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Pippa Norris

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PART I

UNDERSTANDING THE RADICAL RIGHT

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I

Understanding the Rise of the Radical Right

On 21 April 2002, the defeat of the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, by Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the French presidential elections, sent a profound shock wave throughout Europe. The result galvanized massive anti-Front National demonstrations by millions of protestors all over France. One of the best-known leaders on the radical right, Le Pen dismissed the Holocaust as a ‘detail of history,’ and he continues to voice anti-Semitic, racist views. These events were rapidly followed in the Netherlands by the assassination on 6 May 2002 of Pim Fortuyn, a flamboyant and controversial figure, leading to a sudden surge of support for his party in the general election. The anti-immigrant Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), formed just three months before the election, suddenly became the second largest party in the Dutch Parliament and part of the governing coalition. Nor are these isolated gains; during the last two decades, radical right parties have been surging in popularity in many nations, gaining legislative seats, enjoying the legitimacy endowed by ministerial office, and entering the corridors of government power. Some have proved temporary ‘flash’ parties while others have experienced more enduring success across a series of contests. The popularity of figures such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jörg Haider, Umberto Bossi, Carl Hagen, and Pim Fortuyn has aroused widespread popular concern and a burgeoning scholarly literature.¹

The core puzzle that this book seeks to explain is why these parties have established a clear presence in national parliaments in recent years in a diverse array of democracies – such as Canada, Norway, France, Israel, Russia, Romania, and Chile – and even entered coalition governments in Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Italy – while failing to advance in comparable nations such as Sweden, Britain, and

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the United States. Their rise has occurred in both predominantly Catholic and Protestant societies, in Nordic and Mediterranean regions, in liberal Norway and conservative Switzerland, as well as in the European Union and in Anglo-American democracies. The puzzle is deepened by the fact that they have surfaced in many established democracies, affluent post-industrial 'knowledge' societies, and cradle-to-grave welfare states with some of the best-educated and most secure populations in the world, all characteristics which should generate social tolerance and liberal attitudes antithetical to xenophobic appeals.² Moreover, radical right parties are not confined to these countries; they have also won support within certain post-Communist nations, as well as in some Latin American democracies. Their rise is all the more intriguing given the remarkable resilience of established party systems and the difficulties that left-libertarian insurgents, exemplified by Green parties, have commonly encountered when trying to break through into elected office.

Despite extensive interest, little consensus has emerged about the reasons for this phenomenon. This book reexamines classic questions about the underlying conditions facilitating the rise of the radical right, the nature of electoral change, and the drivers behind patterns of party competition. Building on ideas of rational voters and rational parties developed nearly half a century ago, this phenomenon is understood here through the concept of a regulated political marketplace which distinguishes between public 'demand' and party 'supply,' both operating within the context of the electoral rules. On the 'demand side,' the book suggests that certain conditions in the mass electorate, notably the growth of political disaffection and partisan dealignment in contemporary democracies, make it easier for supporters to defect, at least temporarily, from mainstream parties. The rising salience of cultural protectionism, in a backlash against globalization and population migration, has altered the public agenda in each country, providing sporadic openings for new parties. But these developments are common across contemporary societies, so they are insufficient by themselves to account for the varying fortunes of the radical right. The theory developed here argues that the key to radical right success depends upon the complex interaction of public demand and party supply under conditions of imperfect competition in a regulated electoral marketplace. Each section of the book is organized to explore a different dimension of this account.

- Part I provides an overview and introduction.
- Part II examines the broader institutional context of the type of

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regulated marketplace, comparing the formal *rules* determining the nomination, campaigning, and election process.

- Part III considers the role of public *demand*, notably conditions of widespread political disaffection and attitudes sympathetic toward cultural protectionism.
- Part IV analyzes how far party *supply* matches electoral demands, in particular whether radical right parties emphasize either ideological or populist appeals within this environment, contributing toward sporadic electoral gains, and – the condition necessary for persistent success – whether the radical right manages to build and consolidate effective party organizations.

This theory is tested against survey evidence derived from almost forty societies. The conclusions drawn from the study are designed to contribute toward informing the debate about the role of the radical right in contemporary democracies, by dismissing certain common fallacies while highlighting other underemphasized causes. By contrast, the study establishes that remarkably little evidence supports many other popular myths about the reasons for their success, for example the claim that the radical right have advanced most strongly in societies with rampant unemployment or strong waves of immigration, or that they appeal most strongly to socially disadvantaged sectors of the electorate. Nor does this account emphasize, as others commonly suggest, that radical right fortunes depend primarily upon where other mainstream center-right and center-left parties locate themselves across the ideological spectrum, or that charismatic leaders are vital to their success. Taken by themselves, none of the core propositions advanced in this book can claim to provide particularly striking or original insights; indeed, they can be regarded as fairly conventional assumptions pervasive in many standard rational choice accounts of electoral systems, voting behavior, and party competition. The book borrows from, and thereby builds upon, the substantial literature in these subfields, rather than seeking to reinvent the intellectual wheel. Nevertheless, the combination and dynamic interaction of these factors have been insufficiently understood theoretically, still less demonstrated empirically, to explain this particular phenomenon.

THE RISE OF RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES

Before setting out the key components of the argument developed at the heart of this study, and discussing how this argument relates to the

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previous literature, for those unfamiliar with this phenomenon, the study first briefly sets the stage by describing the basic facts concerning where and when the radical right have advanced most successfully during the postwar era – and where they have failed. The precise definition and categorization of parties within the radical right family are discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, but here, for an overview of this phenomenon, some of the best-known contemporary cases are highlighted.

In the postwar decade, the remnants of the radical right existed at the shadowy fringe of party politics in established democracies. The most significant parliamentary party which could trace its origins to Europe's fascist past was the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), although in postwar German politics the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) remained active at the margins. In the United States, powerful forces of racist right-wing reaction included the Ku Klux Klan and George Wallace's American Independent Party. The most dramatic new insurgent, which shocked established party systems, arose in France, where the Poujadists registered sudden albeit short-lived gains during the 1956 general election. By the early 1970s, however, initial signs suggested that the deep tectonic plates of European party politics were starting to shift elsewhere. In 1972, Mogens Glistrup established the Danish Fremskridtspartiet (FP). Tremors reverberated throughout Western Europe when, just a year later, they became the second largest party in the Danish Folketing, gaining 16% of the vote on a radical antitax program. Other leaders sought to emulate their success in Britain (with the National Front, founded in 1967), France (Le Pen's Front National, FN, founded in 1972), and Norway (the sister Fremskrittspartiet, or FrP, created in 1973). The initial electoral record of these parties remained erratic and uncertain during this decade: by the early 1980s, national parliaments in Western democracies contained only a half-dozen parties which could be classified as constituting part of the radical right family, even by the most generous definition.

Today, by contrast, multiple contenders jostle for power. To give just a few illustrations of their contemporary success, as well as the recent contests in France and the Netherlands mentioned earlier, in Italy, the government was returned to power in May 2001, resting on the support of the xenophobic Lega Nord (LN), led by Umberto Bossi, and the Alleanza Nazionale (AN), led by Gianfranco Fini (with roots in the fascist MSI). In Austria, in 1999 Jörg Haider's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) won 26.9% of the vote and the FPÖ (although not Haider) became part of the new coalition government led by the conservative Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP). In the 2001 Danish general

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election, the Dansk Folkeparti (DF), headed by Pia Kjaersgaard, got 12% of the vote. In Norway that year, Carl Ivar Hagen's Fremskrittspartiet won 14.7% of the vote, becoming the third largest party in the Storting. In Belgium, in October 2000, the Vlaams Blok, or VB (led by Frank Vanhecke), became the biggest party on Antwerp City Council, winning twenty out of fifty seats. During the June 2004 European elections, Vlaams Blok won the second largest share of the Belgian vote. In Switzerland, the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) consolidated gains in the October 2003 elections with 26.6% of the vote, becoming the largest party in the Swiss Parliament, with 55 out of the 200 seats in the Nationalrat, gaining an additional seat in the executive Federal Council. By no means all these peaks were sustained in subsequent elections. Nevertheless each temporary surge administered a sharp shock to mainstream parties and generated considerable alarm in popular media commentary.

So far we have only mentioned some recent electoral gains for the more successful contemporary radical right parties in Western Europe. The list remains far from complete. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, in Anglo-American democracies similar parties include New Zealand First, the Canadian Reform Party (subsequently known as the Alliance and then the Conservative party),³ the British National Party (BNP) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Ross Perot's Reform Party in the United States, and One Nation in Australia. In post-Communist Europe, ultranationalist right-wing forces emerging since the fall of the Berlin Wall in Central and Eastern Europe are exemplified by the Hungarian Justice and Life Party, the Slovene National Party, the Greater Romania Party, the Romanian National Unity Party, and the Liberal Democratic parties in Russia and the Ukraine.⁴ In regional elections, the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the German People's Union have also registered some modest gains in the former Communist eastern Germany. Comparisons elsewhere include the Independent Democratic Union and National Renewal parties in Chile, and the National Religious Party and National Union (IL) in Israel.

Figure 1.1 summarizes some of the basic trends in party support. The graph illustrates the proportion of votes cast for seven relevant radical right parties in Western Europe which contested a continuous series of national elections since the early 1980s. This includes votes cast for the Italian MSI/AN, Austrian FPÖ, Swiss SVP, Danish FP/DF, Norwegian FrP, Belgian VB, and French FN. All these parties are defined as 'relevant' as they have achieved over 3% of the vote in one or more national parliamentary elections during this period, and they represent some of the more consistently successful radical right contenders in Western Europe. The figure

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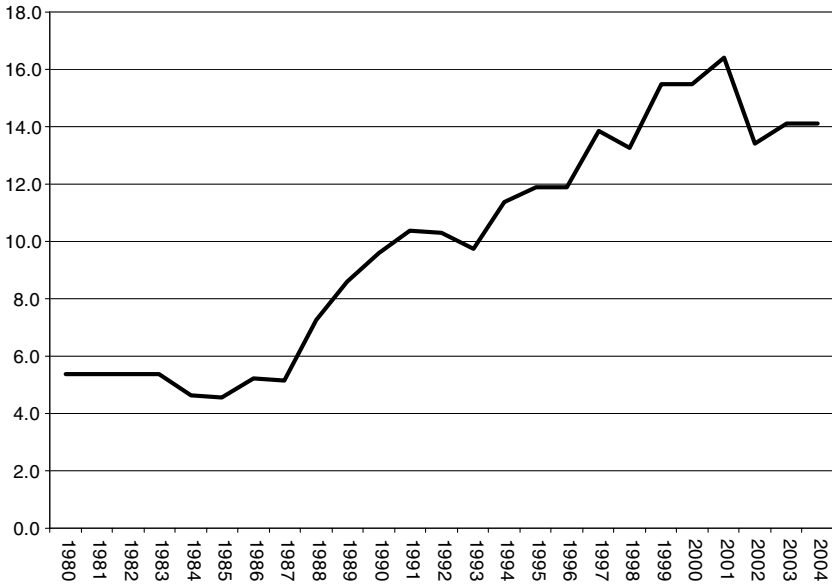
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FIGURE 1.1. Mean Vote for Seven Radical Right Parties in Western Europe, 1980–2004. This figure summarizes the average share of the vote in the lower house from 1980 to 2004 for the following parties in Western Europe, all of which have contested a continuous series of national parliamentary elections since 1980: Italian MSI/AN, Austrian FPÖ, Swiss SVP, Danish FP/DF, Norwegian FrP, Belgian VB, French FN. All these parties can be defined as ‘relevant’; i.e., they have achieved over 3% of the vote in one or more national parliamentary elections during this period. In the Italian and Danish cases, splits occurred within parties, but there are still recognizable continuities in renamed successor parties. *Sources:* Thomas T. Mackie and Richard Rose. 1991. *The International Almanac of Electoral History*. London: Macmillan; Thomas T. Mackie and Richard Rose. 1997. *A Decade of Election Results: Updating the International Almanac*. Studies in Public Policy. 295. Glasgow: University of Strathclyde; recent elections from *Elections around the World*. www.electionsworld.org.

demonstrates the dramatic advance of these parties: in the early 1980s, support remained flat and the radical right was often excluded from parliament through failing to meet the necessary vote thresholds over successive elections. The surge gathered momentum from the mid-1980s onwards until these parties eventually reached a slight plateau in 2001, with the support of around one in six European voters. To summarize, during the last two decades, popular support for these parties almost tripled.

By now, too many gains have occurred in too many countries to accept the idea that the radical right is simply a passing fad or fashion, a

temporary phenomena which will eventually fade away on the contemporary political scene. Still, the success of the radical right should not be exaggerated: for example, the British National Party, the German NDP, and Australian One Nation currently remain stranded at the peripheries of power, attracting disproportionate media angst and headline news coverage despite, so far, only sporadic and limited electoral success. ‘Flash’ parties, exemplified by Lijst Pym Fortuyn, enjoy a meteoric rise but an equally precipitate fall. Elsewhere, however, as will be discussed in Chapter 10, some other contenders such as Lega Nord, the Norwegian FrP, and the Belgian Vlaams Blok have managed the successful transition from fringe into minor party status. After their initial entry into local government or national parliaments, parties which have consolidated support over successive elections have gradually gained status, resources, and legitimacy, which they can use to build grassroots party organizations, select more experienced candidates, and expand access to the news media and to public campaign funding, all of which can provide a springboard for further advances. Access to legislative office often provides important opportunities to accumulate valuable political resources such as access to public funding, political patronage, and media coverage between elections, which are denied to fringe parties persistently excluded from power.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS IN THE LITERATURE

Of course, no shortage of alternative explanations for the rise of the radical right is available, as will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. The reasons for this phenomenon have attracted widespread speculation in popular commentary and in the academic literature.⁵ Research on the extreme right is hardly new; indeed classics in political sociology published during the late 1950s and early 1960s focused on understanding grassroots support for fascism and Nazism (Adorno et al., Lipset), the French origins of Poujadism (Hoffman), and the American phenomenon of McCarthyism (Bell).⁶ One summary of the literature by Rydgren developed the following ‘shopping list’ of reasons which had been proposed in research to explain the emergence of contemporary radical right parties:

1. A postindustrial economy.
2. Dissolution of established identities, fragmentation of the culture, multiculturalization.
3. The emergence or growing salience of the sociocultural cleavage dimension.

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4. Widespread political discontent and disenchantment.
5. Convergence between the established parties in political space.
6. Popular xenophobia and racism.
7. Economic crisis and unemployment.
8. Reaction against the emergence of New Left and/or Green parties and movements.
9. A proportional voting system.
10. Experience of a referendum that cuts across the old party cleavages.⁷

Other commentators have identified ten distinct ‘theories’ of the radical right.⁸ Yet it remains unclear how these various ad hoc causes relate to each other theoretically. Nor is it evident how structural developments which are thought to be common in most postindustrial nations, such as political disaffection, can account satisfactorily for contrasts in the electoral fortunes of the radical right within or among similar societies, such as Wallonian and Francophone Belgium, or western and eastern Canadian states. Many common propositions, such as the assumed role of economic conditions or patterns of immigration, have found only limited or mixed support in the literature. The research also remains divided in part because, rather than offering systematic comparative analysis with testable generalizations, the subfield remains heavily dependent upon descriptive narratives about specific national case studies. As a result, contingent factors emphasized as critical for the rise of specific radical right parties in some particular countries (or elections) are reported as unimportant in others. Many of these explanations are discussed and considered further throughout this book but found to be less closely and consistently linked to the rise of the radical right in many countries than the account developed here.

To make sense of the contemporary literature, and as a brush-clearing exercise, the predominant perspectives can be categorized analytically into three main schools. The most common sociological approach has long emphasized structural trends altering popular demands in mass society, notably developments in the socioeconomic background and political attitudes of the electorate, which are thought to have generated opportunities for new parties. Alternatively, more recent institutional accounts have often focused more heavily upon supply-side factors, including the strategic activities of parties as rational agents and where they choose to locate themselves across the ideological spectrum when seeking to compete for votes and seats. Finally, the traditional approach found in the literature on electoral systems has long stressed the importance of the institutional

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context, emphasizing the formal electoral rules constraining both supply and demand in the regulated marketplace.

Social Structure and Public Demand

Essentially, one-level models based on how changes in the social structure have fueled public demand for the radical right are by far the most pervasive approach in the previous literature, drawing upon sociology, social psychology, and political economy. These accounts emphasize long-term ‘bottom up’ generic conditions and secular trends in mass society – notably the growth of a marginalized underclass in postindustrial economies, patterns of migration flows, and/or the expansion of long-term unemployment – which are thought to have facilitated public demand for these parties as an outlet for political frustrations among the losers in affluent societies.⁹ Specific arguments within this perspective claim, alternatively, that the radical right is strongest under conditions where: (i) new waves of immigration, asylum seekers, and refugees have raised public concern about this issue; (ii) the electorate has become widely discontented with the mainstream parties and mistrustful of the political system; (iii) a breakdown has occurred in the traditional class and religious cleavages structuring mainstream political affiliations and party loyalties; (iv) a cultural backlash is evident against the rise of postmaterial values; and/or (v) cuts in the welfare state, growing levels of job insecurity, and rising patterns of unemployment have generated new forms of social risk and disadvantage. These conditions are regarded as largely ‘structural’ in the sense that they are understood as persistent and enduring developments in mass society which constrain the behavior of all actors in the political system. This relationship between society and parties involves some endogeneity; in the long term, public policies can gradually transform society, for example through cuts in the welfare state expanding the number of households living in poverty, or through legal restriction on the influx of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.¹⁰ Politicians seek to shape and alter public opinion, for example by populist rhetoric heightening fears of ‘outsiders,’ or by proposing new legislation restricting immigration, thereby raising the salience of the issue on the policy agenda. Nevertheless, demand-side approaches treat mass society as the ‘given’ context within which political parties have to fight any particular election.

Although frequently assumed, for example by commentators in the news media, in fact some of the most popular explanations fail with just a cursory glance at the comparative evidence. Many accounts blame job