



Home, identity, and populism: far-right housing politics beyond neoliberalism in Germany and the UK

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Abstract. This paper examines far-right policy proposals, ideological positions, and protest strategies around housing to explore how a now well-established far right across Europe may convert its electoral successes into policy platforms which reflect ethno-national agendas and which, crucially, might break with received affinities between the populist right and neoliberalism. To this end we consider two forms of engagement with *the housing question* on the far right. First, we chart emergent discourses in branches of Germany's AfD party on housing policy, focusing particularly on a new identitarian critique of free-market housing policies among the younger, more intellectually oriented wing of the party and its wider ideological orbit. These arguments position housing as a key responsibility of a nationally conscious state, and as a means to promote rooted forms of German family life within a “social–national” framework. In the UK context, by contrast, we examine how housing becomes an arena for nativist claims around national belonging and deservingness of social support through a study of far-right mobilisation against so-called “asylum hotels” through the summer of 2025. Here, racialised social media and press reporting, as well as a policy landscape which works through outsourcing and privatisation to drive asylum seekers and refugees to the margins of public life, reveals a paradoxical situation where the demands of the far right have already effectively been realised by a bipartisan commitment among successive governments to keep asylum seekers precariously housed and limit their access to the housing market. While the German case reveals a far right more advanced in its consideration of the role of housing in an ethno-nationalist programme, compared to a loosely-organised UK far right mobilising sporadically (but intensively) around the contradictions of privatised housing policy, both cases reveal how housing operates as a site of increasing right-wing claim-making about national identity, as well as one of material exclusions. With an eye to the internal dynamics among these far-right formations, and the way these materialise spatially, we consider how these two formations may interact in the future, before discussing how these developments may be resisted.

1 Introduction

How do we stem the rising tide of the far right? A common answer in progressive circles is to rally around bread-and-butter, material issues; if the right stokes symbolic fears about immigration and culture wars, the left should respond with principled and grounded messaging foregrounding everyday concerns – transport, rent, the cost of living. Hope is thereby placed in the idea that concrete policy issues are resistant to right-wing incursion in a way which cultural or symbolic issues – patriotism, national identity, flags – are not. The assumption running parallel to this, often justified, is that

far-right politicians are primarily invested in fearmongering, scapegoating, and culture-war theatrics and do not maintain consistent positions on questions of social policy or, if they do, that they replicate a boilerplate neoliberal stance, pro-market and anti-bureaucracy. But as the far right's electoral rise transitions into a more established phase, we ask whether these assumptions about politics and ideology are still sound. To this end we consider two forms of engagement with *the housing question* on the far right, in Germany and the UK, where new policy-oriented thinking around housing and the flash points of the 2025 “hotel protests” provide contrasting

entry points into far-right engagement with this issue. While it would be wrong to think of the far right as developing in a straightforward linear style, these contexts present a far-right movement clearly in different moments of a broader political trajectory. While the UK presents a strongly digitally mediated far-right ecosystem with relatively little central organising infrastructure, manifesting in periodic, event-focused riots against migrants, the far right in Germany has moved from this more uncoordinated style, peaking in the “baseball bat years” of the 1990s (Reinfrank and Brausam, 2016), to become a much more institutionalised political force, with the housing issue already being discussed by intellectuals and political parties.

One issue at stake in this discussion is the relationship of these developments to neoliberalism, particularly to the emergence of various “post-neoliberal” (Davies and Gane, 2021) dynamics of our present conjuncture. As we witness the demise of postwar consensus around globalisation, free trade, a rules-based international order (Jones, 2025) and the consolidation of a transnational far right rallying around a critique of liberalism and cultural globalisation (Abrahamson et al., 2024), it is more than likely that straightforwardly neoliberal, pro-market positions will cease to be the default options for far-right parties entering office. Our examination of Germany’s far-right policy figures reveals a network of thinkers far more comfortable with the idea (the necessity, even) of intervention in the market and who position housing as a key responsibility of a nationally conscious state. Meanwhile in the UK, a commitment to private-sector-led business-as-usual policies in the accommodation of asylum seekers has created a pattern of radicalising far-right street protests around asylum and housing, which call for ever-more drastic and violent solutions to this particular housing question. These are not nationally siloed developments; indeed, we detect a number of resonances in the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary right in both contexts, whose significance we later consider in relation to housing politics.

Methodologically, the paper uses a comparative approach to identify contrasts, parallels, and lessons between these distinct but interrelated contexts. It proceeds in the relational spirit of comparative geographies (Ren, 2023), which does not posit cases as “local variants of a more general phenomenon” but investigates how these cases “are constituted in relation to one another through power-laden practices in the multiple, interconnected arenas of everyday life” (Hart, 2006:996). We are thus sensitive to the spatiotemporal differences between the far-right formations in our two settings, whose articulations with civil society and the state and who’s everyday spatialisations adopt a distinct texture as a result. This sensitivity informs our choice of empirical material in each case; rather than a like-for-like contrast, we explore different empirical entry points to account for the distinct organisational, ideological, and spatial expressions of the far right between Germany and the UK. In the German case, we examine programmatic material from AfD manifestos and pol-

icy documents and articles by intellectuals of the New Right, forums where novel ideological claim-making relating to housing issues on the German right is currently being developed. In the British case, where these connections between an established radical-right party and an intellectual/ideological milieu are less developed, we examine social media material and investigative reporting on street protests around the housing of asylum seekers. The differences in the organisational and ideological formation of the radical right between these two cases mean the issue of housing is likewise connoted differently in each: in the German case as an object of policymaking and in the British case as an object of sporadic street-level mobilisation and protest. Nonetheless, and following the call from Beveridge et al. (2024:10) for comparative research which uncovers “the contradictions, deficiencies and malleability of right-wing populist promises”, we argue that the cases converge in ways that support a discussion of a number of pressing issues, including how housing works as a site of ideological claim-making about the nation and how this may enable the radical right to explore politics which move beyond neoliberal orthodoxy.

This paper now proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents a brief review of the interdisciplinary and geographical literature on how housing has been approached by fractions of the far right, which reveals that housing is a very fertile ground for infrastructural populism and that the right is beginning to exploit this to its advantage. Section 3 introduces the German side of the case study, exploring internal dynamics within the AfD party on the question of rent and housing and how these debates are mediated through a split between a neoliberal and a more “social-national” wing of the party. Section 4 pivots to consider a more specific far-right mobilisation around housing in the case of accommodation for asylum seekers in the UK, revealing both a less ideologically developed position on the proper orientation of the right towards housing policy, but also a situation where an extremely restrictive approach to the governance of housing is already the norm. Section 5 brings together lessons from the two cases and their potential to speak to each other in the future before Sect. 6 offers some brief reflections on how these developments might be resisted.

2 The far right and “the housing question”

Right-wing mobilisations around “the housing question” (to use the phrase of Friedrich Engels, 1973) are all the more striking for the fact that this is a domain where the left, historically, has been on much firmer ground. From social reformers like Charles Booth to young socialists like Engels, critiques of inadequate housing and calls for its provision as a basic right have long been at the heart of reformist and radical political programmes. In our own time, urban social movements have positioned housing as a central social question, key to participation in civic life. Housing is a way of

asserting rights to the city, especially for tenants and tenant associations (Vollmer, 2018; Schipper, 2017), and struggles around housing – through occupations, squats, or rent strikes – have been theorised as an avenue for emancipatory and insurgent urban politics (García-Lamarca, 2017; Martínez, 2019). The territorial practices of activists around blocking evictions and occupying empty housing give this politics a distinctly spatial, physical dimension and pose direct challenges to a market system which produces both an abundance of (empty) housing units and a desperate scarcity of good-quality, affordable residences. Housing has therefore always been an issue that lends itself well to populist mobilisation (Hochstenbach, 2025; Karlsson and Ördén, 2025), which ruptures an established order and stages a confrontation between a “many” who assert a right to shelter and bodily survival, and a “few” who would keep housing wrapped within the commodity form (Swyngedouw, 2011). In recent years, this has been particularly evident among left-wing groups, as demonstrated by protests and expropriation campaigns (Vollmer, 2023; Strobel, 2020).

But housing is not only an “urban” question and not only of interest to the left. Increasingly, right-wing groups are also turning their attention to housing politics (Domann and Hölzl, 2021; Ludwig and Mießner, 2022; Kreil, 2019). It is often argued that the way in which someone lives – whether in their own home, in rented accommodation, in the city, or in the countryside – already informs and conditions their political views in various ways: the bigger the house, the more conservative the person, one could say (Beckmann et al., 2020, Ronald, 2008); however, this correlation does not always hold true. In some cases, it is specific neighbourhood dynamics – particularly socio-economic and cultural changes within neighbourhoods – that lead to a shift in political attitudes (Santamarina and Ince, 2025). Changes in the neighbourhood act as a trigger point (see Mau et al., 2023) at which society shifts, turning communities against rather than towards one another (Reichle and Bescherer, 2021). This individualisation can lead to more populist sentiment and hostility towards “the new” – migrants, wealthy students, property owners (Bescherer and Reichle, 2022). It is therefore clear that the housing issue holds enormous potential not only to reach a large number of people, but also to put autonomous ideas into practice by renegotiating the distribution of housing.

Pulling together various strands of scholarship from regional studies and political science, Waldron (2021) sketches a research agenda at the interface of housing, populism, and place, exploring the interplay of “housing system dynamics, housing precarity and political disaffection”. While some existing research does chart the relationships between financial precarity, housing market dynamics, and populist electoral geographies (Ansell, 2019; Rugh, 2020; Adler and Ansell, 2020; Kiss et al., 2020), Waldron (2021:1220) focuses our attention on how the lived experience of precarity as mediated through “housing affordability, accessibility, security and the

physical qualities of home and place” comes to manifest spatially as disaffection, invitingly “available” (Anderson and Secor, 2022) for populist mobilisation. Waldron (2021) suggests the idea of “housing discontent” to account for this relationship between housing- and place-based anxiety on the one hand with polarised political attitudes and protest voting on the other.

Some geographers have also approached this interface via the rubric of “infrastructural populism” (Beveridge et al., 2024; Domann, 2024; Domann et al., 2025), uncovering how various aspects of social infrastructure, such as education (Hussain and Yunus, 2021) and healthcare (Speed and Mannion, 2020), are being enrolled within populist political programmes in ways that depart from the straightforwardly deregulationist, privatising, and individualist tendencies of neoliberalism (see Joppke, 2021). Populism maps onto this dynamic in three ways: first, the rejection of the elite who are responsible for infrastructural problems; second, the grievances of marginalised groups who could be excluded from infrastructures (Domann, 2024); and third, the mobilisation of “parts of society formerly seen as far beyond their traditional base of supporters” (Beveridge et al., 2024:2). This engagement with social infrastructure, including but not limited to housing, does not demonstrate a rejection of “the social” or the idea of public services, but rather recasts these areas as the exclusive entitlements of the “native people”. Indeed, the very senses of ontological certainty and security that discourses of nationhood promise to provide (Ahmed, 2004) are perhaps best accessed via these concrete areas such as housing, which fundamentally shape people’s feelings of rootedness, belonging, and sense of place. Within the very real atmosphere of precarity emerging from life in increasingly financialised and unequal housing markets, the “housing question” displays strong potentialities for further involvement in populist spatial programmes (Waldron, 2022). Like in other infrastructural aspects, housing is “a field of political struggle where right wing populists can position themselves as defenders of the people” (Beveridge et al., 2024:12). The concept of infrastructural populism therefore works as an arena for better illuminating the strategies of the far right (Özatağan and Eraydin, 2025), especially in regard to housing. Below we use this infrastructural approach to populism to show how, on the one hand, the far right deploy critiques of the housing market as part of a broader ideological critique of (neo)liberalism and, on the other hand, mobilise stochastically around housing issues to incite resentment and hate towards the nation’s “others”.

3 Between neoliberalism and Germany First – different approaches to far-right housing policies

Germany is predominantly a renters’ country, with one of the highest proportions of the population residing in rented accommodation in Europe, which underlines the importance of

affordable rental housing (Abou-Chadi et al., 2025). In the early 2000s numerous municipal housing stock units were privatised and sold to investors, which is one of the primary factors why Germany now lacks a large amount of affordable housing (Aalbers and Holm, 2008; Holm, 2011; Heeg, 2013). Consequently, housing became a topic; everyone has their opinion, and every political group debates about it. In recent years this discourse gained a new member when the far right discovered housing as a new arena for developing a social policy agenda (Domann and Hölzl, 2021; Ludwig and Mießner, 2022).

In 2022, a speech in the German Bundestag by Roger Beckamp, who sits in the parliament for the AfD, caused a stir (Deutscher Bundestag, 2022; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2025:395). Under the title *Deportation creates living space (Abschieben schafft Wohnraum)*, the AfD politician incited hatred against migrants and placed them in the context of the housing issue. He claimed that the demand for housing was growing for three reasons: first the increasing number of one- or two-person households, second the internal migration to cities, and third the so-called “mass immigration” since 2015.

Political decisions that can generally be summarised under the heading of immigration often disadvantage people on low incomes. ... This then leads to these households paying for the homes of hundreds of thousands of new citizens with their taxes, but finding it difficult to find homes themselves, let alone affordable ones. ... You do not have to be an expert to realise that over a million refugees need housing, which is then lacking on the housing market for the local population (Deutscher Bundestag, 2022:684, authors’ translation).

The connection between housing, social participation, and migration is thus finally established. While earlier protests largely focused on opposition to the accommodation of asylum seekers – such as the protests during the “baseball bat years” of the 1990s (Zschocke, 2022) and in the aftermath of the “summer of migration” in 2015 (Mannewitz, 2018) – the focus has now expanded to systematically address the structural challenges supposedly posed by integrating refugees into the tight housing market. Therefore, he uses particularly populist rhetoric here, first to oppose the actions of the ruling party and second to further exclude a marginalised group.

With his speech, the politician underscores the radicalism of the AfD and demonstrates the influence of the far-right ideological milieu around the party. Initially evident only in the AfD’s youth party, the demand for deportation policies aimed at freeing up housing for German nationals has progressively ascended to the federal level of the party. In 2025 this stance was finally included in the AfD’s party pro-

gramme.¹ Such populist rhetoric overlooks other underlying issues related to housing, such as the unequal spatial distribution between urban and rural areas or disparities between wealthier and poorer populations. With their housing policy, they have found another topic to pit migrants against others. While this rhetoric initially provoked societal shock – particularly when the AfD openly discussed plans of remigration – the public reaction gradually diminished over time; protests subsided; and the deportation agenda was embedded within the party’s platform, serving as a means to address infrastructural topics like housing. This ongoing normalisation is characteristic for far-right politics, as they seek to push the boundaries of acceptable discourse (Wodak, 2020).

Here the AfD’s youth organisation is considered an important link between far-right intellectuals and the party itself. Various ideas are transmitted from the foreground through members of the youth party to AfD politicians ultimately culminating in their party programme (Heinze, 2024). New Right think tanks thus influence active party decisions (Heinze, 2024). When it comes to housing, there is therefore a suspicion that social issues are gaining influence within the party, a development notably driven by far-right visionaries such as Benedikt Kaiser, especially through his publication *Solidarischer Patriotismus*.² These social elements are not new and have been present within the far right in Germany since the Nazi era and the Conservative Revolution (Weiß, 2017). It is evident that social ideas are not a recent development but were historically incompatible with the ongoing neoliberalisation of the states that accelerated in the second half of the 20th century. The far right struggled around social politics but maintained enough space to avoid direct association with the Third Reich (Barthel and Jung, 2013). Central elements of their social discourse include *Volk* and identity. While these ideas were previously a niche (Gebhardt, 2010), social issues are becoming increasingly important in present far-right rhetoric. The far right developed an idea of a capitalist critique, which subconsciously means a rejection of modernity and globalisation (Becker et al., 2019). They often criticise capitalism and neoliberalism as such; however their main targets are more the actors, like “money-hungry corporations and politicians who are enthusiastic about globalisation” who are in favour of a “misguided social welfare policies” (Wohlfahrt, 2022:29, authors’ translation).

Central to this is the contrast between a *völkische Gemeinschaft* and an emancipated individual (Wohlfahrt, 2022). The emphasis on social policy aimed at the community thus serves to reject liberal society and economic principles. Conservative, communal values are seen as increasingly los-

¹ AfD Sachsen: Wahlprogramm der AfD Sachsen für die Landtagswahl Sachsen 2024. Damit Sachsen Heimat bleibt, 2024:58; AfD Rheinland-Pfalz: Programm zur Landtagswahl 2026. Wir regeln das, 2026:66.

² Kaiser, B.: *Solidarischer Patriotismus. Die soziale Frage von rechts*, Verlag Antaios, ISBN 978-3-944422-73-2, 2020.

ing ground as individuals become more atomised and self-centred. This progression makes it easy to scatter topics of cultural struggle into supposedly social issues. For instance, queerness is often portrayed as incompatible with the community, and due to the rejection of liberal values, it is viewed with hostility (Wielowiejski, 2020). Simultaneously, we can spot an international backlash of traditions, such as a rollback of female emancipation and a new emphasis on so-called Trad Wives, women who predominantly manage household and care work for their (mostly many) children, while the husband is employed outside home (Rösch, 2025; Sykes and Hopner, 2024). The far right uses this image of a female character to draw an antifeminist figure as a contrast to “the” feminist, working woman, who is depicted as selfish and incapable of contributing to society (Mayer et al., 2020:107). Another traditional backlash that we can observe is the increasing trend of home schooling, notable especially in the US and in far-right religious parishes (Brockschmidt, 2021; Stange, 2014), but also in the *völkisch* scene (Röpke and Speit, 2019). Similarly, in terms of housing, there is a partial return to traditional values in right-wing circles. These developments exemplify the rejection of individualism and liberal values, wherefore we can point out that what is framed as “social ideas” represents more a cultural regression rather than a pursuit of liberal freedom and equality for all.

Although the AfD and its far-right foreground share the same values, they are not yet fully united. While they repeatedly exhibit a willingness to cooperate, their positions differ widely, especially regarding social issues such as housing. On the one hand, there are strongly liberal economic positions, particularly represented by party leader Alice Weidel, Beatrix von Storch, and others. Conversely, there are ideas advocating a so-called organic market economy, as AfD Thüringen head Björn Höcke calls his socio-political utopia (Kemper, 2016). As previously discussed, the far right is increasingly attempting to join the debate on social justice, with housing policy being a prominent arena of focus. These attempts to engage the housing question on the German right take various forms and articulate across different geographies and reactionary agendas. One type of right-wing living is that of the so-called *völkisch* settlers (Röpke and Speit, 2019; Simon, 2020; Varco, 2024), who withdraw from capitalist and cosmopolitan society and retreat to rural areas. This tendency often leads to the creation of right-wing villages where like-minded individuals can practise an alternative way of life connected to nature (Röpke and Speit, 2019; Varco, 2025). A further consideration of housing policy from the right tends to emphasise society as a whole (Retzer, 2024). Housing, similar to other areas of society, should be oriented towards the common good, as the focus on profit harms society by encouraging individualisation.³ The far-right author points out that public services, like housing, should be state-led (Retzer, 2024). While the specific meth-

ods they propose for improving housing policy vary, a key point of the far-right foreground is the criticism of capitalistic structures (Retzer, 2024; Wohlfahrt, 2022). Housing is a fundamental topic of this critique. In a country where people cannot afford their own home, the state should ensure affordable rental housing, the far right proclaims.⁴ But it is unable to do so, as even those on the right are now realising. Kaiser summarises: “the focus of local housing policies on the interests and needs of high-income households through private investors and real-estate companies continues.”⁵ Housing is thus not only a result of social inequalities but also a spreader of welfare disparities and poverty.

To reduce the problem of the housing market, cooperatives have long been used to combine economic and social aspects, but now far-right theorists are also taking this solution into consideration. Kaiser and Menzel, another right-wing thought leader, base their social principle of solidarity-based patriotism on this concept of cooperatives and a local economy.⁶ Housing plays a central role in this framework. Local communities should collaboratively manage essential aspects of life, leading to equitable outcomes, reducing social inequalities, and fostering a sense of community, as Kaiser and Menzel describe,⁷ at least for those who actively participate and contribute to its success, as the idea of rewarding performance is still integrated in their concept of solidarity-based patriotism.⁸ A short form of that solidarity can be already observed, as Nettelbladt and others pointed out through case studies in Germany. It reveals that far-right actors actively engage in neighbourhoods and try to shape their living environments (Nettelbladt, 2023; Bescherer and Reichle, 2023).

Against this backdrop of various expressions of right-wing social policies and ideas concerning housing, it is noteworthy to see how these positions are also reflected in the AfD – with the additional dimension of neoliberalism. These stances are not only articulated in speeches like the one mentioned earlier but are also reflected in the AfD’s party programmes. The party programme states that, on one hand, new construction should be strongly promoted⁹ – reflecting a classic neoliberal approach – while on the other hand, a social housing policy should also be promoted concurrently.¹⁰ For example,

⁴Kaiser (2020).

⁵Kaiser (2020:170).

⁶Menzel, F.: Vom Globalkapitalismus zur nachbarschaftlichen Wirtschaft, Recherche D, 1, 6–10, 2018.

⁷Menzel (2018) and Kaiser (2020).

⁸Kaiser (2020).

⁹AfD Hessen: Wahlprogramm der AfD Hessen zur Landtagswahl 2023, 2023:41; AfD Nordrhein-Westfalen: Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 18. Landtag des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2022:98.

¹⁰e.g. AfD Deutschland: Zeit für Deutschland. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 21. Deutschen Bundestag, 2025:37; AfD Thüringen: Alles für Thüringen. Wahlprogramm der AfD Thüringen zur Landtagswahl 2024, 2024:76.

³Kaiser (2020).

the AfD advocates the formation of supra-regional building land commissions, which, in cooperation with the federal government, the states, local authorities, regional associations, and landowners, will promote the development of building land. The bureaucracy involved in obtaining permits must be radically simplified and streamlined, and municipal and cooperative housing associations must be promoted or newly established. Land available at the municipal level should be allocated primarily through a concept award process, taking into account urban planning and social aspects as well as social housing construction. Additional social housing should be created through the purchase of occupancy rights¹¹ (authors' translation).

Such ambiguities are common within political parties, but a more detailed analysis, especially over time, uncovers some interesting developments. Social elements have only recently been integrated into the AfD, as our analysis of the AfD's programmes shows. Initially in 2016, there was a predominant focus on neoliberal themes (Ludwig and Mießner, 2022). As already indicated in that period, the shift towards a stronger social policy has been confirmed, and housing policy serves as a particularly salient indicator of this transformation. This change within the AfD's stance became clear at the latest *Conservative Metropolis Conference* in 2023 (Rusch, 2023). As Domann (2025:140) emphasises, this reflects the normalisation of the party on the one hand – the AfD must become more socially acceptable – while on the other hand, the AfD is also seeking to align with the construction and real-estate industry following the model observed in the US. This illustrates the strategic importance of the neoliberal efforts to keep big companies on side. Concurrently the shift to a more market-social orientation of their themes to keep voters on their side is done here as well. One way to attract them involves a radical social shift like Kaiser and Menzel indicate. Nonetheless, as the party has moved increasingly to the right, and more radical opinions have become more visible and vocally expressed, these social elements have been accepted and connections to the far right tolerated, as steadily increasing electoral support has demonstrated (Heinze, 2025). The AfD's approach to housing policy exemplifies a populist strategy, as Mudde (2019) already pointed out years ago. The different solutions proposed by the party indicates that not the solution itself is the reason why it made it into the election manifesto. The primary aim of the combination of housing infrastructure and the social questions is to influence voter preferences, rather than necessarily offering concrete or consistent policy solutions.

¹¹AfD Rheinland-Pfalz: Heimat bewahren, Zukunft gestalten. Wahlprogramm der AfD Rheinland-Pfalz zur Landtagswahl 2021, 2021:172.

4 Carceral hospitality and the 2025 UK hotel protests

A year after the 2024 summer race riots, the United Kingdom found itself amidst a new wave of far-right agitation and anti-migrant hate. This time, however, the activity had a much clearer spatial focus, orbiting around the issue of housing for people seeking asylum in the UK. With the far-right scene baying for a repeat of the previous summer's widespread violence, a sexual assault case in July involving a 41-year-old asylum seeker in the Essex town of Epping provided the spark, causing local protests around the Bell Hotel, where the man was being temporarily housed. The criminal case was handled relatively swiftly, with the individual charged in September 2025 and deported the following month under the UK Borders Act 2007. But the incident was quickly seized upon as purported evidence of the inherent connection between immigration and criminality, and the Bell Hotel became a flash point for protests every few days, which periodically turned violent. The protests were further inflamed by a High Court ruling in August (later overturned) prohibiting the continued use of the Bell Hotel to accommodate asylum seekers. The then-shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick visited the Epping protest, lauding the “peaceful, patriotic protestors” and writing on social media: “People are right to be fed up of illegal migration. And the crime and billions being wasted because of it”.¹² Similar rolling anti-migrant protests emerged at other hotels being used as temporary asylum-seeker accommodation, at the Britannia Hotel in Canary Wharf, London; the Cresta Court Hotel in Altrincham, Manchester; the Park Hotel in Diss, Norfolk; and others across the UK (Childs, 2025). Although other issues were at stake, these protests crystallised around the material accommodation of asylum seekers, while the spatiality they adopted, targeting an archipelago of sites in towns and municipalities across the UK, speaks to longer histories of privatised housing provision and asylum governance in the UK, which we unpack below.

These protests around accommodation for asylum seekers also evinced the “post-organisational” characteristics of the British far right identified by Mulhall (2018), led less through named organisations or parties and more through a complex viral assemblage of right-wing media personalities, influencers, Facebook groups, and social media call-outs. This was also manifest at the hotel protests through a notable lack of programmatic coherence beyond a jumble of nativist slogans and affects. At the Britannia Hotel in Canary Wharf, anti-migrant protesters held a St George's flag reading “The English began to hate; Deport all illegal's [sic]; Bring back hanging; Justice for our girls; No Surrender”. Within this bewildering ecosystem of patriots, concerned cit-

¹²Jenrick, R.: Great to be with peaceful, patriotic protesters in Epping today, X, 17 November, 19:03, <https://x.com/RobertJenrick/status/1957141338258112674> (last access: 16 August 2026), 2025.

izens, and “child protectors”, it has been possible for more committed ethno-nationalist activists to embed within and steer the protests after they achieved some organic momentum in one locale. In Epping, for example, the gatherings of local residents provided cover for fascist activists from the Homeland Party, including Callum Barker, who was allowed to masquerade as a concerned local resident for an interview on LBC, and White Vanguard, a neo-Nazi group. The latter handed out leaflets at the protests reading *Protect the Volk* (reported by Red Flare, 2025) and *Volk First: Preserve the White Race* (reported by Novara Media; Childs, 2025), the commitment to niche German-language ideological vocabulary stretching the credulity of the idea that these were the organic demands of “concerned citizens” while nonetheless being illustrative of how the presence of foreign bodies was constructed as threatening to a housing stock deemed to be a *völkisch*, native entitlement. Another veteran organiser of the British far right, Eddy Butler (who helped found the British National Party’s “stewards group”, which would later become the terror group Combat 18; Copsey, 2008:66), was pictured smiling in the background of one of Robert Jenrick’s photos at Epping.¹³

The hotel protests took place against a backdrop of nationalist mobilisation across the country, with *Operation Raise the Colours* in August and the *Unite the Kingdom* rally in central London on 13 September, the largest fascist assembly in British history with over 100 000 attendees. Again, it is striking how much of this surge in far-right activity occurred without a significant centralised organising infrastructure. Instead, monitoring organisations have pointed to a dense social media ecosystem which uses high volumes of re-tweets, Grok-generated posts, and AI content to keep its participants in a state of semi-permanent agitation. Analysis has shown that the vast amount of traffic within this network is driven by a relatively small number of highly active accounts (HOPE not Hate, 2026). Many attendees at *Unite the Kingdom* made reference to the ongoing wave of hotel protests, articulating a sense of unfairness, and inequities between “luxury conditions” for asylum seekers and financial hardship for “the working man” (Chakrabarti, 2025). This tacked close to the prevailing discourses within the right-wing media ecosystem, such as a July exposé aired on Rupert Murdoch-owned TalkTV, which blared *REVEALED: Life Of Luxury Inside Migrant Hotels* and complained of “extraordinary levels of comfort asylum seekers enjoyed at Copthorne Hotel in West Sussex earlier this year – which will further

enrage hardworking taxpayers.”¹⁴ Already before this latest round of politicisation, high-ranking politicians such as Priti Patel were peddling the idea that the use of hotels as accommodation had established the UK’s reputation as a luxury destination in a way that served as a “pull factor” for migration (Bulman, 2021).

A striking note about the hotel protests was that they were premised on a radical misrecognition that the phenomenon they were protesting was *already* part of a highly punitive carceral infrastructure, which keeps asylum applicants in a perpetual state of suspension and uncertainty, severely limits their movement, and blocks their participation in the labour market. Geographical scholarship has shown how the governance of the material infrastructures of housing and the home are central to this biopolitical project; indeed, the outsourcing of housing provision for asylum seekers to the private sector forms critical context for the shape that the 2025 hotel protests took, particularly for populist narratives alleging “luxury conditions” for asylum seekers. Already since the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, passed under New Labour, housing has been provided for asylum seekers on a “no choice” basis (Phillips, 2006). This system of dispersal left ample room for private actors to take a leading role in the governance of asylum. In 2001, what would become the infamous “immigration removal centre” at Yarl’s Wood was opened, whose management rotated between a roster of private companies through the 2000s. In 2012, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government signed the COMPASS contracts, consolidating the hybrid asylum provision landscape to just three multinational companies (Cleare, G4S, and Serco). By 2013, the existence of a “market” in asylum was taken as a matter of fact among these companies (Darling, 2016). In 2015–2016, Serco and G4S began using hotels in England and Scotland to fulfil their contracts with the Home Office, justifying this as an emergency response to shortfalls elsewhere in the housing system. In 2023, however, following a rise in hotel use through the pandemic, the Home Office reclassified hotels within the standard categories of housing provision, formalising their status as part of the normal (not exceptional) functioning of asylum (Darling and Burrridge, 2025). Far from a last resort, hotels are becoming more and more prominent as a means of responding to a range of crises, from homelessness to pandemic quarantine requirements (Nowicki et al., 2019). Indeed, despite their association with contingency planning, hotels have now become a much more durable aspect of asylum governance in the UK and beyond (Burrridge, 2025).

The term “asylum hotel” is thus misleading insofar as it obscures this long history of outsourced housing provision, not to mention the implication, almost always accompanying the use of the phrase in public, that these are spaces

¹³These mobilisations are reminiscent of Germany’s own wave of anti-migrant protests centred around asylum housing in the late summer of 2015. These brought together a broad and malleable assemblage of populist politicians, “concerned citizens”, and committed extreme-right activists, enabling a mingling of personnel and ideas between party and extra-party scenes which later crystallised into a radicalised set of positions within the then fledgling AfD (Hövel, 2018).

¹⁴TalkTV: *REVEALED: Life Of Luxury Inside Migrant Hotels*, 28 July, YouTube [video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4pyo0fZN5g> (last access: 16 August 2026), 2025.

of comfort and luxury. The use of hotels sits within a system of provisionality working through unpredictability and deferral (Bagelman, 2013), where the right to remain has been rendered highly contingent, even for groups with relatively more secure migration statuses (Burrell and Schweyher, 2019). The system of dispersal, now consolidated and continued through the regular use of hotels, works through the gradual production of exhaustion and despondency in those subject to it and who work to mobilise against it. The negative effects of the dispersal regime critiqued by Darling (2022:3), focusing around “social isolation, the tethering of individuals to insecure locations, and resentment among communities who perceive asylum seekers to be a ‘burden’ on already scarce resources”, are clearly reproduced through the ongoing use of hotels as a housing solution. The inability, within the short-term time horizons of austerity and outsourcing, to fathom a sustainable, coordinated process for accommodating asylum claimants – purpose-built accommodation, for example, which is fit-for-purpose and adequately resourced (see Refugee Action, 2026) – means the system remains in search of ever more precarious spatio-temporal fixes, moving through a variety of sites clearly unsuitable for the accommodation of large numbers of people, from off-shore barges to derelict military installations (Mayblin et al., 2024). The successive failures of these non-fixes not only exposes asylum seekers to numerous harms and indignities, but also contributes to radicalising calls for more draconian “solutions”, such as Robert Jenrick’s chilling suggestion that asylum seekers be detained in “prison camps with only basic facilities”, which ominously produced a favourable majority during a snap YouGov poll in September 2025 (YouGov, 2025).

How can a spatial strategy so clearly connected with de-humanisation and slow violence in such a range of contexts (Mayblin et al., 2020) be so vehemently protested on the grounds of being “too soft”? The cultural connotations of hotels with leisure and recreation clearly account for a large part of the “surplus” quality of the outrage around the summer 2025 protests – not just that there were asylum seekers present in a community, but that they were being “pampered in luxury accommodation”. There is clearly a spatial determinism at work within this logic, an inability to grasp the functional versatility of sites like hotels, which, even as they are connoted with luxury or leisure in the context of a holiday, can just as easily function as carceral spaces. Numerous reports by journalists and refugee advocacy groups have documented miserable living conditions inside these hotels, marked by confinement, anxiety, and a lack of bodily autonomy (Refugee Action, 2023). Darling and Burridge (2025) use the idea of “carceral hospitality” to account for this dual identity of the hotel, where care and control blend together as inseparable imperatives. Indeed, the essential identity of the hotel as a commercial space, where the right to occupy a unit of living space on a temporary basis is purchased on the free market, makes them all too compatible with the log-

ics of privatised asylum contracts, which after all are profit-oriented by nature and must seek out spaces on the basis of lowest cost in order to remain competitive. Furthermore, numerous writings on ethics within and beyond geography have observed the distinctly ambiguous nature of “hospitality” as a gesture which ostensibly enacts welcome but which always reserves the desire to set the terms upon which that welcome is extended – and potentially withdrawn (Derrida, 2000; Gibson, 2003). One need not be surprised that the ethically problematic potential of hospitality as demonstrated by Derrida has not filtered down into the language and demands of these spontaneous street protests, but it is a particular irony to see calls for a regime *more* punitive, *more* restrictive than one which is already extremely effective in producing these outcomes and whose use of the hotel is by no means incompatible with this aim to discipline and punish.

Darling (2022:3) notes that the violence of the UK asylum system is “all too often erased from public concern precisely because it is hidden and hard to trace back to any single accountable actor.” When contrasting the demands of the 2025 hotel protests with this record of government policy, it is clear that successive administrations of the centre-left and centre-right have already created conditions so inhumane and punitive that the far right often does not realise that many of their demands are already reflected in reality. Through 2025, several Reform MPs submitted written questions in Parliament requesting data on how many asylum seekers were housed in social housing in their constituencies. This was only to be informed that their wishes to exclude asylum seekers from public goods were *already* satisfied by the status quo, each question being answered in the same way by the Labour Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook, with the reminder (or, perhaps, reassurance) that “if a person’s immigration status does not allow them recourse to public funds, as is the case in respect of asylum seekers, then they are not eligible for an allocation of social housing” (UK Parliament, 2026). That the bipartisan commitment to upholding a hostile environment for asylum seekers has outflanked even the radicalising desires of the far right highlights a state of affairs which should be at least as concerning as the prospect of a far-right victory at the polls, namely, the drift of civil discourse and public policy into positions which *already* satisfy the demands of these groups. This is precisely the phenomenon warned of in *Reactionary Democracy* by Mondon and Winter (2020), which delineates in various contexts the erosion of an assumed comfortable boundary between the “extreme” and “mainstream”. In conditions of deepening austerity, authoritarian desires among the population, and a broader atmosphere of radicalisation and crisis in public culture, we must ask which poses the greater threat: the far right itself or the attempts of liberal parties to contain, emulate, or otherwise appease them.

5 Home, nation, and living space: housing “the people” as a far-right concern

A comparison of these two cases leads us to ask: could policy positioning around social-infrastructure issues such as healthcare, education, transport, and particularly housing become an inflection point for the far right to break with neoliberal governance and embrace more muscular, ideologically driven “social-national” agendas? The fundamental malleability of neoliberalism as a doctrine and style of government has made it compatible with a wide range of political programmes; it can attach to socially liberal concerns around wellness, individual empowerment, and opportunity (Táíwò, 2022), as well as to illiberal programmes of culture war and majoritarian rule (Meyenburg, 2025). In contrast to debates around “authoritarian neoliberalism”, suggesting a new fusion of two otherwise separate forms of politics, recent histories of neoliberalism have highlighted the *already* authoritarian potentialities circulating in the formative periods of the doctrine’s history, with strong overlaps with eugenicist and race-scientific beliefs (Slobodian, 2025) and arch-conservative gender politics (Cooper, 2017). But despite these long-standing affinities, there are clear and growing signs of discontent with the specifically neoliberal dimensions of the status quo among some portions of the intellectual right, a nascent belief that a concern for one’s own people needs to entail a more serious engagement with the realm of social reproduction, and therefore with issues like housing, childcare, and the cost of living, than pro-market orthodoxies can provide. This is already visible with those natalist currents of the nationalist right who are openly concerned with family politics, illustrated in Tucker Carlson’s public agreement with progressive Democratic senator Elizabeth Warren’s thesis in *The Two Income Trap* around the increasing impossibility of raising a family on a single income, but interpreting this primarily as a threat to national reproduction (Glenza, 2019). Especially in light of the wider European far right’s embrace of eschatological themes of “white extinction” and “civilisational erasure” (Bhatt, 2021), the solidity of housing, which after all is a foundation of social wealth (Waldron, 2022), offers a way to shore up nationalist anxieties in concrete questions of social reproduction and provision.

In many ways, this racially guided engagement with “the social question” has long been central to fascist politics and not at all the paradox that it often appears to be on the surface, where it is often framed as “the far right imitating the far left” (for a critique of this trope, see Ince, 2023). The focus of new-right intellectuals such as Kaiser and Menzel on the role of housing in a properly right-wing programme draws on its own historical precedents. Studies of spatial planning during the Nazi period, for example, reveal a widespread focus on modernisation and the improvement of living standards, framed as benevolence towards ordinary Germans, but also clearly functioning as a mode of social

control (Hagen and Ostergren, 2020). Hagen and Ostergren (2020:147) cite speeches by the Nazi housing official Heinrich Simon, who asserted that “the foundation of the state is the healthy family with many children: the foundation of the healthy family is the healthy home”, clearly invoking this spatial sequence between home, family, and nation. In this vein, the Reinhardt Programme extended subsidies for house-building while folding housing within the regime’s broader ideological vocabulary around *Lebensraum* or living space, with housing reform supporting the reproduction of the *Volk* as well as pre-empting the conditions of urban unrest seen as feeding the fortunes of Marxism (Hagen and Ostergren (2020:151). The desire to speak directly to material needs for security, comfort, and a sense of the future has clearly underpinned engagement with questions of social infrastructure as a form of “existential provision” (*Da-seinsvorsorge*) within the statist political philosophy of Nazi legal theorists (Folkers, 2017). “Existential provision” is an idea that, tellingly, is also undergoing a renaissance amidst the young intellectual figures of the identitarian right, for example in Kaiser’s allusion to a quote from Götz Kubitschek that the German state “must ensure basic services in the areas of traffic, banking, communication, education, health, energy, housing, culture, and security”¹⁵ (authors’ translation).

Both profiles of far-right mobilisations around housing reveal this awareness of housing policy as a national(ist) priority necessary for the reproduction of the *Volk* or the British people, more latent in the British case and more manifest in the German. At the same time, in order for this affinity between housing and far-right positions to be politically articulated, it is necessary to have some form of ecosystem of think tanks, policy spokespeople, intellectuals, and publishers to provide an intellectual foundation for these ideas and circulate them into the political mainstream via the party formations in their orbit. In this regard, the situation in Germany is considerably more advanced, the philosophical protagonists of the “social question” having risen through a well-resourced pipeline of far-right youth organisations connected with the AfD (Roeser, 2023). The lack of these tight connections between party and the extra-parliamentary milieu in the UK keeps the openly ethno-nationalist positions on housing (“houses for the *Volk*”, “deportations create living space”) in a more interstitial position, a tactical weakness compensated for by a durable cross-party commitment to upholding a hostile environment for refugees. This being said, Restore Britain, a splinter group from Reform UK, are much more clearly connected with an openly extreme-right, ethno-nationalist activist scene, as revealed in reporting by Searchlight (Gale, 2026) and Red Flare (2026b). Indeed, despite these ideological affinities, the far right’s position in the electoral landscape is a marked point of comparison between Germany and the UK; in the former, the

¹⁵Kubitschek, G.: Selbstverständlichkeit als Minimalprogramm, *Sezession*, 77, 18–21, 2017:19; in Kaiser (2020:45).

AfD have made rapid electoral gains since the mid-2010s, rising to become the second-largest party in the 21st Bundestag while significantly altering its parliamentary mathematics and putting strain on the idea of a “firewall” of non-cooperation with the extreme right. The electoral gains of Reform UK have been more modest, though still significant in the context of Britain’s first-past-the-post system, with five seats in the 2024 general election, rising to eight in 2026 following Conservative defections and by-elections. In Britain, however, the far right’s success must be seen mainly in terms of transplanting their rhetoric and policy priorities into the mainstream parties.

As it looks set to build on its electoral successes, could this more overt ethno-national position on housing policy eventually become the norm within Reform UK? Many commentators have pointed out Reform’s unconventional character as an organisation: less a political party with a headquarters and permanent staff than a private company using polarising rhetoric to project influence beyond its actual material capabilities. The appointment of inexperienced teenagers to official positions in county councils has also contributed to an image of the party as an unserious political outfit (Quinn, 2025). But in an age of political consultants, think tanks, and frequent Tory defections, Reform UK’s “thin” policy platform and underdeveloped political machine seem remediable issues for the young party. The recruitment of high-profile Tories – among them Robert Jenrick and Suella Braverman – brings front-bench experience to Reform’s ranks, while the appointment of Cambridge academic James Orr as the party’s head of policy may well bring respectability and coherence to its policy ideas, not to mention access, money, and connections from the world of the right in which Orr is especially well networked. There are already signs that Orr might want to develop these “social” elements of his avowed national conservatism; while details remain vague, Orr noted in an interview with the BBC that Nigel Farage, head of Reform UK, was “surprisingly welfarist” on some issues such as the two child benefit cap (Wheeler, 2025). Lacking the deep bench of extra-party think tanks and intellectual figures that forms the orbit of the AfD, Reform remains a predominantly neoliberal outfit, led by millionaires with close ties to business interests (Shone, 2025). But the emergence of a network of think tanks and policy development around Orr and others may open the door to the kinds of strategic realignments, pragmatic alliances, and genuine ideological shifts which might foreshadow those breaks with neoliberal thinking occurring on parts of the German radical right.

Moreover, there are also clear precedents for the British far right looking to Germany for ideological and strategic inspiration, and in this way it is telling that in their search for reference points, the terminology being reached for by the extreme-right agitators in Epping was not “*les gens*” or “we, the people”, but specifically *das Volk*, with all of the organicism and solidity that this term carries. And there are clearly political outfits even to Reform’s right who openly identify

as fascist and who are looking to Germany as an exemplar, being particularly inspired by the energetic youth wing of the AfD in Generation Deutschland. This materialises in numerous ways: the direct citation of German-language vocabulary around the *Volk*, the rallying around “remigration”, the focus on metapolitical strategy and the battle for culture (through podcasts, influencers, X, the manosphere, crypto-trading), and an official visit to the Bundestag for a Homeland delegation in 2025 on the invitation of German MdB Steffen Kotré. The fascist Homeland Party regularly celebrates the German heritage of their ideology, singing German-language songs at their meetings and marking Adolf Hitler’s birthday as a significant part of their calendar (Red Flare, 2026a).

One takeaway of this Anglo-German comparison is therefore a warning. This social-national current of the German right, embodied in the young intellectuals around the AfD, has shown itself willing to break with market orthodoxies and demand a stronger role for the state in providing key public services for (native, deserving) citizens, a call refracted through the *völkisch* idea of housing as precious *Lebensraum* being squandered by money-grubbing, short-sighted real-estate investors with no sense of national mission. As polling consistently reveals housing and affordability as central issues for young voters (European Parliament, 2025), while at the same time, the far right continues to build out its vote share among young people in diverse national contexts (Abou-Chadi, 2024), there is a clear demographic incentive for far-right parties to begin bending these welfarist, social-national ideas towards overtly exclusionary policies for governing the provision of housing which break with neoliberal precedent and wield state power to enforce housing as a domain where membership in the national community is granted or denied. Whereas in Germany, housing is increasingly being approached as an object of policy by a parliamentary party now well established at the federal level and eager to incorporate it into a wider nativist programme and by a more radical “intellectual” wing which seeks to explicitly centre it as a priority of an (ethno-)national state, the UK radical right hosts more inchoate positions on how housing as such should be governed, using stochastic mobilisations around the issue of asylum-seeker housing to mobilise political discourse around other issues like asylum and citizenship and using housing as a space to materialise and localise longer-standing xenophobic and nativist campaigns. But both cases clearly indicate how “housing discontent” (Waldron, 2021) can come to be channelled politically, as part of infrastructural-populist discourses which both position the right as “defenders of the people” (Beveridge et al., 2024) while also opening up new possibilities for how the state might actively regulate housing stock as an (ethno-)national asset. Especially in contexts where a privatised housing market is already significantly embroiled within a hostile environment, these moves may prefigure new political tendencies and positions that move beyond, while accelerating the authoritarian dimensions of, the neoliberal

status quo. To paraphrase McKenzie Wark (2021), neoliberalism may be dead (or dying), but this could be something worse.

6 Conclusion: Against fascist housing politics

The German and UK far right differ in important ways, in both their internal composition and their attitudes around housing. But we argue here that they also converge in ways that are significant, using housing both as a platform towards other nationalist ends and as a nationalist end in itself. These similarities are made all the more pertinent by the growing transnationalisation of the right, as radical-right movements and parties host delegations from each other's countries, liaise on questions of ideology and strategy, and build their networks in international meetings (Solletty, 2026). This transborder cooperation presents a significant challenge for antifascist actors and underscores the importance of co-ordinated responses at an international level. Fostering societal solidarity remains a key element in resisting the far right, in both its intellectual guises and its street-level mobilisations and attacks on refugee housing, as demonstrated in both the German and UK contexts. Spatial analyses indicate that the placement of refugee accommodation within predominantly right-leaning neighbourhoods contributes to localised tensions and conflicts (Bescherer and Witt, 2019). In the same vein, Nettelbladt (2026) and Santamarina and Ince (2025) argue for the importance of neighbourhood solidarity and community-based resistance in counteracting right-wing territorial strategies. Broad networks and alliances are necessary, and progressives should not avoid working together also with private partners or foundations (Gulde and Mullis, 2025). This question of progressive coalition-building is a fraught and complex one and comes without guarantees; alliances must be worked through with a sensitivity to shifting political landscapes across scales, continually corrected, and readjusted. In this spirit we look, with tentative hope, towards campaigns in New York, where Mayor Mamdani has succeeded in putting questions of affordability, and centrally the affordability of *housing*, at the heart of a progressive campaign which also speaks back, with force and integrity, to authoritarian consolidations at the federal level. This simultaneous struggle *against* authoritarianism and *for* a better society became crystallised in energising campaign mantras, with "Freeze the? Rent!" being followed by call-and-response chants centring free public transport and universal healthcare. Other struggles, long-standing and ongoing, are underway in Germany through the *Deutsche Wohnen und Co. Enteignen* campaign and in the UK through renewed debates on the left around social housing, rent controls, and housing policy beyond landlordism (Rose, 2024; Bano, 2025).

Once the far right claims housing as a policy concern, or even establishes its own residential enclaves, are there

any possibilities left? Zahn (2025) answers in the affirmative. Antifascist resistance gains potency when it is supported by large segments of society, not just activist groups. Public awareness campaigns aimed at local policymakers can exert pressure to utilise legal tools – such as expropriations or mandatory purchase orders – that political authorities sometimes hesitate to deploy, often due to insufficient societal pressure (Zahn, 2025). If this fails, it is important to maintain a strong civil society presence to exert democratic counter-pressure on far-right housing projects, making them more difficult, financially and logistically, to maintain. Given the increasing prevalence of far-right structures and plans related to housing and territorial control, proactive antifascist responses are urgent. The discussion presented here underscores the necessity of timely and coordinated interventions. Identifying vulnerabilities within far-right housing strategies and implementing broad societal measures is crucial for limiting their influence and ensuring long-term resistance.

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