethnonationalist tropes (Day & McCormack, 2023). Whereas these narratives often draw from the global far-right repertoires, they become modified to appease the Irish public through references to revolutionary Irish sovereignty, often mentioning figures from the

Easter Rising or the hunger strikes and ignoring the left-wing ideological drive of the republican figures (Molloy, 2023).

Contradictorily, however, some of these mediatic actors or "influencers" have developed ideological and social ties with British and Northern Irish unionist/loyalist networks, publicly broadcast online. Shared anti-EU sentiment, resistance to a perceived "woke liberalism", and conspiracy theories such as the "Great Replacement" have created informal alliances that cut across traditional political divides (Day & McCormack, 2023; Simpson, 2024). This represents a new and unusual discursive formation where republican imagery coexists next to loyalist references, which become bound together by a transnational far-right ecosystem that seems to overlook deep historical conflict.

The porous nature of the online environment has also allowed far-right talking points to increasingly permeate mainstream discourse, particularly on local Facebook groups and community forums. While not explicitly far-right in content, these spaces often serve as gateways to more extreme positions, as they provide legitimacy to complaints about welfare/housing competition, casual racism, government corruption, or "the loss of Irish culture". The mainstreaming process is thus not top-down, but operates through affective proximity and algorithmic visibility, which rewards incendiary posts over non-controversial ones (Brown et al., 2023).

3.5 Counter-Movements and the Mobilised Irish Left

Despite the arguably over-visibility of the far right, it is important to note that one of the defining features of the current political moment in Ireland is the growing coordination of anti-fascist and leftist organisations. From trade unions and housing rights collectives to migrant solidarity groups, socialist, and pro-Palestine associations, a diverse array of counter-movements have emerged to contest the normalisation and mainstreaming of far-

right discourse, both online and on the streets. The Irish left, traditionally fragmented, has found some degree of unity in resisting the far right. Political parties such as People Before Profit, segments of Sinn Féin, and grassroots housing campaigns like CATU (Community Action Tenants Union) and Raise the Roof have sought to reframe the housing and welfare crisis as a class issue rather than as an immigration problem (Lima, 2021).

From a critical perspective, the left's role in this context is ambivalent. On the one hand, it provides the only viable counter-hegemonic discourse to the market logics and scapegoating of the far right. On the other hand, where the left fails to build rooted, class-conscious mobilisation in working-class areas, it risks vacating the field to reactionary forces, which have already created a central position for themselves within the (Western) mainstream (Worth, 2017). Importantly, far-right movements often gain ground not because they offer coherent political alternatives, but because progressive forces are perceived as distant, technocratic, or captured by elite liberalism (Cox, 2017). Additionally, Ireland's anti-fascist mobilisation tends to be reactive rather than strategic, in that it responds to far-right provocations with an incomplete long-term strategic plan.

Notwithstanding, not all is lost; these counter-movements do play a central role in disrupting the radical right-wing's attempt to monopolise political discontent. By refusing the false dichotomy of "locals versus migrants" and instead putting structural inequalities at the foreground, they contest the ideological terrain upon which the far right seeks to build hegemony. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, the mobilisation of the Irish left could represent an embryonic war of position that, while uneven, holds the potential to reframe the common sense of crisis away from racialised scapegoating and toward solidaristic critique.

4. Theoretical Framework

In seeking to understand the ideological and structural nature of the "Ireland Says No" movement, this dissertation adopts a Critical International Political Economy framework, anchored in neo-Gramscian theory. This theoretical approach offers an analytical lens capable of uncovering the dialectical relationships between political mobilisation, economic structure, and ideological reproduction. The far right's mobilisation in Ireland must not be thought of as a spontaneous or irrational response to social change, but rather as a political project that should be interpreted within the broader framework of neoliberal structuring and hegemonic crisis. As Cox (1981) describes, "ideology is a determining sphere of action which has to be understood in its connections with material power relations" (p. 141).

A critical approach, instead of a descriptive, institutionalist, or positivist one, is appropriate here in that it allows for a historical materialist reading of ideology, one that connects socio-economic transformations to political articulation. In contrast to mainstream theories that view populism or far-right movements as culturally driven or electorally strategic, this perspective understands these forces as contingent responses to global capitalist crises, mediated through specific historical and national contexts (Worth, 2011; Saull, 2015ab; Bruff & Tansel, 2019). Most importantly, critical theory, in contrast to problem-solving or positivist ones, "can be a guide to strategic action for bringing about an alternative order (Cox, 1981), which emphasises the normative character of the framework.

4.1 Critical International Political Economy: Beyond Problem-Solving

As first articulated by Robert Cox (1981; 1983), Critical IPE departs from orthodox approaches by rejecting the idea that theory is neutral or objective. Where "problem-

solving" theories accept the existing order as given and seek to optimise it, critical theory interrogates how that order came to be, and whose interests it serves. The question posed is thus not simply whether the Irish far right is electorally viable, but whether its ideology challenges or reinforces the broader neoliberal structure that has governed Ireland since the 1980s.

Cox's (1981) influential distinction between "social forces, forms of state, and world orders" (p. 138) allows us to understand political movements as products of, or responses to, historically specific configurations of global capitalism, and not as isolated phenomena. Therefore, this approach insists on connecting domestic political developments to the international organisation of production, finance, and class power (Cox, 1981; Rupert, 2000). In the Irish case, this means understanding how the post-crisis austerity regime, housing financialisation, and transnational capital flows form the background against which far-right mobilisation occurs.

A significant advantage of Critical IPE is its ability to link ideology to political economy without reducing either to the other, with its neo-Gramscian demonstration of how "globalisation was spread through the transnationalisation of class formations that strengthened and institutionalised the neoliberal world order" (Worth, 2011, pp. 120-1). This is particularly relevant in the assessment of the radical right, which often combines contradictory ideological elements (e.g. anti-elitism with neoliberal individualism, nationalism with global conspiracy). Rather than dismissing these contradictions as irrational, Critical IPE examines how they emerge from attempts to articulate a popular bloc in periods of hegemonic instability (Tansel, 2017; Bruff, 2014).

4.2 Neo-Gramscianism: Hegemony, Consent, and Historic Blocs

At the centre of this theoretical framework is a neo-Gramscian reading of power, as developed by Cox (1983), Gill (1993), and others, who reinterpreted Antonio Gramsci's political theory for the study of world orders. Gramsci's concept of hegemony refers to the capacity of a ruling class to secure consent of subordinate classes through cultural and ideological leadership, while diluting coercion (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony, in this sense, is never purely economic or political; it is an articulation of material and ideological forces that constitute a "historic bloc".

In contrast to a more deterministic Marxism, Gramsci conceptualised power as contingent, relational, and embedded in civil society. His idea of the war of position describes the slow, often invisible struggle over ideological legitimacy within society, differently, hence, which he refers to as a war of manoeuvre, a direct and revolutionary confrontation. Neo-Gramscians like Stephen Gill (1993) and Andreas Bieler (2004) thus have applied the concept to contemporary capitalism, arguing that consent to neoliberalism has been forged not only through institutional design but through a pervasive transformation of the "common sense".

Additionally, Gill's (1998) work on "new constitutionalism" demonstrates how neoliberal norms have been locked into national and international institutions, thereby insulating market rule from democratic accountability. Similarly, Rupert (2000) and Bieler and Morton (2004) show how the internationalisation of production and finance has restructured class power, giving rise to "transnational historic blocs" that maintain consent through both coercion and ideology management. Thus, in this context, counter-hegemony refers not just to opposition but to the construction of an alternative historic bloc, capable of offering a different vision of social order.

In periods of crisis, this hegemony can fracture (Hall, 2011). That is why Gramsci's concept of "passive revolution" can describe the post-2008 crisis response in Ireland. This concept entails the moments in which ruling classes enact limited reforms or tolerate new ideologies to contain crises without threatening core structures of power. In this case, the rollout of bailouts, technocratic governance, and austerity, among others, can be read in this light (Mercille & Murphy, 2015; Jessop, 2016). All things considered, the far right may, in this instance, be acting as a pressure valve, offering a veneer of systemic critique while diverting popular frustration away from capital and toward scapegoated minorities (Fraser, 2017; Worth, 2019).

4.3 Neoliberal Hegemony and Authoritarian Adaptation

The consolidation of neoliberalism since the 1980s must not be reduced to just market deregulation. It has been a hegemonic project aimed at restructuring social relations, identities, and state functions, to make the system ironclad. Harvey (2005) and Peck (2010) argue that neoliberalism achieved dominance through its ability to naturalise inequality and depoliticise economic suffering. This makes the neoliberal system more than just an economic order, as it becomes a mode of subject formation that generates alienation, competitiveness, and individualised responsibilisation (Brown, 2015).

In the recent years, however, neoliberalism has faced a crisis of legitimacy. The post-2008 period, which brought stagnant wages, housing insecurity, and political distrust, has exposed the contradictions of the neoliberal order. As Hall (2011) argues, these crises open a space for authoritarian populist responses to retain neoliberal economic priorities while adopting exclusionary, moralistic, or nationalist cultural frameworks. This is also what Bruff (2014) terms as "authoritarian neoliberalism", where

dissent is managed through legal repression, media manipulation, and racialised securitisation.

Ireland fits uneasily into this global trend. As already mentioned, its traditional party system has been more centrist and technocratic than polarised, suggesting that the emergence of grassroots far-right groups could be due to the failure of securing legitimacy by the disciplinary mechanisms of neoliberalism. Yet rather than advancing a transformative critique of the capitalist system which creates the Irish working class's precarisation, these movements often reproduce core neoliberal logics by blaming migrants for housing shortages, vilifying welfare recipients, and promoting punitivism.

As Worth (2015) argues, many far-right movements are not anti-capitalist but (para)hegemonic, as they adapt to the ideological field of neoliberalism by offering authoritarian solutions to economic grievances without threatening wealth accumulation from the capitalist class. Thus, from a critical perspective, the central analytical question is not whether a movement is anti-elite in rhetoric, but whether it rearticulates the social order in ways that challenge or reinforce the dominant historic bloc.

4.4 Application to the Irish Far Right

Applying this framework to the Irish case allows for a multidimensional analysis that does not take the far right's discourse at face value. A neo-Gramscian approach interrogates how these narratives function in the reproduction of hegemony. The "Ireland Says No" movement, with its opposition to asylum centres, cultural liberalism, and the EU, may appear anti-systemic, but this dissertation investigates whether such oppositions are substantive or symbolic.

Ireland's history of colonialism, religious nationalism, and late capitalist development provides a unique terrain for right-wing populist mobilisation. The

intersection of neoliberal austerity and postcolonial identity has the potential to create specific and uncommon articulatory possibilities, wherein certain struggles are seen in terms of national betrayal, racial contamination, or moral decline. As a side note, it might be relevant to consider the weight the Catholic church has historically had in Ireland and its influence in swaying popular thought, especially when it comes to the "true Irish identity" being heavily moralised (Fischer, 2016). All in all, this comes to be a representation of Hall's (2011) conception of the ideological displacements of material contradictions, where real hardships become politically constructed into false ones.

Finally, this framework is appropriate for the evaluation of a social movement, as it highlights the non-institutional forms of power that form the base of hegemonic struggles. It also avoids the liberal tendency to equate "populism" with democratic pathology, instead of treating it as a terrain of contestation whose direction is not predetermined. In this sense, such forms of critical analysis allow us to ask what the far right opposes, and most importantly, what kind of social order it implicitly endorses.

5. Methodology

This chapter demonstrates the methodological design used to explore whether the "Ireland Says No" movement constitutes a counter-hegemonic challenge to neoliberalism or a mobilisation that stabilises (and is stabilised by) the existing hegemonic order. Grounded in a critical theoretical tradition, the study adopts a qualitative case study framework designed to interrogate the ideological character of the contemporary far-right mobilisation in Ireland by understanding how it creates political meaning, constructs enemies, and interacts with power structures.

The case is approached through a critical epistemology, which understands knowledge as historically situated and thus inseparable from structures of domination and resistance. Another reason this framework is consistent with the dissertation's theoretical grounding is the conceptualisation of neo-Gramscianism's understanding of social phenomena as articulations of wider ideological, material, and institutional contradictions in a specific historical context (Cox, 1981; 1983).

The methodology focuses on uncovering how the Irish far right employs discourse to frame a crisis, assign blame, and propose (or obscure) solutions. Given the largely extra-parliamentary and digitally mediated essence of the "Ireland Says No" movement, a qualitative design allows for a nuanced interpretation of both texts generated by the proponents of the far right and secondary sources that comprise the movement's ideological universe. Rather than relying on the assumption that the far right presents a coherent set of doctrines, this study treats ideology as fragmented, contradictory, and produced in and through discourse.

5.1 Research Design

The choice of a qualitative case study stems from the need to examine a complex political phenomenon situated within a specific socio-historical and economic context. Case studies are well-suited for capturing the interplay between structure and agency, particularly when addressing political movements that draw upon contested discourses and fragmented ideological positions (George & Bennett, 2005; Yin, 2018).

This research is rooted in a critical research tradition that threatens knowledge production as historically contingent and shaped by power relations. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) argue, critical qualitative inquiry involves a process of ideological critique that seeks to uncover the social interests embedded in seemingly neutral political

narratives, making social science an inherently political act in itself (Lincoln et al., 2011). Therefore, in the interpretation of a social phenomenon, there must be a process of denaturalisation of taken-for-granted assumptions and of tracing how consent and domination are organised through cultural means (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997). Accordingly, the goal of this research is interpretative and analytical, as it interrogates how the Irish far right constructs meaning and secures legitimacy in a period of structural crisis.

The study's design is also embedded in the principles of Critical International Political Economy and neo-Gramscian theory, both of which highlight the importance of ideology, discourse, and class in shaping political mobilisation (Cox, 1981; Bevir, 2002). By examining a single movement in a defined national context, this methodology facilitates a sustained engagement with how social forces respond to neoliberal crisis conditions and compete over the construction of common sense.

5.2 Case Selection

The "Ireland Says No" protests, which gained momentum between 2023 and 2025, present us with a paradigmatic, and arguably unprecedented, instance of grassroots far-right mobilisation in Ireland. While lacking a robust partisan front, the movement itself reflects a growing current of anti-immigration sentiment, state and EU scepticism, and populism largely spread through social networks, felt all around the Western world. Its choice as a case study was informed by its visibility, persistence, and rhetorical reach across online and offline spaces.

This mobilisation emerged at a time of intensified social contradictions and real material loss among the working class, such as worsening housing insecurity, overstretching of public services, and post-pandemic economic pressures. Such a

historical situation provides an empirical entry point into analysing how far-right ideology gains traction among a particular social stratum and through which specific discursive strategies it does so. Focusing on a single, contextually rich case facilitates the detailed examination of ideological articulation, mobilisation practices, and hegemonic potential (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 2005).

5.3 Data Collection

The data corpus for this study includes digitally available materials, protest documentation, and secondary analysis produced by academics, journalists, civil society organisations (NGOs), and far-right party manifestos which advocate for the Ireland Says No movement (Irish Freedom Party and National Party). The reliance on publicly accessible content is due to the fragmented and opaque nature of the Irish far right, which rarely operates through formal channels or open institutions.

Therefore, sources include an array of tweets (posts made on X, formerly Twitter) that were selected for the appearance of the hashtag #IrelandSaysNo, tweets made by notable far-right "influencers", and by accounts with a significant following on the platform. This selection was also limited by the researcher's judgement to choose posts that were clearly made by Irish people. While this data does not offer a fully ethnographic insight into the internal organisation of the movement, it does provide sufficient material to trace ideological patterns, rhetorical strategies, and discursive paths followed.

5.4 Data Analysis

To interpret the data extracted from social media, this research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a primary method. CDA is a theoretical approach to the study of language that views discourse as constitutive of social reality and as embedded within systems of power and ideology (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2012; Wodak & Meyer,

2015). This method of analysis is especially suited for the examination of how political actors might use language to frame events, legitimise actions, and construct social antagonisms.

CDA draws on a dialectical understanding of the relationship between discourse and social structure in which discourse both reflects and shapes material conditions. It operates on the premise that language is not neutral but is profoundly implicated in the production and reproduction of social inequality. As Wodak (2015) outlines, far-right and populist discourses are marked by specific recurring features (e.g. anti-globalisation, scapegoating, and moral panic) that function ideologically to reframe complex situations into emotionally resonant binaries. To ensure a methodical arrangement of the data, the following table was used:

Discursive Strategy	**Operational Question**	**Post + Username**	**Relevance + Date**	**Analysis**
Nomination	How are actors labelled or named?		*Likes* *RT (Retweets)* *Views* *Followers* *Date*	*Construction of in-group/out-group, moralisation of identity…*
Predication	What attributes are attached to social actors?			*Assigning blame or virtue, reinforcing binary thinking…*
Argumentation	What justifications are given?			*Legitimisation of exclusion, appeal to crisis, morality, common sense…*
Perspectivation	Whose viewpoint is presented as legitimate?			*Establishment of authenticity and trust, marginalisation of counter-narratives…*
Mitigation/ Intensification	How is intensity adjusted?			*Modulation of aggression, amplification of urgency, determining*

				audience acceptability…

Table 1.

The analysis proceeds in three stages:

1. **Textual analysis:** Done through a close reading of social media posts and external sources like newspaper articles and NGO reports to identify recurring themes, lexical patterns, metaphors, and rhetorical devices. Special attention was paid to how immigrants, the state, leftist organisations, and "elites" were constructed and positioned.
2. **Discursive strategies:** Adapting Reisigl and Wodak's (2001) model, the study examined strategies of nomination (how actors are named), predication (what attributes are assigned), argumentation (what justifications are offered), and perspectivation (whose voice is privileged or excluded).
3. **Interdiscursivity and ideological framing:** Drawing from Fairclough (2003), the analysis explored how far-right discourse appropriates and reconfigures elements from broader cultural repertoires such as nationalism, Catholicism, or working-class grievance, to produce a common sense that is intelligible and politically viable.

Throughout, the analysis was also rooted in Gramsci's (1971) conception of hegemony, in particular to gain knowledge on the role of civil society in the reproduction of consent. CDA provides a methodological bridge between this theoretical frame of reference and the extracted data, allowing the researcher to interrogate how hegemonic or counter-hegemonic ideas are constructed through language, especially in social media.

An additional justification for such methodology comes from the fact that CDA has been widely used in similar studies on nationalism, populism, and the far right

(Wodak, 2015; Kryżanowski, 2020; KhosraviNik, 2010), and its compatibility with critical theory makes it particularly appropriate for research that aims to connect micro-level discourse with macro-level political and economic structures.

5.5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Several methodological limitations shape the scope of this research. Most notably, data availability presents an ongoing challenge, as the decentralised and often anonymised nature of the (Irish) far right makes access to internal communications, membership structures, or nationality/country of residence extremely limited. Much of the organising occurs through encrypted and secret channels (e.g. Telegram, Signal) that fall outside of the researcher's observational reach. Additionally, this anonymity complicates the attribution of authorship and accountability, especially with the mass proliferation of "bots" and engagement-seeking accounts that might not be "concerned Irish citizens" (Gallagher et al, 2023; Kakavand, 2024).

Additionally, archival instability is a main concern. Social media accounts and posts are frequently removed for violating platform guidelines, which complicates the reliability and traceability of sources. While archived material and media or NGO reports help to fill in these gaps, the ephemerality of such digital content remains a methodological weakness.

Another limitation relates to the safety and ethical boundaries of this landscape of research. No direct engagement or interviews were conducted with far-right actors or anti-fascist organisers, who could be inadvertently put in the spotlight, hence the prioritisation of non-invasive methods and the avoidance of risking the amplification of extremist content and voices. As such, the analysis remains at the level of discourse and representation, rather than organisational sociology or participant observation, which

limits the ability to draw robust conclusions about internal motivations, demographics, or strategic decision-making.

Additionally, the usernames of the accounts used for the recompilation of data will not be shown in their entirety in the Findings section in order to maintain the anonymity of the users (Williams et al., 2017). Although to ensure research reliability and authenticity, the full names and sources will be available in the Appendix, which will not be published or made publicly available at any time.

Finally, the qualitative nature of the research means that its generalisability is extremely limited. The findings apply primarily to the specific Irish case and the timeframe studied, which makes interpretative analysis the study's primary value, though comparative insights may emerge through future research.

6. Findings

The Ireland Says No movement, integrated within the Irish far right, employs a range of discursive strategies to construct an ideological framework that blends anti-immigration rhetoric with critiques of neoliberalism, state betrayal, and media manipulation. Through an analysis that considers social media posts (focused on the platform X, formerly Twitter, where communication is mostly text-based), party manifestos, news reports, and government and NGO documents, this section explores how the movement frames crisis, constructs identity, delegitimises elites, and grapples with internal contradictions.

6.1 Discursive Construction of Crisis and Threat

Framing of National Emergency

Across the data, the "Ireland Says No" movement consistently frames immigration as an existential threat, employing hyperbolic militaristic and dehumanising language such as "invasion" (@P, 14 June 2025; @W, 26 July 2024) and "flooding" (@W, 25 November 2024) to depict demographic change as a threat to national survival. Tweets like "Ballymullen Barracks, Tralee allegedly up next for an invasion of immigrants (…) No community is safe" (@W, 26 July 2024) or "The invasion of our countries is no accident, this is what the unelected dictators have decided for Europe" (@P, 14 June 2025) construct a narrative of imminent danger, reinforcing the idea that Ireland's sovereignty is under siege. This aligns with the far-right "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory, which claims that elites are orchestrating demographic change to displace native populations, and has been getting traction in the Irish far-right sphere (Bielenberg, 2022; Harrison, 2024; Thomas, 2021).

The narrative extends beyond social media into semi-mainstream discourse through alternative media outlets like *Gript*, that amplify this framing with headlines such as "Thousands attend Ireland Says No rally in Cork", followed by the subheadline that says the protesters were "opposing mass immigration" (Uí Bhriain, 2025) which appears as neutral but implies the assumption that there is indeed "mass migration". Consequently, this reinforces the idea of an unsustainable influx of migrants. The movement's rhetoric is directly linked to the one already extensively used by international far-right actors, such as Tommy Robinson (UK) and Tucker Carlson (USA), who have reinforced Ireland's immigration debate in terms of a "replacement", which always seems to be racially loaded (Gallagher, 2024, Carlson, 2025).

Additionally, street protest signs and speeches frequently pair these rhetorical tropes with the national flag, evoking the legacy of anti-colonial struggle while reframing contemporary migration as a comparable occupation. In the Limerick Says No protest of

the 14th of June of 2025, chants of "Mass deportations now!" were delivered alongside the slogan "Whose streets? Our streets!" (fieldnotes), formulation imported from earlier far-right street movements in Europe and North America[2].

CDA coding identifies argumentation strategies rooted in causal and consequence claims ("their country is being stolen" - @N, 14 June 2025), and intensification strategies amplifying perceived urgency ("the situation around Ireland is worsening daily" - @W, 26 July 2024). This framing fits Gramsci's notion of an "organic crisis" in which the legitimacy of the state is in question, yet here the crisis is reframed from a contradiction of capital to a demographic and cultural emergency. These perceived threats are amplified to justify radical political responses with the desired effect to legitimise extra-institutional mobilisation, including street protests, blockades, and in some cases riotous confrontation, all without articulating a critique of Ireland's embeddedness in global neoliberalism.

The "Ireland is Full" Narrative

The slogan "Ireland is Full" is central to the movement's messaging, suggesting that the state lacks the capacity to accommodate migrants due to housing shortages and strained public services. However, this narrative often ignores structural economic factors (e.g. neoliberal housing policies) and instead blames migrants, as seen in tweets accusing the government of "squandering €5.4B+ on illegals (2019-24) while Irish citizens live in fear" (@O, 6 August 2025), this conflates asylum seekers with economic burdens while it ignores the role of neoliberal austerity in Ireland's housing crisis (Duggan, 2023).

[2] Although the chant is said to have originated from the left, in the Stonewall riots of 1969 (Flash & Goodfriend, no date), as well as it being widely used by the Black Lives Matter movement, and countless other liberatory movements.

This narrative is further reinforced by local protests, such as the notorious Coolock and Ballymena ones, where demonstrators claimed that migrants were getting preferential treatment for welfare and coming to Ireland to take advantage of "our liberal housing policy" (*The Journal*, 2022). However, government reports and academic analyses contradict this, noting that most asylum seekers are housed in hotels and do not compete directly for housing (Cunningham, cited in *Time*, 2023; Meskill, 2023). The movement's selective framing displaces core societal issues wherein systemic failures are blamed on marginalised groups rather than governmental neoliberal policy. This displacement of class antagonism and the embrace of exclusionary politics of deservingness is accounted for by Fraser (1993) in her conception that neoliberalism produces a moral or deservingness imaginary, which prioritises "taxpayers" and "locals", deeming them worthy, and it implicitly casts migrants as parasitic competitors for limited resources.

6.2 Construction of Identity and Belonging

The "Ordinary Irish Citizen"

A recurring self-representation among activists and their supporters is the "working-class local" or "ordinary taxpayer" abandoned by the political elites. Online posts stress familial and productive identities ("Irish couples can't afford to have children" @S, 7 August 2025). CDA perspectivation legitimises claims through personal standpoint narratives, often in a maternal or paternal voice.

The Irish far-right movement, and, by default, the "Ireland Says No" one, constructs a homogenised "Irish identity" defined in opposition to both migrants and the political elites. Social media posts like "Foreign people and governments trying to usurp the rights of Irish people is a battle the Irish people have been fighting for centuries" (@R, 3 August 2025) reinforce an exclusionary nationalism that positions the movement as the

voice of the "real" Irish people. This moralised in-group identity is both ethno-cultural and neoliberal in that worthiness is linked to economic contribution, framing inclusion in the national community through productivity and fiscal responsibility. As with other European far-right movements, this nationalism is exclusionary by design. The "nation" is defined as white, Irish-born, and culturally conformist, collapsing civic identity into ethnos.

This discourse is also echoed in party manifestos. The National Party's principles state that "we support a positive policy of remigration to secure Ireland as the homeland of the Irish people", while the Irish Freedom Party's principles call for prioritising the Irish diaspora over other migrants. These statements also construct a racialised notion of citizenship, where belonging is tied to ethnicity rather than legal status.

"Illegal Immigrants" and "Foreign Men"

Migrants are consistently racialised and gendered, with social media posts emphasising "Oriental guy" and "unvetted single male migrants" (@W, 30 July 2025; 25 November 2024). The conflation of immigration with crime is also a recurring theme that perpetuates a racialised threat narrative, for example, we see this connection in: "An Irish woman was gang raped at the rugby world cup by Romanians. An Australian woman has been gang raped by 5 Africans… And people are still wondering why #CoolocksaysNo?" (@U, 23 July 2024)

Such rhetoric mirrors global far-right tropes that frame migrant men as sexual predators (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020; Gallagher et al., 2023; McGuirk, 2025). The movement's focus on "foreign men" also reflects a broader Islamophobic discourse, in which Muslim migrants are depicted as inherently violent and misogynistic (Carr, 2025).

This discourse securitises migration, portraying migrants as both a criminal and sexual threat, particularly to women and children. Brown's (2015) account of securitised neoliberalism becomes relevant here in the sense that the state is simultaneously cast as failing to protect and as an agent of unwelcome demographic change. This enables calls for enhanced policing and restrictive migration policies.

6.3 The Role of the State and Elites

Betrayal from Above

Anti-elite populism pervades both street speeches and online commentary, as politicians are labelled "traitors" and "sell-outs" (@M, 4 November 2024), and mainstream parties are collapsed into an indistinct establishment ("Sinn Féin are no different to Fine Gael" - @W, 25 November 2024). The movement frames the Irish government and EU as traitors, accusing them of prioritising migrants over "Irish locals". For example, "Irish tax payers' money is being used to house foreigners before our own people" (@P, 7 August 2025) constructs a binary of "us" (the betrayed) versus "them" (the corrupt government). This can align with Cox's (1987) conception of transnational capitalist classes, though here elites are seen as complicit in global neoliberalism at the expense of the nation. Additionally, this narrative is reinforced by party manifestos, such as the Irish Freedom Party's call for "Irexit" to reclaim sovereignty from the EU (IFP Manifesto, no date).

Mainstream media reports note that this anti-establishment rhetoric resonates in working-class communities where distrust of the government is high (Murray, 2024). However, research highlights that far-right actors exploit this disillusionment by positioning themselves as the only alternative to a failing political class (Doherty, 2025). Thus, these critiques rarely interrogate the structural integration of Ireland's economy into EU fiscal rules, global capital flows, and property speculation, and when they do, they

wildly misrepresent it. Finally, systemic critiques by the far right remain moralised and personalised.

NGOs and the Media as Enemies

The movement portrays NGOs and mainstream media as tools of elite control. Tweets that position RTÉ as "state-funded propaganda" (@J, 7 August 2025) or ones that claim that "these NGOs do NOT act in the interests of our people" (@L, 3 November 2024) delegitimise institutions that challenge far-right narratives. Thus, civil society actors are framed as profiteers and propagandisers, which reflects predication strategies attributing corrupt motives, and perspectivation strategies that delegitimise their authority. This agrees with the EDMO's findings on "trading up the chain", where far-right groups manipulate media coverage to amplify their message, especially by spreading disinformation about Irish history, which is subsequently used to frame immigration as an invasion analogous to the British occupation and "plantations" (Park & Kelly, 2023).

The National Party's manifesto explicitly targets the media, stating: "The media, political elites, and Garda Commissioner have all described yesterday's riot as being led by the 'far-right'. This term has become so overused that it has lost all meaning" (National Party Statement, 2023). This reflects a wider strategy of dismissing criticism as "fake news", another tactic borrowed from global far-right movements (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021). In sum, the attacks on NGOs and journalists construct them as complicit in a "globalist agenda" (National Party, 2023) that suppresses dissent, but the overall critique still remains at the level of the individual or organisational malfeasance, missing potential points of convergence with other anti-neoliberal struggles.

6.4 Internal Contradictions and Ideological Incoherence

Libertarian vs. Authoritarian Tensions

The movement oscillates between libertarian rhetoric (e.g. opposing state "control", resistance to "EU dictatorship") and authoritarian demands (e.g. mass deportations, capital punishment in the National Party manifesto). For instance, some posts condemn "RUC-style" policing of protests (@D, 9 June 2025) while calling for enhanced enforcement against migrants (@O, 6 August 2025). This tension reflects the far right's uneasy relationship with neoliberalism, one which rejects state intervention for capital but demands it for policing borders.

Similarly, while the movement critiques government spending on migrants, it ignores the role of corporate landlords and vulture funds in Ireland's housing crisis (Ó Ceannabháin, 2024). This selective outrage suggests an ideological alignment with neoliberalism's economic policies, even as the movement claims to oppose the system. Worth (2019), citing Davidson (2015), agrees in that "many far-right discourses might seem to contradict international capitalism – especially in terms of limiting freedom of movement, through anti-immigration measures, thus limiting the growth of capital – these are often played out in the realm of existing class relations" (p. 14), clearly stating the internal contradictions of the ideology.

Neoliberal Logics Embedded in Anti-Establishment Discourse

Despite its anti-systemic posture, the movement's focus on "taxpayer money" and "free housing for immigrants" inadvertently reinforces neoliberal fiscal paranoia and market individualism. CDA argumentation here moralises deservingness, framing welfare as a reward for contribution rather than a right. The Irish Freedom Party's manifesto, for example, critiques EU "centralisation" while advocating for hyper-privatisation ("free

productive enterprise"). This paradox highlights the argument that far-right movements often reproduce the very neoliberal logics they claim to oppose.

The incoherence is further evident in the far right's electoral failures in the country. While it mobilised street protests effectively, the inability to present coherent policies on housing or healthcare led to poor electoral performance (*The Journal*, 2024). As Harris (2024) notes, "the far right performed poorly in the election because the main parties chose to play down immigration as a campaign issue", highlighting the movement's reliance on single-issue politics. This supports Worth's (2019) argument that far-right mobilisation often deepens rather than disrupts market rationality, repositioning neoliberal scarcity logics within a nationalist frame.

6.5 Analysis

The findings presented show that the "Ireland Says No" movement's discourse and practice are best understood as a reactive form of mobilisation that rearticulates the grievances of the post-crisis Irish working and lower-middle classes through exclusionary nationalism rather than systemic critique. From a critical perspective, this aligns with the broader pattern identified by Worth (2015; 2019) and Bruff (2014), in which far-right actors capture discontent generated by neoliberal restructuring but redirect it away from capital and towards socially divisive targets.

The repeated invocation of crisis narratives, from "invasion" to "replacement", is paradigmatic in Gramsci's (1971) concept of an "organic crisis", but here the antagonism is framed in cultural-demographic terms rather than economic ones. In neoliberal Ireland, where the 2008 financial crisis entrenched austerity, privatisation, and housing commodification, this reframing allows the state and capital to evade scrutiny while

societal anger is channelled towards migrants, NGOs, and political elites as moral (and profiteering) betrayers.

Scarcity framing, encapsulated in the "Ireland is Full" slogan, demonstrated how neoliberal logics of competition and deservingness have been internalised by the movement's rhetoric. While keeping a neoliberal mentality, the movement opposes "progressive neoliberalism" in that, rather than aligning multiculturalism with market liberalism, the far right offers monoculturalism as the moral counterpart to market discipline, justifying exclusion as a rational allocation of scarce resources (Fraser, 2022). Interestingly, the movement does not reject the "welfare state" that the more radical neoliberal front would, but they embrace welfare-chauvinism with the argument that "the welfare state has become untenable due to the culture of dependency (of non-ethnic nationals)" (Worth, 2015, p. 162)

Identity construction within the movement reveals an ethno-national moral economy in which the "ordinary Irish citizen" is defined by productivity, fiscal contribution, and cultural belonging. This conflation of economic worth and ethnocultural identity resonates with Brown's (2015) account of how neoliberal doctrines infiltrate even ostensibly illiberal political projects. Migrants, racialised and Muslim men in particular, are positioned as undeserving and threatening as a way to legitimise securitisation and border enforcement, which follows the global patterns of the far right described by Joppke (2021).

The anti-elite populism of the movement, while rhetorically potent, remains structurally thin. By targeting politicians, NGOs, and journalists as corrupt or complicit, the movement stops short of interrogating Ireland's embedded position within the transnational fiscal market (especially the economic dependence on the United States), or the core causes of international migration. This absence of structural analysis reflects

Bruff's (2014) argument that authoritarian populism can function as a stabilising force for neoliberalism by focusing on governance style while ignoring the economic structure. Nevertheless, the disengagement with mainstream politics from the followers of the movement due to their rejection of "the elites" might help with the now electorally irrelevant Irish far-right parties' success in the future (Betz, 1993).

Additionally, the contradictions within the movement, such as the seesawing between libertarian calls for freedom and authoritarian demands for deportation and surveillance, give further support to Worth's (2015) contention that far-right mobilisation under neoliberalism is ideologically incoherent but strategically functional. In other words, these contradictions let the movement be appealing to multiple ideological frames while reinforcing core neoliberal tenets (e.g. individual responsibility, marketisation/commodification of basic needs, and naturalisation of scarcity).

In sum, the Ireland Says No movement is counter-hegemonic in its rejection of neoliberal multiculturalism but hegemonic in its reproduction of neoliberal economic anxieties and racialised scapegoating. Therefore, it reflects the resiliency of neoliberal hegemony with its articulation of economic crisis as a cultural one, channels class injustice into exclusionary nationalisms, and reinforces the market's moral economy, yet fails to offer a coherent alternative to the neoliberal order it ostensibly opposes.

The movement's reliance on social media amplification, conspiracy theories, and transnational far-right networks (Gallagher et al., 2023; Cannon et al., 2022) highlights its hybrid nature, that being simultaneously grassroots and astroturfed, local and global. While it has not yet achieved electoral dominance, its ability to shape public discourse through online and offline mobilisation poses a significant challenge to Ireland's political establishment.

7. Discussion

The empirical findings presented in this study suggest that the "Ireland Says No" movement, while articulating itself as a radical, grassroots challenge to the political establishment, operates within a discursive and ideological terrain largely compatible with neoliberal hegemony. This interpretation falls in line with the neo-Gramscian proposition that political movements should be analysed in terms of their relationship to the lived historic bloc, instead of through self-ascribed ideological labels or surface-level opposition (Cox, 1981). The movement's rhetorical construction of crisis, identity and antagonism, as revealed by the Critical Discourse Analysis of social media posts, is illustrative of a hegemonic posture, in which systemic discontent is absorbed into exclusionary, racist frameworks, thereby preserving the economic and political structures it claims to resist.

From the standpoint of Critical International Political Economy, this outcome does not come as a surprise. The Irish far right's discourse selectively critiques aspects of the neoliberal order (that being, EU integration or a perceived elite cosmopolitanism) while tacitly reproducing its essential values of moral and economic logics, which as previously stated, are the marketisation of welfare, competitive individualism, and the naturalisation of scarcity, among others. Through the centering of populist and nativist discourse in the political sphere, a process of naturalisation of violence and discrimination becomes embedded within the confines of neoliberalism (Wodak, 2020; Mudde, 2019) This comes to demonstrate Bruff's (2014) "authoritarian neoliberalism", or the adaptation of market rationales to exclusionary and punitive governance, particularly through racialised border regimes. In effect, the "Ireland Says No" movement's opposition to neoliberal multiculturalism does not constitute a rupture from the neoliberal historic bloc, but it

represents a cultural rearticulation of it, becoming one that aims to resolve legitimacy crises without threatening capital accumulation.

Importantly, the findings confirm the utility of a discourse-oriented methodology for revealing these dynamics. That is, by analysing nomination, predication, perspectivation, argumentation, and mitigation/intensification of messaging, CDA ensured the exposure of how far-right actors in Ireland construct the "ordinary Irish citizen" as both ethnically bounded and economically productive. This framing fuses nationalist identity with neoliberal deservingness criteria, which supports Laclau's (2005) notion that populist chains of equivalence can bind disparate issues into a coherent "common sense" even when underlying material causes remain unaddressed. In neo-Gramscian terminology, the far right's war of position is being waged in cultural terms and remoulding political imaginaries to siphon disaffection away from systemic and structural critique and directing it toward scapegoated others.

Nevertheless, the findings also point to significant internal contradictions within the movement, particularly between the libertarian anti-state rhetoric and the authoritarian demands, such as coercive border control. These tensions may limit the coherence of the movement's political project, but as Worth (2015) notes, incoherence does not preclude functionality; instead, it could be argued that a diffuse or boundless ideological framework may broaden the appeal across ideologically fragmented constituencies, thereby reinforcing hegemonic stability.

7.1 Methodological and Theoretical Implications

The application of Critical Theory, particularly Critical Political Economy and neo-Gramscian theory, proved effective in situating the "Ireland Says No" movement within broader processes of neoliberal social and economic reproduction and ideological

manufacturing. Unlike descriptive, positivist, or purely cultural analyses, this approach emphasised the structural pillars of far-right mobilisation in Ireland, and revealed how movements that appear anti-systemic in rhetoric may still operate as integral to hegemonic reproduction (Rupert, 2000; Saull, 2015b). The reliance on CDA as a bridge between micro-level discourse and macro-level political economy was a particular strength, as it enabled the analysis to remain grounded in empirical data while engaging with more abstract theoretical concepts.

However, the research design also imposed constraints on the objective to obtain a heuristic overlook of this particular far-right movement. The reliance on publicly available, exclusively online material means that organisational dynamics, membership demographics, and offline mobilising structures were unable to be analysed in depth. Moreover, the certainty with which claims about authorship or audience impact could be made was limited by the ephemerality of digital content and the difficulty of verifying identity and authenticity (given the prevalence of bots and accounts run under pseudonyms). A mixed-methods design incorporating ethnographic observation or structured interviews could help address these gaps, though such approaches usually raise significant ethical and safety concerns when engaging with extremist actors.

In sum, a strength was the study's ability to connect discourse analysis with macro-structural analysis, offering a multidimensional account of the Irish far right's ideological positioning. Additionally, the focus on a non-electoral and extremely current grassroots movement fills an inadvertent gap in Irish far-right scholarship up to this point, which has, at times, prioritised party politics (O'Malley, 2008; Fattibene et al., 2024). The integration of both domestic and transnational dimensions of far-right discourse also reinforces the contribution by emphasising Ireland's embeddedness in global far-right networks, particularly British and North American.

Admittedly, case study research like the one undertaken inherently limits generalisability, albeit not being the ultimate goal of the study. The Irish context offers a unique post-colonial and political-economic specificity, whose uniqueness inevitably constrains the extent to which conclusions can be extrapolated to other singular movement cases. Furthermore, focusing being near-exclusively on discourse assumes the risk of undermining material organisational capacities, funding structures, and even behind-the-scenes political linkages that may shape the movement's trajectory and success.

7.2 Implications for Further Research

Future research could successfully adopt a comparative framework by examining whether similar para-hegemonic dynamics emerge in other post-crisis European contexts where far-right movements mobilise, particularly around endless austerity, migration, and, most relevantly in Europe, housing shortages. Future long-term studies could also potentially reveal whether movements such as "Ireland Says No" consolidate into more coherent ideological projects or if they shatter under strategic contradictions by tracking shifts in discourse over time. Finally, closer attention to the interaction between far-right and leftist counter-movement strategies in Ireland could illuminate how hegemonic struggles are contested in real time, most importantly, in working-class communities that represent essential battlegrounds for both sides of the political spectrum.

In short, the study demonstrates that the "Ireland Says No" movement is a clear example of a form of reactive (and reactionary) nationalism that reinforces neoliberal hegemony by reframing class-rooted injustices as cultural antagonisms, and it arguably strengthens it. The study also highlights the importance of analysing far-right mobilisation through a critical politico-economic lens, which can reveal how such

movements operate less as ruptures in the hegemonic order than as its adaptive components or even its symptoms of decay.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation set out to assess the far-right induced "Ireland Says No" movement to evaluate its constitution as a rupture from the neoliberal hegemonic order, or if paradoxically, it contributes to its stabilisation. Reading the movement through a critical theoretical framework, particularly a critical political economy lens with a neo-Gramscian conception of hegemony, the analysis concluded that the movement performs a selective negation of multiculturalism, largely brought by global neoliberalism and post-colonial relations with the Global South, while reinforcing, morally and discursively, the very market logics and scarcity imaginaries that produced working-class precarisation in the first place. In other words, the movement is anti-systemic in style, but compatible with the material and ideological contours of the existing historic bloc (Gramsci, 1971; Cox, 1981).

Theoretically, this finding is relevant because it denies the simple binary of anti-system vs. pro-system and instead maps where the Irish far right exists within a field of ideological competition. The movement's central rhetorical manoeuvres (moralisation of welfare, naturalisation of scarcity, racialisation of insecurity/crime, housing competition, and delegitimisation of public/media institutions) effectively convert the structural "faults" of neoliberalisation into legible cultural issues that appeal to emotion. This phenomenon reproduces the processes that scholars such as Harvey (2005) and Brown (2015) identify as the political economy of neoliberal subjectivity, while also fitting Jessop's (2016) account of how consent and submission to market rule are reproduced in

civil society and culture. In Gramscian terms, the "Ireland Says No" movement is actively engaged in a war of position by shifting the terrain of common sense so that neoliberal scarcity becomes understood as an identitarian issue rather than one of distribution of power and resources. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that Ireland does not exist in a vacuum and that far right ideology is rapidly gaining political terrain in the Global North, from Trump's America to the increasingly popular Farage in the UK, and Spain's Vox at the top of the polls, especially the populist/nativist ones that include a methodical advocacy for a neoliberal social reality (Phelan, 2014).

Despite the limitations encountered by CDA and the methodology used, which makes the discernment between the social movement's nature as a rhetorical current and occasional protests and riotous events, and its potential as a durable political power blurry, there is a value in recognising these gaps as they can be used as pointers for coming projects which does not necessarily undermine the study's central empirical claim. Therefore, why does this piece of research matter in practical and political terms?

I argue that understanding the mechanisms by which far-right mobilisations mould material shortcomings into cultural and identitarian threats is a prerequisite for defeating them. Analytical awareness about how the far right displaces class-based questions onto questions of nationality and deservingness suggests three interrelated strategies for counter-mobilisation. First, policy: without losing sight of capitalism's nature, which inherently breeds structural inequality, by ameliorating the material conditions of the working class, most evidently housing and labour precarity, fertile terrain for far-right extremism is removed (Fanning, 2011; Harvey, 2005). Second, discursive intervention: exposing the para-hegemonic logic (how structural injustices are blamed on migrants rather than the economic system and its beneficiaries) undercuts the nationalist moral economy. Third, organisational politics from below: building a counter-hegemonic bloc

that links redistributional demands to inclusive cultural narratives, following Fraser's (2017) call for progressive-populist alignments and Mouffe's (2019) argument that emancipatory politics must construct new collective identities, thus avoiding sectarianism-inducing identity politics.

Many scholars (Cox, 1981; Horkheimer, 1982; Worth, 2011) contend that critical theory is necessarily normative and must be explicitly liberatory. In this case, the neo-Gramscian analytic tools employed throughout the dissertation are explanatory, but most importantly, they indicate where consent is manufactured and therefore, where emancipatory praxis can intervene. The broader scholarly and civic significance of such research thus lies less in the investigation of the movement's pure stance on being anti- or pro-neoliberal, and more in equipping progressive actors with conceptual maps and practical routes for intervention. By showing how exclusionary identitarian ideologies co-opt working-class grievances, the study provides a diagnostic instrument that leads us to the conclusion that the far right should be outflanked discursively by offering competing frames that make redistribution intelligible and desirable to a broader ideological radius.

Finally, if there is a single, modest hope this piece of research offers, it is that diagnosing the hegemonic nature of far-right movements can be a strategic tool to pinpoint how and where consent is manufactured. Nevertheless, research based on critical theory that stops at diagnosis is incomplete; therefore, it should foreground liberatory means of knowledge production. In this case, to counter the "Ireland Says No" far-right mobilisation (and the broader European extreme right-wing currents), scholars and activists must combine rigorous analysis with an emancipatory project: redistributive policies, discourses that bind struggles together, and an organisation capable of winning consent for a more just social order.

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