

Profiling Far-Right Populist Women Leaders: A Trait Analysis of Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel

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Abstract

Limited scholarly attention has been paid to the leadership profiles of far-right populist women leaders and their implications for political leadership, particularly from a comparative perspective. Employing Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), this article examines the leadership profiles of Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, and Alice Weidel. The article makes three contributions: first, it bridges scholarship on gender, leadership traits, and populism with LTA's theoretical framework; second, it provides empirical profiles of these three prominent far-right populist women leaders; and third, it compares them to their male far-right populist counterparts, non-populist women leaders, and a broader sample of world leaders. The analysis draws on software-assisted content analysis of party convention speeches and press conferences from 2011 to 2024. The findings show that the leadership profiles of far-right populist women leaders are marked by high self-confidence and pronounced distrust of others. Differences vis-à-vis male populist counterparts are comparatively small, consistent with the argument that masculine-coded leadership norms dominate far-right party contexts; by contrast, differences from other women leaders are pronounced.

Keywords

Alice Weidel; comparative analysis; far-right populist women leaders; gender; Giorgia Meloni; leadership trait analysis; Marine Le Pen

1. Introduction

In 2013, Andrea Pető (2013, p. 78) warned that “[p]opulist female leaders should not be underestimated.” Indeed, female right-wing populists—from Marine Le Pen in France to Giorgia Meloni in Italy and Alice

Weidel in Germany—have been highly successful in consolidating party power, winning national elections (Meloni), or emerging as serious contenders for top political office (Le Pen, Weidel). Yet their parties present highly contradictory environments for women's leadership, both ideologically and representationally. Far-right populist parties—often described as *Männerparteien* (men's parties)—are strongly male-dominated and promote authoritarian, ethnonationalist, and patriarchal ideologies that privilege heterosexual (white) men while relegating women to caregiving and maternal roles (Pettersson, 2017, p. 8; Snipes & Mudde, 2020, p. 439).

Unsurprisingly, the contradiction of women leading women-hostile parties has sparked a variety of research. Many analyses have concentrated on case studies examining the roles, leadership styles, and images of individual populist women leaders. This research has predominantly focused on Marine Le Pen, who is considered “the most prominent female populist radical right leader in the world” (Snipes & Mudde, 2020, p. 449; see also Geva, 2020a, 2020b; Pettersson et al., 2023), as well as Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy (Cianciara, 2025; Cilento, 2023; De Giorgi et al., 2023; Donà, 2024; Indelicato & Lopes, 2024), followed by analyses of Scandinavian leaders, such as Pia Kjaersgaard (Meret, 2015), Laura Huhtasaari (Kivijärvi & Takala, 2020), or Riikka Purra (Pettersson & Sakki, 2024). Methodologically, most of these studies have employed content and (critical) discourse analyses of these leaders' populist communication and self-representations, especially in social media (Bast et al., 2022; Cianciara, 2025; Cilento, 2023; De Giorgi et al., 2023; Griffini & Montecchio, 2026; Meret et al., 2016; Pettersson, 2017; Pettersson et al., 2023; Pettersson & Sakki, 2024; Saccà & Massidda, 2025), alongside mass media representations (Kivijärvi & Takala, 2020; Pettersson, 2017; Snipes & Mudde, 2020).

Yet while these analyses make important contributions to understanding the performance of far-right populist women leaders, conceptually, they rely primarily on discursive analytical tools to explain the causes and consequences of women's populist leadership. They leave open the question of what specific leadership traits far-right populist women leaders exhibit and how these traits shape their leadership performance. In other words, the leadership profiles of women who rise to prominence in these *Männerparteien* remain underexamined.

Similarly, research on the relationship between populism and leadership has expanded considerably. Core scholarship identifies national executives such as Donald J. Trump, Viktor Orbán, Hugo Chávez, or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as prototypical populist leaders, who exhibit, for example, a confrontational style, heightened assertiveness, and greater willingness to take risks than mainstream democratic leaders (see, for example, Kesgin, 2020; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019; Nai et al., 2019; Weyland, 2017). Only a limited number of studies, however, link populism and leadership traits, focusing either mainly on foreign policy behavior (Drezner, 2017; Fitzsimmons, 2022; Fouquet & Brummer, 2023; Özdamar & Ceydilek, 2020; Thiers & Wehner, 2022) or on personality-based assessments using expert surveys (Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019; Nai et al., 2019).

While these studies advance our understanding of how populism and leadership are connected and how leadership traits shape populist performance, they remain gender-blind, focusing almost exclusively on male leaders and leaving open the question of how gender shapes leadership profiles. Yet evidence suggests that gender significantly influences leadership and that women face distinct constraints in male-dominated environments (see, for example, Cameron & Shaw, 2016; Campus, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Jamieson, 1995; Kesgin & McCormick, 2026; Müller & Tömmel, 2022). Similarly, Brummer (2022) demonstrates that

men and women encounter different pressures when enacting leadership traits such as dominance or conceptual complexity, suggesting that women—particularly in severely male-dominated environments—may perform decisiveness or power-seeking in ways distinct from men.

This article advances research on far-right populist women leaders by integrating a gender perspective into the analysis of populist leadership traits, using Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to examine how these traits shape their performance. We pose three interrelated research questions:

- (a) Do far-right populist women leaders share similar leadership traits?
- (b) Do they differ systematically from their male populist counterparts, other non-populist women leaders, and the broader population of world leaders?
- (c) If so, how and to what extent?

Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National), Giorgia Meloni (Fratelli d'Italia), and Alice Weidel (Alternative für Deutschland) serve as the primary case studies in our empirical analysis. They were selected because they exemplify “successful radical right-wing populist female leaders who managed to achieve consensus and support among many white male voters in a predominantly white male party organisation,” and operate as leading political figures in three of Europe’s most powerful countries—France, Italy, and Germany (Meret et al., 2016, p. 123; for brief career synopses of Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel, see the Supplementary File, Appendix A1.1). Although Le Pen and Meloni have received considerable scholarly attention individually, they have rarely been examined comparatively (Griffini & Montecchio, 2026). By contrast, research on Weidel—both individually and comparatively—remains limited and has only recently begun to emerge (Bordignon & Pansardi, 2026; Haußmann et al., 2026; Kamińska-Korolczuk et al., 2025).

This article makes three contributions: first, it bridges scholarship on gender, leadership, and populism with LTA’s theoretical framework; second, it empirically profiles Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel; and third, it compares them to their male far-right populist counterparts in France, Italy, and Germany, respectively, non-populist women leaders, and a broader sample of world leaders. The analysis draws on software-assisted content analysis of party convention speeches and press conferences from 2011 to 2024 ($N = 283$). Our analysis finds that far-right populist women leaders most consistently stand out in their self-confidence and distrust of others, especially relative to other women leaders. Compared to their male counterparts, differences are smaller. This corroborates earlier research (Geva, 2020a, 2020b; Meret, 2015) and suggests that masculine-coded leadership performances dominate far-right party contexts.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 integrates scholarship on far-right populist women leaders and populist leadership traits, laying the ground for our analysis. Section 3 presents empirical expectations, empirical material, and strategy that underlie our research. In Section 4, we present our main findings. Section 5 discusses those findings and our ensuing conclusions.

2. Theoretical Considerations: The Nexus Between Gender and Populist Leadership Traits

Populist leadership—as any kind of leadership—builds on gendered frameworks (Geva, 2020a, 2020b). As Meret (2015, pp. 82–83) asserts, the connotations underlying populist leadership are often framed—implicitly or explicitly—in strongly masculine terms. While scholars differ in how they conceptualize populism, there is broad agreement that populist leaders seek to construct a direct, personalized relationship with “the people” while positioning themselves against established elites (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 3; Mudde, 2004, p. 544).

When leaders seek to personalize power, it follows that institutional checks and balances become anathema (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 7). In turn, this means that decision-making is often centralized within a small circle of loyalists (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 8; Meret, 2015, p. 92). At the same time, dependence on popular backing is inherently volatile, as support based on personal appeal can quickly erode (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 7; Geva, 2020a, pp. 27–28). Reliance on volatile mass support, consequently, encourages opportunistic decision-making, prioritizing short-term, dramatic actions that amplify polarization, exploit grievances, and target perceived “enemies of the people” (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 8). While varying across political contexts, personalized leadership remains a recurring theme in the literature on leadership and populism.

Within this broader populist logic, populist far-right leaders interpret politics through an especially stark “us versus them” worldview (see, for example, Geva, 2020b; Mudde, 2004; Özdamar & Ceydilek, 2020). This black-and-white thinking is reinforced by key elements of far-right populist ideology, such as nationalism, nativism, and racism, which deepen populist politics’ inherent contentiousness (Geva, 2020b, p. 6; Özdamar & Ceydilek, 2020, p. 143). Consequently, far-right populist leadership is often associated with confrontational, aggressive, and assertive performances that resonate with hegemonic masculine ideals of authority and social dominance, understood as culturally dominant forms of masculinity in specific social and historical contexts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Geva, 2020a, 2020b; Griffini & Montecchio, 2026; Meret, 2015).

Because populist performances are structured around hegemonic masculinity and far-right populist parties remain heavily male-dominated, female right-wing populists can be expected to face particularly strong gendered barriers to political success (Bast et al., 2022, p. 359; Pettersson et al., 2023, p. 907). These barriers are reinforced by the broader historical association of political power with men: leadership continues to be conflated with stereotypically masculine traits such as ambition, assertiveness, confidence, and dominance, while women are presumed to embody qualities like kindness, cooperation, warmth, and gentleness (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 90). Although these stereotypes have certainly evolved over time, particularly regarding perceptions of competence (Eagly et al., 2019, p. 313), gendered expectations of leadership remain resilient and continue to shape evaluations of leaders—across genders—with often adverse effects for women leaders (Müller & Tömmel, 2022, p. 21).

One of the most common obstacles is the so-called “femininity-competence double bind” (Campus, 2013, p. 54; see also Jamieson, 1995). Women leaders must navigate a tension between demonstrating strength, decisiveness, and assertiveness—traits typically associated with male political leadership—while conforming to traditional expectations of femininity rooted in care, nurturing, and maternal responsibility (Bast et al.,

2022, p. 360; Geva, 2020b, p. 7; Meret et al., 2016, p. 131; Pettersson & Sakki, 2024, p. 407). The double bind often yields prejudicial perceptions and evaluations of women leaders that impede their access to and exercise of leadership, requiring women “to ensure they are neither dismissed as insufficiently authoritative nor derided as aggressive ‘battleaxes’” (Cameron & Shaw, 2016, pp. 11, 134). While the double bind affects women leaders across political contexts, it may be particularly pronounced in male-dominated environments where hegemonic masculine leadership norms remain especially salient.

Meret (2015, p. 101) highlights these contrasting dimensions in an analysis of Pia Kjærsgaard, whose “profile is defined at the intersection between a professional, hard core and despotic (masculine) style in the public political sphere, and a motherly, ordinary, over-emotional and straightforward nature mainly ascribed to the ‘private Pia’, a woman and a mother” (see also Meret et al., 2016, pp. 130–135). Similarly, Geva (2020a), examining Marine Le Pen’s performance, argues that she represents a “double-headed hydra,” viewed as “extraordinary due to her combined political masculinity and political femininity” (Geva, 2020b, p. 16; see also Griffini & Montecchio, 2026; Pettersson, 2017; Pettersson et al., 2023; Pettersson & Sakki, 2024; Snipes & Mudde, 2020). Other studies likewise highlight the skillful rhetorical maneuvering of populist far-right women leaders, such as Giorgia Meloni (Cianciara, 2025; Saccà & Massidda, 2025), Riikka Purra (Pettersson & Sakki, 2024), and Laura Huhtasaari (Kivijärvi & Takala, 2020). Keeling and Ladini (2025, p. 13) argue that Meloni adopts a masculine leadership style that reproduces hegemonic gendered power structures. Likewise, Cianciara (2025, p. 113) shows how Meloni navigates the “double bind” by balancing “toughness, typical of hegemonic masculinity, and more motherly traits, such as caregiving and understanding of people’s concerns” (see also Griffini & Montecchio, 2026).

Taken together, existing research has identified recurring leadership profiles across a range of mostly male populist leaders—personalistic, self-aggrandizing, confrontational—but has not systematically examined how gender shapes these profiles. At the same time, research on prominent far-right populist women leaders shows that they distinctively adopt hegemonic masculine performance patterns, blending them to varying degrees with strategically deployed feminine elements. Yet systematic evidence remains limited regarding the underlying leadership profiles of far-right populist women leaders and whether they exhibit distinct leadership traits compared with their male counterparts and other women leaders.

3. Empirical Expectations, Empirical Material, and Research Strategy

Political-personality profiling infers leaders’ traits, beliefs, and motivations by analyzing patterns in their public communications (Kesgin & McCormick, 2026, p. 38). This approach rests on the assumption that leaders’ language—specifically, *how* they say something—provides insight into their underlying cognitive orientations, which, in turn, shape their political performance (Allen & Gallagher, 2022; Dyson, 2023; Kesgin & McCormick, 2026).

For our study, we use LTA, developed by Hermann (2002, 2005), to examine whether Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel exhibit similar leadership traits and to what extent they may differ from their male populist counterparts, other non-populist women leaders, and the world average for political leaders. LTA is a well-established method that has been applied extensively to the study of political leaders worldwide (see, for example, Allen & Gallagher, 2022; Dyson, 2023; Fitzsimmons, 2022; Kesgin, 2020), including research on populist leaders (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023; Thiers & Wehner, 2022). LTA employs content analysis of

speech texts to infer leadership traits. In particular, LTA provides insights into a leader's willingness to challenge or respect political constraints, their openness to new information, and their ability to form alliances or maintain control in hierarchical structures (Dyson, 2023, p. 214; Hermann, 2002, pp. 6, 9). Taking both populism and gender into account, leadership traits can be examined not only for their general effects but also for how their expression varies across populist and gendered contexts.

3.1. *LTA and Empirical Expectations*

LTA organizes seven leadership traits into three core dimensions: how leaders respond to political constraints, how open they are to external information, and what drives them to pursue and hold political office (Dyson, 2023, p. 216). The first dimension concerns whether a leader challenges or respects political constraints and is captured through belief in ability to control events (BACE) and need for power (PWR; Hermann, 2005, pp. 13–15). BACE reflects the degree to which a leader sees themselves as shaping rather than responding to events, while PWR reflects the drive to influence and assert authority over others (see Table A1 in Appendix A1.2 of the Supplementary File for coding details of all traits).

On the one hand, populist leaders typically seek to control political events and make autonomous decisions, suggesting high BACE; on the other, populist narratives portraying elites as powerful conspirators may reflect a perceived lack of control, implying lower BACE (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 10). Similar competing expectations may apply to populist women leaders. Women who attain leadership positions in far-right populist parties do so within highly male-dominated environments, where authority, decisiveness, and control remain important markers of leadership (Meret, 2015, pp. 101–102; see also Geva, 2020a, 2020b). Consequently, they may have incentives to project political agency and autonomy, suggesting high BACE. In this sense, high BACE may also serve as a strategic signal of masculine-style leadership. At the same time, heightened awareness of structural and gendered constraints may temper rather than eliminate such tendencies, suggesting more moderate levels of BACE.

Regarding PWR, populist leaders often exhibit a strong personal drive for power, characterized by opportunism, strategic maneuvering, and norm-breaking behavior (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, pp. 10–11; see also Ernst et al., 2019; Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019). At the same time, they present themselves as selfless embodiments of the people's will rather than power-seeking individuals (Drezner, 2017; Geva, 2020a; Mudde, 2004). Similar competing expectations may apply to far-right populist women leaders. As with BACE, higher PWR may serve as a signal of leadership strength and of performance traditionally associated with masculine leadership. However, the need to balance authority with populist claims to serve rather than seek power may also result in more moderate expressions of PWR.

The second LTA dimension concerns openness to contextual information and is assessed through the combination of conceptual complexity (CC) and self-confidence (SC; Hermann, 2005, pp. 17–23). CC refers to the degree to which a leader can differentiate among people, issues, and ideas (Hermann, 2005, pp. 22–23). SC measures a leader's sense of personal capability and authority and reflects "one's sense of self-importance" and ability to cope with challenges in the environment (Hermann, 2005, p. 20). When CC scores are higher than SC, a leader is considered more open to new information; when the reverse is true, the leader tends to interpret the environment through a fixed sense of self.

For populist leaders, low CC appears consistent with populism's "good-bad" worldview and black-and-white thinking (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 11; Hermann, 2005, pp. 195–196). However, high CC is associated with cognitive flexibility, openness to contextual information, and opportunistic adaptation—traits that facilitate strategic maneuvering and political manipulation (Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 11). Thus, while populists' rhetoric suggests low CC, their strategic adaptability points to high CC. Similar competing expectations apply to far-right populist women leaders. On the one hand, they may emphasize a particularly clear and uncompromising worldview to establish ideological credibility within their parties. On the other hand, navigating environments that are often challenging for women leaders may require greater flexibility and adaptation. Consequently, we expect CC scores to range from low to moderate rather than clustering at either extreme.

For SC, Fouquet and Brummer (2023, pp. 12, 20) expect populists "to be highly self-confident leaders," which was largely confirmed in their analysis. High SC underpins defiance of external pressures and personalistic decision-making. Similar expectations may apply to far-right populist women leaders. As Kivijärvi and Takala (2020, p. 430) note: "Female right-wing leaders are particularly challenged by their double-standard deviance from the expected normalcy, i.e., being right-wing women and right-wing leaders, both of which are considered possible identity category violations" (see also Bast et al., 2022; Pettersson et al., 2023). Given the additional barriers associated with attaining leadership positions in far-right populist parties, we expect these women leaders to exhibit at least comparable, and potentially higher, levels of SC than their male counterparts and other women leaders.

The third dimension, which concerns a leader's motivation for holding office, involves task focus (TASK), distrust of others (DIS), and in-group bias (IGB; Hermann, 2005, pp. 24–32). TASK reflects whether a leader prioritizes problem-solving over group harmony, DIS indicates suspicion toward external actors, and IGB captures attachment to one's own group. Together, distrust and high IGB suggest a worldview shaped by conflict and threat, while lower scores reflect a more cooperative and open orientation.

On the one hand, TASK captures instrumental activities that signal determination and agency; on the other, appealing to groups and followers reflects a more relational leadership style. Since far-right populist women leaders, like other women leaders, must balance expectations of competence and femininity, we expect them to score in the moderate range on TASK (Geva, 2020a, 2020b; Meret, 2015). For DIS and IGB, Fouquet and Brummer (2023, p. 13) expect high levels to closely align with populist leadership (see also Hermann, 2005, pp. 200, 203). While they find only partial support for this expectation—high DIS but no support for IGB—we anticipate relatively high levels of both traits among far-right populist women leaders. From a gender perspective, emphasizing distrust toward opponents and loyalty to the in-group may help women leaders project strength and ideological credibility in political parties where leadership remains strongly masculinized. Table 1 summarizes our empirical expectations for far-right populist women leaders across traits.

Table 1. Leadership traits and empirical expectations for far-right populist women leaders.

Leadership traits	Exemplary behavioral expectation and stereotypical gender connotation based on a...	
	...high manifestation of the leadership trait	...low manifestation of the leadership trait
BACE	• Active involvement in decision-making processes • Low willingness to delegate tasks	• Hesitant, wait-and-see behavior • Low tendency to take initiative
Empirical expectation: Moderate to high BACE		
PWR	• Focus on maximizing own benefit • Little consideration for others	• Willingness to fit into decision-making groups • Focus on balance and fairness
Empirical expectation: Moderate to high PWR		
CC	• Consideration of situations from different points of view • Openness to new information and advice	• Own intuition essential • Stereotypical ideas about facts and/or persons
Empirical expectation: Moderate to low CC		
SC	• Little inclination to critically examine oneself and/or facts • Ignoring or reinterpreting “inappropriate” information	• Reluctance to commit oneself; third parties have great influence on decision-making • Erratic and inconsistent positions
Empirical expectation: High to very high SC		
TASK	• Focus on tasks and/or issues • Groups serve primarily as a means to process or solve problems	• Focus on relationships • Relationships between group members and group cohesion central
Empirical expectation: Moderate TASK		
DIS	• Categorical suspicion of actions and motivations of third parties (esp. adversaries) • Expectation of high loyalty from members of own group	• More unbiased perception/image of third parties • Distrust not excluded but situation-specific
Empirical expectation: High DIS		
IGB	• Preservation of own group's independence central • Shifting of blame to other groups	• No categorical demarcations from other groups • Less tendency to hold other groups responsible for one's own problems
Empirical expectation: High IGB		

Source: Own conceptualization based on Brummer (2022) and Dyson (2023).

3.2. Empirical Material and Research Strategy

We use speeches from party conventions and press conferences as primary sources to analyze the leadership traits of both female and male far-right populist politicians, a data source widely recognized and well-established in LTA (Suedfeld, 2010). Using speeches from party conventions allows for cross-country

comparability, as these formal settings share similar contexts and purposes (Dyson, 2023, p. 218). We use verbatim transcriptions of video recordings of these events, rather than relying on written or prepared texts, capturing the leaders' spoken words as delivered. Speeches were thus primarily sourced from official party YouTube channels and, where available, news broadcasters. The full dataset covers January 2011 to December 2024, comprising 283 speeches and 732,763 words across all leaders (see Supplementary File's Appendix A1.3 for details about source selection and A1.4 for transcription procedures). Speeches and press conferences are particularly well-suited for studying far-right populist leaders, as these leaders tend to be hostile toward mainstream media and actively avoid journalist-led formats such as interviews (Engesser et al., 2016; Ernst et al., 2019; Muis et al., 2020).

Speeches and press conferences were selected and transcribed based on formal role and political relevance. First, for the three women leaders, we also included speeches given before their formal appointment as party leaders (Le Pen: 2011; Meloni: 2012; and Weidel: 2022), provided they were already prominent public figures or held influential roles within the party structure (for details on Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel's party career trajectories, see Appendix A1.1 in the Supplementary File; for details on speech selection criteria per country, see Appendix A1.5 in the Supplementary File). Second, male individuals were included if they held a senior leadership position within their party at the time of the speech. All speeches were weighted equally; no speech was prioritized or assigned additional weight. To ensure that aggregating male leaders did not mask meaningful variation, we also conducted a robustness check excluding male leaders who contributed fewer than three speeches (see Appendix A1.10 in the Supplementary File). The substantive findings remained unchanged. Table 2 presents an overview of the number of speeches, the total word count, and the years covered.

Table 2. Overview of number of speeches, total word count, and time period.

Leader	Time period	Number of speeches	Total word count
France - RN			
Marine Le Pen	2011–2024	49	211,804
Male leaders (n = 9)	2011–2024	46	108,760
Italy - FdI			
Giorgia Meloni	2013–2024	55	206,509
Male leaders (n = 8)	2013–2024	30	40,509
Germany - AfD			
Alice Weidel	2014–2024	54	66,962
Male leaders (n = 4)	2014–2024	49	98,219
Total	2011–2024	283	732,763

Note: Male leaders' rows show aggregate totals for all male party members analyzed; see Supplementary File's Table A3 in Appendix A1.7 for a detailed breakdown of individual male leaders.

ProfilerPlus, an automated tool developed by Social Science Automation for LTA, was used to analyze leaders' verbal outputs (Levine & Young, 2014). The software uses pre-established dictionaries of words and phrases associated with each leadership trait, enabling systematic and objective coding. Each trait was calculated as a proportional score, calculated as the ratio of high trait observations to the total number of relevant observations, resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 1, which ultimately accounts for differences in speech length. ProfilerPlus supports English and German. French and Italian speeches were translated into

English for analysis. Robustness checks confirmed that the translation choices did not significantly affect LTA outcomes (see Appendix A1.6 in the Supplementary File).

For each speech or press conference, ProfilerPlus generates scores for all seven leadership traits. Because LTA assesses leadership traits assumed to be relatively stable over time, we calculated the mean score per leader across all available speeches (see also Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 8). Recent research has confirmed this stability assumption, demonstrating that cumulative trait scores stabilize after approximately 20,000–40,000 words (Young, 2025, pp. 3, 5). We provide additional support for the stability assumption in Appendix A1.9 in the Supplementary File, which shows that the trait scores are stable over time.

The standard approach to analyzing LTA outputs is to compare individual or group trait scores with a norming group, either the global sample of world leaders provided by ProfilerPlus or a relevant comparison group. In our case, the trait scores of far-right populist women leaders are compared with those of their male counterparts in the same party and country, as well as ProfilerPlus's norming group of 284 world leaders.

To further disentangle the gendered dimensions of far-right populist leadership, we also drew on a sample of 52 American women leaders compiled by Kesgin and McCormick (2026). We ran LTA using ProfilerPlus on the same 52 text files and calculated the mean and standard deviation per trait across all women leaders in the sample. We acknowledge that comparing American women leaders to European far-right populist leaders is not ideal, given differences in political systems and contexts. However, this sample represents the best and most comprehensive norming group of women political leaders currently available for LTA research.

4. Empirical Findings: Profiling Far-Right Populist Women Leaders

Table 3 shows the standardized differences of Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, and Alice Weidel vis-à-vis their respective far-right populist male counterparts, the sample of world leaders, and the sample of American women leaders. Differences are expressed as standardized z-scores, indicating how many standard deviations each woman leader's mean score deviates from the relevant comparison group, and are categorized according to LTA thresholds (very high/very low, high/low, lean high/lean low, and average), reflected in the color coding of the tables (see Appendix A1.8 in the Supplementary File for detailed z-score calculation methods and z-score classification). Similarly, Table 4 shows the standardized differences between far-right populist male leaders in France, Italy, and Germany, compared with the samples of world leaders and American women leaders. In the following, we examine the findings for each leadership trait, leader, and their respective comparison groups in turn.

4.1. BACE

Le Pen scores average on BACE relative to all three comparison groups (z-scores: -0.05 , -0.12 , -0.25). Weidel similarly scores average across all comparisons (z-scores: -0.04 , 0.11 , -0.01). Meloni, by contrast, scores lean high relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.59), world leaders (z-score: 0.65), and American women leaders (z-score: 0.54), indicating a stronger tendency to present herself as actively shaping events than all three comparison groups, which matches our expectation of moderate to high BACE. Table 4 shows that Italian far-right male politicians score lean low on BACE relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.53) and American women leaders (z-score: -0.66). Meloni's elevated BACE may therefore function as a signal of decisiveness

Table 3. LTA results for Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, and Alice Weidel.

Trait	Marine Le Pen				Giorgia Meloni				Alice Weidel			
	Score	vs. male counterparts	vs. world leaders	vs. American women leaders	Score	vs. male counterparts	vs. world leaders	vs. American women leaders	Score	vs. male counterparts	vs. world leaders	vs. American women leaders
BACE	0.344 (0.084)	−0.05	−0.12	−0.25	0.382 (0.070)	0.59	0.65	0.54	0.356 (0.164)	−0.04	0.11	−0.01
PWR	0.285 (0.087)	0.43	0.49	0.26	0.234 (0.072)	−0.04	−0.52	−0.79	0.311 (0.203)	0.09	1.02	0.80
CC	0.556 (0.062)	0.31	−0.57	−0.34	0.593 (0.059)	−0.12	0.04	0.37	0.522 (0.099)	−0.34	−1.14	−1.00
SC	0.391 (0.140)	0.15	0.31	1.43	0.431 (0.123)	0.14	0.71	2.04	0.356 (0.264)	−0.15	−0.04	0.87
TASK	0.609 (0.107)	0.03	−0.31	0.32	0.576 (0.099)	−0.31	−0.77	−0.03	0.687 (0.157)	0.42	0.82	1.18
DIS	0.206 (0.097)	0.24	1.27	1.37	0.191 (0.083)	0.36	1.01	1.09	0.279 (0.182)	0.37	2.48	2.67
IGB	0.147 (0.057)	0.40	−0.06	0.92	0.105 (0.060)	−0.00	−0.90	−0.15	0.151 (0.118)	0.09	0.01	1.01

Legend: z-score = very high (≥ 2) high (≥ 1) lean high (≥ 0.5) average lean low (≤ -0.5) low (≤ -1) very low (≤ -2)

Table 4. LTA results for male far-right populist leaders.

Trait	Male Populists—France			Male Populists—Italy			Male Populists—Germany		
	Score	vs. world leaders	vs. American women leaders	Score	vs. world leaders	vs. American women leaders	Score	vs. world leaders	vs. American women leaders
BACE	0.350 (0.115)	−0.00	−0.12	0.324 (0.100)	−0.53	−0.66	0.360 (0.106)	0.20	0.08
PWR	0.250 (0.082)	−0.20	−0.46	0.239 (0.106)	−0.42	−0.69	0.304 (0.071)	0.89	0.67
CC	0.528 (0.090)	−1.04	−0.88	0.604 (0.098)	0.24	0.60	0.546 (0.071)	−0.73	−0.53
SC	0.355 (0.235)	−0.05	0.86	0.408 (0.167)	0.48	1.68	0.378 (0.155)	0.18	1.22
TASK	0.605 (0.136)	−0.36	0.28	0.623 (0.149)	−0.11	0.48	0.635 (0.123)	0.07	0.61
DIS	0.178 (0.117)	0.80	0.86	0.158 (0.091)	0.46	0.50	0.205 (0.199)	1.25	1.35
IGB	0.117 (0.077)	−0.67	0.15	0.105 (0.072)	−0.90	−0.15	0.142 (0.090)	−0.16	0.80

Legend: z-score = very high (≥ 2) high (≥ 1) lean high (≥ 0.5) average lean low (≤ -0.5) low (≤ -1) very low (≤ -2)

and leadership strength vis-à-vis her male peers, setting her apart from the broader Italian far-right leadership. Overall, the findings support our expectation that far-right populist women leaders would exhibit moderate to high levels of BACE. While Le Pen and Weidel score in the moderate range, Meloni occupies the upper end of the expected spectrum.

4.2. PWR

Le Pen scores average on PWR relative to all three comparison groups (z-scores: 0.43, 0.49, 0.26). Meloni scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: -0.04), lean low relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.52), and lean low relative to American women leaders (z-score: -0.79). This aligns with Fouquet and Brummer's (2023, pp. 10–11) observation that populist leaders often present themselves as selfless embodiments of the people's will, downplaying personal power ambitions. Weidel, by contrast, scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.09), but high relative to world leaders (z-score: 1.02) and lean high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 0.80), indicating a stronger emphasis on influencing and asserting authority than both norming groups. Overall, the findings provide partial support for our expectations. While Weidel's scores align with the expectation that PWR may serve as a signal of leadership strength, Le Pen's average scores are consistent with the expectation that competing pressures may result in more moderate expressions of PWR. Meloni departs somewhat from this pattern, exhibiting comparatively low levels of PWR relative to world leaders and American women leaders.

4.3. CC

Le Pen scores lean low on CC relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.57), suggesting a stronger reliance on categorical language and less openness to alternative perspectives, consistent with populist leadership. She stands out neither from her male counterparts (z-score: 0.31) nor from American women leaders (z-score: -0.34). Meloni scores average across all three comparisons (z-scores: -0.12 , 0.04, 0.37). Weidel scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: -0.34), but low relative to world leaders (z-score: -1.14) and American women leaders (z-score: -1.00), indicating a stronger tendency toward simplified, dichotomous thinking than either norming group. Table 4 shows that the German male sample also displays lean low CC relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.73), though Weidel's score is considerably lower still. Overall, the findings support our expectation that far-right populist women leaders would exhibit CC scores ranging from low to moderate rather than clustering at either extreme. While Le Pen and Weidel lean toward the lower end of this range, Meloni displays a more moderate level of CC.

4.4. SC

Le Pen scores average relative to world leaders (z-score: 0.31) and male counterparts (z-score: 0.15), but high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 1.43). Meloni scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.14), lean high relative to world leaders (z-score: 0.71), and very high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 2.04). Weidel scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: -0.15) and world leaders (z-score: -0.04), but high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 0.87). Table 4 shows that male far-right leaders also score high on SC relative to American women leaders across all three countries (France: 0.86, Italy: 1.68, Germany: 1.22), though in each case the woman leader's score is higher still, most markedly for Meloni. Overall, the findings support our expectation that far-right populist women leaders would exhibit

levels of SC comparable to, and in some cases exceeding, those of their male counterparts and (consistently) other women leaders.

4.5. TASK

Le Pen scores average on TASK across all comparisons (z-scores: 0.03, -0.31, 0.32), supporting the expectation of moderate TASK. Meloni similarly scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: -0.31) and American women leaders (z-score: -0.03), and lean low relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.77), broadly confirming the expectation, although she falls somewhat below average relative to world leaders. Weidel, by contrast, scores average on TASK relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.42), but lean high relative to world leaders (z-score: 0.82) and high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 1.18), indicating a stronger focus on problem-solving and instrumental activities than both norming groups. This departs from our expectation of moderate TASK and suggests a more strongly task-oriented leadership style. Overall, the expectation is supported for Le Pen and Meloni, but not for Weidel.

4.6. DIS

Le Pen scores high relative to world leaders (z-score: 1.27) and American women leaders (z-score: 1.37), consistent with the expectation of elevated DIS, though she does not stand out from her male counterparts (z-score: 0.24). Meloni scores as average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.36), but high relative to world leaders (z-score: 1.01) and American women leaders (z-score: 1.09), indicating frequent use of language that portrays external actors as suspicious or threatening. Weidel scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.37), but very high relative to world leaders (z-score: 2.48) and American women leaders (z-score: 2.67). These differences are among the largest in the analysis. Table 4 shows that the male samples also display elevated DIS relative to world leaders across all three countries (France: 0.80, Italy: 0.46, Germany: 1.25), but in each case the woman leader's score exceeds that of her male counterparts, most notably for Weidel, whose DIS score is nearly double the German male sample score relative to both norming groups. Overall, the findings provide strong support for the expectation of elevated DIS among far-right populist women leaders and suggest that distrust may be particularly pronounced among women leaders in far-right populist parties.

4.7. IGB

Le Pen scores average relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.06) and male counterparts (z-score: 0.40), but lean high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 0.92), reflecting a greater emphasis on group loyalty than other women leaders. Meloni scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: -0.00) and American women leaders (z-score: -0.15), but lean low relative to world leaders (z-score: -0.90), leaving the expectation of high IGB unconfirmed across all three comparison groups. Weidel scores average relative to her male counterparts (z-score: 0.09) and world leaders (z-score: 0.01), but high relative to American women leaders (z-score: 1.01). Table 4 shows that male samples score average to lean low on IGB relative to world leaders across all three countries, with Le Pen and Weidel both exceeding their respective male aggregates relative to American women leaders. Overall, the findings provide only partial support for the expectation of elevated IGB. While Le Pen and Weidel display stronger in-group bias than American women leaders, neither

consistently exceeds world leaders or their male counterparts, and Meloni does not exhibit elevated IGB relative to any comparison group.

4.8. Comparative Discussion

Taken together, SC and DIS emerge as the most consistent traits across all three leaders, representing the clearest markers distinguishing far-right populist women leaders from other women leaders. Results for BACE, PWR, CC, TASK, and IGB are more mixed, with differences emerging more clearly in comparisons with world leaders and American women leaders than with male far-right counterparts.

Notably, however, in several cases, the women leaders not only meet but also exceed their male counterparts, suggesting that far-right populist women do not merely adopt the leadership norms of their party context but may actively reinforce them. This is consistent with the theoretical argument that women in highly male-dominated environments face particular pressure to demonstrate leadership strength and ideological credibility—aligning with and elevating masculine leadership ideals. At the same time, the findings extend Fouquet and Brummer’s (2023) work by suggesting that leadership traits among populist actors may also be shaped by gendered expectations and constraints. In particular, the consistently elevated levels of SC and DIS indicate that these pressures may reinforce the expression of certain core populist leadership traits.

5. Conclusion

This study integrates a gender perspective into LTA to examine how far-right populist women enact leadership within male-dominated and misogynistic party environments. Profiling Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel—and systematically comparing them to samples of their male counterparts, world leaders, and non-populist American women leaders—yields five central conclusions.

First, compared to non-populist women leaders, all three far-right populist women exhibit stronger expressions of several traits commonly associated with both populist leadership and masculine leadership ideals. Most notably, all three score high to very high on SC and DIS—traits previously identified as characteristic of populist leadership (see Section 2; see also Fouquet & Brummer, 2023, p. 24). Overall, the findings are consistent with our expectations and align with earlier research: in our sample, far-right populist women leaders appear more self-confident, confrontational, and, in some cases, more control-oriented than other women leaders. This pattern suggests that entering and advancing within male-dominated far-right parties may require women leaders to project these traits particularly strongly. In other words, compared with other women leaders, far-right populist women leaders more consistently display traits associated with both populist and traditionally masculine leadership performances.

Second, compared to the broader sample of world leaders, these differences are less pronounced—except for DIS, which distinguishes all three women. High distrust emerges as the most robust trait separating populist leaders from the broader leadership population, confirming Fouquet and Brummer’s findings (2023, p. 24; see also Fitzsimmons, 2022). A similar result appears in Allen and Gallagher’s (2022, p. 551) analysis of Donald Trump, where distrust most distinguishes him from the world leader sample. Beyond elevated distrust, however, the women display varied profiles across traits such as BACE, PWR, CC, TASK, and IGB when compared to the world leader sample, indicating, as suggested by Fouquet and Brummer, that populist

leadership does not reflect a single, uniform personality type. However, the closer resemblance to the world leader sample than to the women leader sample suggests that the former may itself reflect historically masculinized patterns of executive leadership, including stronger expectations of agency, assertiveness, and control (see, e.g., Cameron & Shaw, 2016; Campus, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Jamieson, 1995). In turn, this underscores the importance of gendering LTA.

Third, comparisons with male far-right counterparts reveal both convergence and gendered differentiation across cases. In France, Le Pen shares relatively low CC and elevated distrust with male peers, yet exhibits stronger SC and, in broader comparisons, stronger IGB, suggesting a more pronounced emphasis on masculine-coded traits than her male counterparts. In Italy, Meloni diverges more clearly: while Italian far-right men lean low on BACE, she leans high, combining very high SC and high distrust. This configuration positions her as more action-oriented and control-focused than both her male peers and the broader leadership samples. In Germany, Weidel closely resembles her male counterparts, as the AfD sample broadly displays high distrust, lean high need for power, and low CC; however, she expresses these traits—especially distrust—at even more pronounced levels.

Fourth, taken together, these comparisons suggest that gender shapes not so much the overall configuration of far-right populist leadership traits as their intensity and expression. In our sample, women leaders often resemble their male party counterparts, but score higher on SC, distrust, and, in some cases, stronger control orientation than other women leaders.

Finally, comparing our findings to those of Fouquet and Brummer (2023) suggests that variation in populist leadership also depends on sample composition. While Fouquet and Brummer confirm high DIS and high SC among eight populist government leaders (Chávez, Kirchner, Trump, Orbán, Erdoğan, Berlusconi, Modi, and Duterte), our analysis of far-right populist leaders in France, Italy, and Germany points to a more consistent alignment with core populist leadership traits. This divergence likely reflects both the distinct context of far-right parties and the gendered pressures women leaders face within them, which may intensify the expression of selected populist traits.

By collecting a large corpus of verbatim speeches and press conferences, this article provides a robust basis for studying the leadership traits of far-right populist women leaders comparatively. Future research can build on this design in several ways. For example, while the comparison to American women leaders offered an intra-gender variation, cross-national differences in institutions and political communication may shape how the traits are expressed independently of gender and the far-right context. Future work could therefore develop a European comparison group of non-populist women leaders, and ideally non-populist men, to enable more context-sensitive gender comparisons. The exact composition of ProfilerPlus's world leaders norming sample is also not publicly disclosed and may itself include leaders with populist characteristics, a limitation that future research could address through more transparent norming datasets. Similarly, rather than a stand-alone or binary social category, gender intersects with other social identities and is expressed through diverse identities, performances, and institutional positions. Future leadership trait analyses should therefore incorporate a stronger intersectional lens, examining how gender, in conjunction with other social categories, shapes leadership traits across different groups and contexts, populist or otherwise.

Taken together, the findings suggest that far-right populist leadership is most consistently characterized by elevated SC and DIS. Gender matters not by producing fundamentally different leadership profiles within the far right, but by shaping the degree to which women adopt, perform, and, in several cases, amplify masculine-coded and populist traits to secure authority and legitimacy. Far-right populist women leaders thus do not merely mirror their male counterparts; in several instances, they intensify traits central to populist leadership, turning gendered expectations into a strategic resource rather than a constraint (Bast et al., 2022; Snipes & Mudde, 2020). It is precisely because of these carefully calibrated performances that far-right populist women leaders should not be underestimated, as Pető warned more than a decade ago.

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Conflict of Interests

In this article, editorial decisions were undertaken by Pamela Pansardi (University of Pavia).

Data Availability

The data are available upon request.

LLMs Disclosure

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used GitHub Copilot (GitHub/Microsoft, integrated into RStudio) to assist with coding and debugging; DeepL to translate French and Italian source texts into English; and OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5.3) to refine grammar and language. These tools were not used to generate or alter substantive content, data analysis, or the interpretation of results. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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