

Introduction

But the extremists of the movements of the Right do deserve a measure of dispassionate attention, not because of services they have rendered America but because they have reflected tensions endemic in the entire population and in the very structure of American life.

(Bennett 1990: 6)

The observation that European politics is dominated by political parties which are older than most of their electorates still holds true for much of Western Europe. And even if party systems seem to be more in flux in the twenty-first century, not only in the Eastern part of the continent, they are still largely controlled by members of the traditional party families, notably the conservatives and Christian democrats, socialists and social democrats, and liberals. In fact, only two new party families have been able to establish themselves in a multitude of European countries since the Second World War: the Greens (or New Politics) and the populist radical right. And only the latter has been able to gain results in both parts of Europe.

Seen in this light, it does not seem strange to have yet another book on this topic. After all, the populist radical right is the only successful new party family in Europe. Moreover, given the unprecedented horrors of the Second World War, and the more recent nativist wars in the Balkans, the destructive threats to liberal democracy of the populist radical right seem reason enough for the extensive study of the phenomenon. Not surprising then, that the populist radical right is one of the few academic topics that one can study without having to defend the relevance of one's choice.

But one can go even further. I often start my presentations, academic or otherwise, by pointing out that “the extreme right” is actually not “blowing for a general attack on the parliaments” of Europe (Fromm & Kernbach 1994: 9). In fact, it is still a relatively marginal electoral force in the vast majority of European countries. Still, none in the audience sees this as a good reason for me to either leave or question my almost ten-year career in this subfield of political science. In fact, most often

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the reaction is one of utter disbelief or annoyance: “why are you playing down the dangers of the extreme right?”

Also within the large and ever growing scholarly community “researchers recognize that the renaissance of right-wing extremism has become a more or less Europe wide phenomenon” (Rensmann 2003: 95). This general consensus notwithstanding, the empirical facts cannot be ignored. Leaving aside definitional issues for the moment, “it seems that support for far-right parties expanded measurably in the 1980s, but in more recent years it has tended towards slower growth, again with a handful of exceptions” (Wilcox *et al.* 2003a: 129). And even with the “measurable expansion” in the 1980s and the “slower growth” in the 1990s, the average percentage of voters for “far right” parties in fourteen Western European countries was only 6.5 percent in the 1980s and just 8.3 percent in the 1990s (Wilcox *et al.* 2003a: 128). The situation in postcommunist Eastern Europe is quite similar, despite the often alarmist accounts of the 1990s.

Obviously, there are important exceptions. For example, in countries such as Belgium (Flanders) and Serbia, populist radical right parties belong to the electorally strongest political actors, while in others like Austria and Slovakia they are or have been part of the national government. Moreover, politics is about more than mere electoral facts; it is also about perceptions. In this respect, populist radical right parties are certainly politically relevant, if only because they are perceived as such by large parts of both the elites and the masses. And, particularly in multi-party systems, small parties can weigh (heavily) on national policies and social values, even if in (semi-)permanent opposition.

Despite its relatively limited electoral and political significance within European politics, particularly if compared to the established party families, no party family has been studied as intensely as the populist radical right. Whereas the (edited) books on party families like the Christian democrats or liberals can be counted on the fingers of one or two hands, those on the populist radical right (irrespective of the term used) might already outnumber the combined total of books on all other party families together. Moreover, whereas other fields of political science are increasingly dominated by Anglo-Saxon publications, the study of populist radical right parties is truly international, with a roughly equal number of French and English book publications and a predominance of German studies (e.g. De Lange & Mudde 2005). While it might be overly critical to state that “[s]erious comparative scholarship on the radical right is still in its infancy” (Minkenberg 2000: 170), there are many aspects of the populist radical right party family that still need study or further clarification.

The vast majority of research on populist radical right parties has focused exclusively on (some) countries in Western Europe. This is particularly the case with the few comparative single-authored monographs (e.g. Carter 2005; Givens 2005; Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Betz 1994), but also with the bulk of edited volumes (e.g. Blaise & Moreau 2004; Perrineau 2001; Pfahl-Traugher 1994) and journal articles (e.g. Van der Brug *et al.* 2005; Ignazi 1992). Some of these studies have also included non-European “Western” countries, most notably from the Anglo-Saxon world (e.g. Decker 2004; Betz & Immerfall 1998; Minkenberg 1998). In sharp contrast, only a little work has been done on Eastern Europe (e.g. Mudde 2005a; Ramet 1999a), let alone on non-Western countries outside of Europe (e.g. India; see Rösel 2003; Andersen 1998).

As a consequence, there is “a lack of a comparative pan-European perspective” in the field (Anastasakis 2000: 6). It is virtually only in edited volumes that in addition to a majority of West European countries at least some East European cases are also included; although in most cases these studies do not entail a systematic comparative framework or conclusion (e.g. Werz 2003a; Hainsworth 2000a; Cheles *et al.* 1995). It is the explicit aim of this book to provide such a pan-European perspective, even though this does not necessarily limit the findings to the European context; i.e. most conclusions are considered to be valid for the populist radical right *tout court*, irrespective of geographical context, at least till this has been disproved by systematic empirical study.

Obviously, one can question why a pan-European perspective should be pursued, given the inevitable problems involved (e.g. different recent history, even more language problems, lack of data). First and foremost, a pan-European perspective dramatically increases the number of cases, most notably of (relatively) successful populist radical right parties. While the populist radical right is “stronger than ever” (Merkel 2003a), at least in the postwar period, there are still only a few cases of successful parties, both in electoral and political terms. Second, much of the so-called East will or has become part of the so-called West through membership in the European Union, and it is to be assumed that the (alleged) differences that might warrant distinct study at this moment will soon be irrelevant, given the homogenizing effects of EU membership.

While a pan-European perspective might be preferable for the above stated reasons, some important queries remain. Much literature on Eastern Europe argues that the region is fundamentally different from “the West,” including Western Europe, and should therefore not be studied with similar concepts and theories. However, I concur with those who have argued and proven, both on theoretical and empirical ground, that although differences do exist, also within the two regions, so-called

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“Western” concepts and theories go a long way in explaining developments in postcommunist countries (e.g. Clark 2002; Schmitter & Karl 1994).

Recent comparative literature on party politics in postcommunist Europe has emphasized the large similarities with the West, pointing to an increasing convergence of the former East and West (e.g. Bohrer II *et al.* 2000; Lewis 2000). There is no reason to assume that this would be significantly different for populist radical right parties. So, this book rejects neither *a priori* the received wisdom that the populist radical right in Eastern Europe differs fundamentally from its comrades in the Western part of the continent (e.g. Thieme 2005; Merkl 2003b; Butterwege 2002; Minkenberg 2002b), nor the possibility that these differences are relatively irrelevant for many specific research questions (e.g. Blokker 2005; Rensmann 2003; Weichsel 2002). Most importantly, there are clearly political parties on both sides of the former Iron Curtain that share a similar ideological core, which we refer to here as populist radical right, justifying their inclusion in one study. Whether this is the only thing they share, or whether they are also in other respects fairly similar, is to be proven in empirical analysis rather than by provisional observation.

In addition to a pan-European perspective, this study will also take a party-centric approach. Already in 1968, well before the (latest) ascendancy of rational choice theories, Giovanni Sartori criticized the “sociology of politics” for its “objectivist bias” – dealing almost exclusively with “the consumer” (i.e. the voter) and ignoring “the producer” (i.e. the party).

Now the greater the range of politics, the smaller the role of ‘objective factors’. All our *objective certainties* are increasingly exposed to, and conditioned by, *political uncertainty*. If so, it is an extraordinary paradox that the social sciences should be ever more prompted to explain politics by going *beyond* politics. (Sartori 1990 [1968]: 181–2)

Three decades later, Alan Ware notes the continuing predominance of the “sociological approach” in the study of political parties: “In this approach political institutions are mere intermediaries, and in seeking causal explanations of politics it passes quickly over them and concentrates on the ultimate determinants – the patterns of social conflict in that country” (Ware 1996: 9).

Economic and sociological determinisms also dominate the field of populist radical right studies. Virtually all explanations of the phenomenon treat the populist radical right as a passive consequence of macro-level socioeconomic developments. Not surprising then that little research is done on (the role of) the parties themselves. And although

eminent party scholars have argued that “the centrality of ideology in party politics is undeniable” (Ware 1996: 17), still relatively little attention is being paid to party ideology in studies of political parties in general, and populist radical right parties in particular.

In short, this book aims to make a threefold contribution to the literature. First, by providing a state-of-the art discussion of the key literature on several aspects of the study of the populist radical right it endeavors to present an *overview* of the key writings in the field. Second, by critically assessing the various claims made in the literature, it offers significant *revisions* of some of the commonly held misperceptions about the populist radical right party family. Third, and most important, by taking a pan-European and party-driven perspective it offers important *innovations* with regard to various aspects of the populist radical right (i.e. concepts, issues and explanations). As Lars Rensmann has argued:

The analysis of Eastern European post-Communist nationalism is particularly interesting in light of advanced theories on the extreme right that are predominantly based on the specific empirical conditions in Western postindustrial societies – conditions that only partly apply to Eastern Europe. (2003: 118)

Obviously, this is not the ultimate study of the European populist radical right. For instance, it focuses almost exclusively on political parties, leaving aside highly important developments within nonparty organizations and subcultures (e.g. Mudde 2005a; Minkenberg 2003). It also poses at least as many questions as it answers. Most importantly, it is based partially on secondary sources and therefore suffers from some of the same weaknesses as the rest of the literature; i.e. a predominance of certain parties (notably the FN) and a lack of reliable information (in whatever language) on several others. Consequently, most conclusions offered in this study are to be seen, first and foremost, as hypotheses to be tested in further, more systematic and comprehensive studies.

Othon Anastasakis has identified three major shortcomings in the study of the populist radical right in general: “a lack of a commonly accepted definition, a confusing terminology and a difficulty in the categorization of the variety of cases” (2000: 5). Similarly, Peter H. Merkl has postulated that “experienced analysts still disagree on categorization, labels and boundaries between its different manifestations” (2003a: 4). The two chapters of the first part of the book will address these shortcomings by presenting an overview of the state of affairs in the field and by providing a comprehensive framework for analysis.

The first chapter of this book addresses the first two points, though without any illusion or even desire to overcome the lack of consensus. Differences of opinion on which term to use and how to define the core

characteristics of this phenomenon are in themselves not a big problem. Rather, the lack of clear definitions and the interchangeable use of different terms for identical phenomena undermine the ability to compare insights between studies and thereby further the general knowledge on the topic. The first chapter is therefore meant to be, first and foremost, *my* interpretation of how best to define and term the phenomenon at hand. Even when colleagues disagree with my definition or term (or with both), the discussion nevertheless enables them to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the further discussions in this book.

Chapter 2 deals with one of the least developed features of the study of the populist radical right: the categorization of the parties. The main aim of the chapter is to introduce a method for doing this as accurately as possible. While the method proposed is more difficult and intensive than the few alternatives used so far, i.e. expert studies and the party manifesto project, it is more accurate and less susceptible to “common wisdom” (which is often not much more than prejudice). The chapter discusses many individual parties from both the East and the West, in particular certain borderline cases, but some remain to be determined by colleagues with (much) more intimate knowledge of those parties. The final list of populist radical right parties, presented in appendix A, is therefore mostly a suggestion – although some core members of the party family will be identified unequivocally.

The second part of the book takes up a variety of issues in relation to populist radical right parties; some central to the field, others until now fairly marginal. The chapters are scheduled in such a way that we move from the micro- to the macro-level in terms of ideological constructs, addressing respectively, enemies, women, economy, democracy, Europe, and globalization. The prime focus in all chapters is on the ideological position(s) of the populist radical right, although other aspects of the different relationships will also be addressed.

Chapter 3 deals with a central issue of the populist radical right, i.e. its enemies. Rather than losing ourselves in a plethora of idiosyncratic enemy descriptions, the chapter presents an overview of more general enemy images (argumentations) on the basis of a two-by-two typology. In addition, we look in more detail at the role that three traditional enemies play in the contemporary populist radical right parties: the Jew, the Muslim, and the Rom (“Gypsy”). These enemy images provide not only a better insight into what and whom the parties are against, but also into what they support, and how they see themselves and their own nation.

The relationship between populist radical right parties and women has received only passing attention in most major works on the topic. With the exception of some feminist authors, most scholars in the field merely

note the significant underrepresentation of women in the electorates and memberships of these parties. What virtually all studies have in common, however, is that this lack of attraction of populist radical right parties for women is explained by the alleged particularly sexist nature of these parties. Chapter 4 presents extensive new empirical data to qualify the underrepresentation of women within the electorates and parties of the populist radical right. In line with these new findings, the sexism thesis is largely rejected and an original alternative explanation is suggested.

The next chapter addresses one of the most important misunderstandings about the populist radical right, i.e. the predominance of neoliberal economics. As a consequence of the huge influence of two of the seminal books in the field (i.e. Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Betz 1994), many scholars have come to emphasize the importance of neoliberal economics in the ideology and to the electorate of populist radical right parties. Chapter 5 will revise this view on two counts: the content of the socioeconomic program and its importance to the populist radical right.

A special place in the debate about the populist radical right is reserved for its relationship to democracy in general, and liberal democracy in particular. Many authors have discussed the alleged tension and even opposition between the two, but most accounts are highly abstract, referring more to general principles rather than concrete proposals. Chapter 6 analyzes the key characteristics of populist radical right democracy and compares them to the fundamentals of liberal democracy. On the basis of this comparison, a theoretical threat assessment is presented.

European cooperation is a highly topical issue in comparative politics in general, and in relation to the populist radical right in particular. Rejection and even sepsis of European integration is increasingly seen as a key feature of populist radical right parties; indeed, some parties seem to be classified as members of the party family purely on the basis of their anti-EU attitude (e.g. ODS, UKIP). Chapter 7 provides a short historical overview of the positions of different populist radical right parties towards European integration in general, and the EC and EU in particular. It further discusses the various European utopias that exist within the party family and the attempts at European cooperation between populist radical right parties.

The last chapter of part two deals with opposition to globalization, which has become a hot topic in politics and political science in recent years. Various accounts on the so-called antiglobalization movement have been published, mostly by their activists or sympathizers, but few touch upon the views of the populist radical right on this topic. Chapter 8 presents the main arguments of the party family on the different processes of globalization. It shows that the populist radical right considers

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globalization to be a multifaceted enemy, though few of the parties devote much attention to it (yet).

The third and last part of the book addresses what constitutes probably the most difficult aspect of the study of contemporary populist radical right parties, explaining their electoral failures and successes. It argues that the major assumptions underlying most research in the field are seriously flawed and have led to a predominance of macro- and micro-level studies of the demand-side. Instead, an argument for a major change in perspective towards meso-level studies of the supply-side, most notably of the populist radical right parties themselves, and a differentiation of theoretical models for the phases of electoral breakthrough and persistence is put forward.

The final chapters of the book present and integrate the main conclusions and suggestions for further studies along the same lines. In addition, they assess the relationship between populist radical right parties and European democracies: addressing both the impact *of* the populist radical right parties on the European democracies and of these democracies *on* these parties. The concluding chapter ends with a reminder of the key message of the whole book: populist radical right parties themselves should be put at the center of future research on their electoral and political failures and successes.

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Part I

Concepts

1 Constructing a conceptual framework

The belittlement of definitions is wrong on three counts. First, since definitions declare the intended meaning of words, they ensure that we do not misunderstand each other. Second, words are also, in our research, our data containers. Therefore, if our data containers are loosely defined our facts will be misgathered. Third, to define is first of all to assign limits, to delimit. (Sartori 2004: 786)

1.1 Introduction

Several recent studies on the topic of our concern have started by paraphrasing the famous opening sentence of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*: "A specter is haunting Europe, it's the specter of . . .," followed by the author's term of preference (e.g. Jungwirth 2002b; Papadopoulos 2000). The author will then simply assume that the preferred term accurately labels the "specter," that the term itself has a singular and comprehensible meaning, and that readers are in agreement with the categorization of the various manifestations of that "specter."

In fact, during the last few decades commentators worldwide have concurred in their assessment of the similarities and dangers of European political parties as seemingly diverse as Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front national (National Front, FN), Pia Kjaersgaard's Danske Folkeparti (Danish People's Party, DFP), or Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal'nodemokraticheskoi partii Rossii (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, LDPR). But seldom did they manage to agree on terminology. Both in the media and in the scholarly community an unprecedented plethora of different terms has been put forward since the early 1980s.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, titles of (comparative) books and articles in various languages on the topic include terms like *extreme right* (e.g. Schain *et al.* 2002a; Perrineau 2001; Hainsworth 2000a; Ignazi 1994; Pfahl-Traughber 1993; Stouthuysen 1993), *far right* (e.g. Jungerstam-Mulders 2003; Roxburgh 2002; Marcus 2000; Cheles *et al.* 1995), *radical right* (e.g. Ramet 1999a; Minkenberg 1998; Kitschelt &