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Introduction

1.1. THE PUZZLE

The dramatic entry of Jean-Marie Le Pen into the second round of the French presidential election of 2002 was a high point in the history of the *Front National* (National Front – FN) in France. This election was a clear challenge to “business as usual” in France. In the first round, Le Pen’s 17% of the vote was a shock to then Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who was only able to get 16% of the vote. Jospin was eliminated from what had been expected to be a second-round duel with President Jacques Chirac, who received 20% of the first-round vote (the lowest percentage ever for an incumbent). This election was one in which the two main campaigners were considered uninspiring and voters were faced with a choice of 16 candidates. These two factors led to a record high rate of abstention (28.4%) and allowed Le Pen to win second place with a small increase in vote share from what he had won in the previous election. Le Pen’s advancement into the second round led to massive protests and a concerted effort by both the right and left to ensure that Chirac won the second round convincingly. Although many left voters held their noses as they voted, Chirac won the second round with 82% of the vote.

Le Pen’s triumph in the presidential election was quickly followed by a disappointing but predictable result in the first round of the legislative elections. The FN received 11% of the vote, down from the 15% it had received in the 1997 election, and it did not win any seats in the French Assembly. Even in the 1997 election, the FN was only able to translate its 15% of the vote in the first round into one seat in the French Assembly. Although the FN has been considered one of Europe’s most successful

radical right parties, it has had difficulty translating the percentage of the vote it receives into electoral office at the national level.

After its success in the 1989 European Parliament elections, in which it received 7.1% of the vote, the *Republikaner* (REP) party of Germany looked forward to the possibility of gaining 5% of the national vote and entering parliament for the first time in 1990. Despite polls that showed that about 7% of voters were willing to vote for the *Republikaner*, the party received less than 2% of the vote in the 1990 legislative election and did not qualify for a seat in the German *Bundestag* (Lower House). The *Republikaner's* loss was blamed on reunification and the downplaying of the immigration issue, as well as on the 5% electoral threshold that the party did not attain. The German *Republikaner* has been even less successful than the French National Front in winning seats in the national legislature.

In contrast, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)'s 27% of the vote in the October 1999 legislative election translated into 52 of the 183 seats in the Austrian legislature and dramatic entry into government as a coalition partner with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). The FPÖ has been the most successful radical right party in Western Europe. The party's leader, Jörg Haider, has been a controversial figure due to favorable references he has made to Nazi employment policies and his calls for a stop to immigration. His party's entry into government was followed by major demonstrations around the country and diplomatic sanctions from the 14 other European Union (EU) member countries.

The study of the rise of radical right parties in the 1980s and 1990s generally focused on economic and political change in Western Europe. The economic and political conditions that have led to the rise of radical right parties exist all over Europe. Unemployment was relatively high during this time and voters were beginning to show their dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties by either voting for new parties on the left and right or by abstaining. Yet, radical right parties have been successful only in a few countries. The *Republikaner's* 2% of the vote is much lower than the National Front's 15% and the Freedom Party's 27% of the vote in national legislative elections. Arguments that rely on political and economic conditions to explain this variation cannot provide a complete picture. Why does such a small percentage of voters choose the radical right in Germany? Why is the radical right winning more seats in Austria than in France and Germany? To what extent can institutional differences, particularly those impacting party strategy, explain the contrasting electoral results?

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Socioeconomic conditions certainly have played a role in the success of the radical right. The process of globalization has led to increased unemployment and increased uncertainty in industrial sectors of the economy. Blue-collar workers in particular have felt the brunt of the change to a more service-oriented economy. Immigrants often are used as scapegoats for unemployment. Many studies of the radical right have focused on two areas: (1) identifying changes in the political opportunity structure and identifying particular groups, such as blue-collar workers who choose to vote for the radical right (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1995, Kriesi 1995); and (2) the relationship of aggregate socioeconomic variables to the vote for the radical right (Swank and Betz 1995, Jackman and Volpert 1996, Chapin 1997). These studies have provided valuable information on the makeup of radical right electorates and the motivations of different groups that vote for these parties.

What has been missing thus far in the literature is an analysis of the radical right that systematically compares the institutional structures, particularly electoral and party systems, in which these parties compete; widely divergent electoral fortunes show that socioeconomic conditions alone cannot explain differences in the success of radical right parties. To understand the variance in the success of radical right parties, one needs to take into account how different institutional settings affect the strategic behavior of both voters and parties.

I begin my analysis by replicating and building on the work of previous studies, comparing the types of appeals made by the radical right, the types of voters they attract, and the relationship of the radical right vote to unemployment and immigration at the regional level. My analysis indicates that these types of analysis cannot explain the causal factors behind the level of success of the radical right. I then examine the relationship among party systems, electoral rules, and the vote for radical right parties, taking into account the strategic interaction of the radical right with the mainstream parties. Through the use of statistical analysis and case studies, I show that strategic voting is a major determinant of a radical right party's vote and seat totals in an election.

My main argument is that radical right parties will have difficulty attracting voters and winning seats in electoral systems that encourage strategic voting by the electorate and/or strategic coordination by the mainstream parties. Strategic voting occurs when voters choose to vote for a party other than their preferred party because they are afraid of wasting their vote, or they are afraid that their least-favored party will win if they vote for their most-preferred party. Electoral rules may encourage

strategic voting, but parties also can encourage strategic voting by signaling coalition preferences prior to an election or by indicating to voters that their vote for another party will be wasted.

Varying electoral rules and coalition structures provide different incentives for voters to vote strategically and for parties to coordinate on coalition strategy. These factors directly influence the ability of the radical right to attract voters and win seats. To support this argument, I compare the roles of strategic voting and strategic coordination in national legislative elections in France, Germany, Austria, and, in the final chapter, Denmark.

This study seeks to understand why individuals in similar socioeconomic environments choose to vote for the radical right in one type of electoral system yet not in another. The focus is on how individuals and parties respond to different institutional settings, while also considering the role of economic and social factors. Although the geographical focus is Western Europe, the analysis is designed so that the hypotheses can be applicable to other developed countries with multi-party systems.

The dependent variable throughout this study is the level of support received by the radical right in each of the four countries I study. The variable is measured through voting returns and seats won in national parliamentary elections. The percentage of support received by the radical right varies in each country, with the radical right receiving a higher level of support in France and Austria than in Germany. National-level electoral returns for each party are displayed in Table 1.1. The table shows that neither the National Democratic Party (NPD) nor the *Republikaner* in Germany have been able to get more than 4.3 % of the vote in legislative elections. The National Front received 15 % of the vote in 1997, and the Freedom Party received more than 20 % of the vote in 1994, 1995, and 1999.

The main independent variables in the study are laid out in Table 1.2. Each of these variables has a positive or negative impact on the vote for the radical right in each country. I argue that there is little difference across countries in their ability to attract the “right kind of voter,” who is basically the “modernization loser” as described by Herbert Kitschelt (1995) and Hans-Georg Betz (1994). The presence of immigrants and high levels of unemployment generally have a positive effect on the vote for the radical right, certainly not a negative effect. The main differences lie, and causal inferences can be made, in the variables related to strategic voting: the electoral system, coalition structures, and factionalism.

Chapter 2 focuses on the development of the radical right parties in France, Germany, and Austria. I argue that these parties can be considered

TABLE 1.1. *Percentage of the Vote Received by the Radical Right in Germany, Austria, and France: Legislative Elections*

Year	NPD/REP*		FPÖ	FN	
	1 st	2 nd		1 st	2 nd
1965	1.8	2			
1969	3.6	4.3			
1970			5.52		
1971			5.45		
1972	0.5	0.6			
1973				0.5	0
1975			5.4		
1976	0.4	0.3			
1978				0.8	0
1979			6.06		
1980	0.2	0.2			
1981				0.4	0
1983	0.2	0.2	4.98		
1986			9.7	9.7**	
1987	0.2	0.6			
1988				9.7	1.1
1990	1.7	2.1	16.6		
1993				12.4	5.7
1994	1.7	1.9	22.5		
1995			21.9		
1997				14.9	5.6
1998	2.3	1.8			
1999			26.9		

* NPD 1965–1987, REP 1990–1994.
** Proportional representation with one round of voting used.
Source: National election returns.

in the same category due to their nationalism and positions on issues such as immigration and the European Union. I begin by comparing different authors’ descriptions of extreme or radical right parties and develop my own description of a radical right party, which focuses on the party’s anti-immigrant stance and its self-portrayal as “outsider” in the party system. I then describe the radical right parties and their histories, including the factionalism that each party has experienced. Despite differences in their historical development during the 1980s and 1990s, the parties have taken very similar positions on key rallying issues like the presence of foreigners and resentment toward Brussels.

In Chapter 3, I present data that demonstrate the similarities between radical right voters in France, Germany, and Austria. Studies such as those

TABLE 1.2. *Factors Influencing the Success of Radical Right Parties*

	Attracting the “Right” Voters	Immigrants & Unemployment	Strategic Voting			Recent Votes*	Outcome Seats
			Electoral System	Coalition Structure	Factionalism		
France – National Front	+	+	–	–	–	11%	0
Germany – NPD and <i>Republikaner</i>	+	+	–	–	–	2.1%	0
Austria – Freedom Party	+	+	+	+	+	27%	52
Denmark – Progress Party and Danish People’s Party	+	+	+	+	+	12%	22

* *Source:* National election returns.

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by Kitschelt and Betz argue that the radical right has been successful because of its ability to win votes from modernization losers, or those who have lost out in the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a services-based economy. I argue that survey evidence indicates that these parties have attracted these types of voters in all of the cases, regardless of a party's level of success. This type of analysis cannot explain differences in the success of these parties.

Many authors have examined the relationship among the number of immigrants in a country, unemployment, and radical right party success. Most of these studies have been done at the national level, which does not take into account regional variation, which can be an important factor in electoral success. In Chapter 4, I examine these variables at the district or regional level to determine their relationships with the vote for the radical right. Although these results do show that the radical right gets a higher percentage of the vote in regions where there are high numbers of immigrants and unemployment, they do not explain why this relationship exists in France and Austria but not in Germany.

The set of variables that I present next (the electoral system, coordination by the mainstream parties, and factionalism) influences strategic voting in an election. The electoral system plays an important role in determining the ability of a small party to gain votes. Electoral systems often are designed to make it difficult for small parties to compete, by the imposition of barriers such as electoral thresholds or requiring a certain number of signatures to be eligible for an election. Another way in which small parties are discouraged is coordination by the mainstream parties, which can encourage strategic voting. Factionalism in a small party also can lead to splits that can, at least temporarily, dampen support and discourage cooperation with more-mainstream parties. In Chapter 5, I develop the theoretical basis for strategic voting that will be analyzed in Chapter 6. I use the theories on strategic voting developed by Gary Cox (1997) and extend those theories by developing a model that includes a party's coalition signals to voters, which then influence strategic voting.

To extend the model into new terrain, I examine another case with a proportional representation (PR) electoral system. In Chapter 7, I apply my model to the Danish case. I chose Denmark because it has a relatively uncomplicated electoral system and party system compared with those of Austria and Germany. Denmark also allows me to examine a case in which immigration from developing countries has been a more recent phenomenon. Denmark is a strong test for my argument, since the socioeconomic conditions that other authors emphasize are not as

strong in Denmark as in my other cases. The results in Denmark confirm my expectations that strategic voting (or lack thereof) is the key variable that channels potential radical right (RR) support into actual electoral success.

Research Design

This analysis does not discuss the *entry* of a radical right party into an electoral system – instead it is assumed that a radical right party has already been successful in entering the party system. In a study of party entry, Simon Hug (2001) has shown that ease of entry does not necessarily have an impact on the eventual success of a small party. The focus of this analysis is the factors that influence whether or not voters will choose to vote for an existing radical right party.

In order to maximize the system-level variables that can be controlled across cases, I use a “most similar systems” design, as formulated by Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune (1970). In this analysis, the cases chosen need to have systems in which the theoretically important processes exist, that is, multi-party systems where coalitions form and voters have the opportunity to vote strategically. However, it also is important to choose cases where the vote for the radical right varies.

Selection bias can be a problem in comparative analysis. Authors such as Barbara Geddes (1990) have pointed out the problems with making causal inferences when one selects on the dependent variable. The ideal situation would be to choose randomly from the universe of cases (such as all countries with multi-party systems), where the vote for (and seats won by) the radical right varies widely. However, as Geddes points out, “In practice, identifying the universe of cases that meet the structural criteria is probably an impossible task” (Geddes 1990, 144). This study attempts to balance the need for variance on the dependent variable with the need to study a few cases in depth. The cases need to vary on the dependent variable (percentage of the vote and seats won), as well as the main independent variables as shown in Table 1.2: electoral system, coalition structures, and factionalism. They also need to meet the main structural criteria (developed politically and economically, socially homogeneous) and be multi-party systems where coalition formation is an aspect of electoral competition.

I have chosen my cases from countries in Western Europe where a radical right party currently exists and has access to the electoral system.

Germany, Austria, France, and Denmark span a range of outcomes in terms of the electoral success of the radical right parties, unemployment levels, and the numbers of immigrants, particularly at the regional level. The NPD and *Republikaner* in Germany have never reached the 5% threshold required to enter parliament, while the FPÖ in Austria received 27% of the vote in the 1999 legislative election. The National Front in France received 15% of the vote in the 1997 legislative elections and 11% in the 2002 legislative elections. In Denmark, the Danish People's Party received 12% of the vote and 22 seats in the 2001 election. The cases also vary in their electoral institutions, with France using a single-member dual-ballot (SMDB) system and Germany a two-vote proportional representation system, while Austria and Denmark have a one-vote PR system.

These cases allow me to control for a variety of system-level social and economic factors. All of the countries are part of the European Union (with Austria joining in 1995) and the same "common market"; thus, similar economic factors are influencing the economies of each country. Each country has had significant inflows of immigrants since the importation of labor began in the 1950s (with Denmark having more recent flows). Despite an end to open labor recruitment in the 1970s, immigrant flows have continued due to family reunification, refugees, asylum seekers, and illegal immigration. These countries also have experienced similar economic difficulties, particularly rising unemployment rates during the transition to a service-oriented economy. The radical right in each country has tried to take advantage of economic discontent and the lack of solutions offered by mainstream parties, using immigrants as scapegoats.

What is important with the "most similar systems" design is that these cases are comparable, and they represent a range of outcomes to allow for generalization. The analysis will show that cultural issues and historical factors need not be invoked to understand the varying level of success of the radical right. Institutional factors, which vary across the cases, can be shown to influence the outcomes.

Rational choice theory underlies the main assumptions made in this analysis. I assume that parties are vote-maximizers, whether the goal is to enter government or simply to influence policies implemented by government. Parties and voters are constrained by the institutional structures that influence party strategies and voter choice. George Tsebelis points out that:

individual action is assumed to be optimal adaptation to an institutional environment, and the interaction between individuals is assumed to be an optimal response to each other. Therefore, the prevailing institutions (the rules of the game) determine the behavior of actors, which in turn produces political or social outcomes. (Tsebelis 1990, 40)

This type of “institutional rational choice” (Dowding and King 1995) provides the framework for the analysis.

There are a variety of factors, such as Austria’s grand coalitions, that make each of the electoral systems that I examine idiosyncratic.¹ To examine the model under a more mainstream type of system, I extend the model to the case of Denmark, which has structural and economic conditions similar to the three main cases. Denmark has a traditional PR system and also is a multi-party system. If the model holds for Denmark, I expect its outcome to be similar to the Austrian case. This will provide evidence that the general model is useful for understanding the rise of radical right parties in other countries.

In the following section I provide evidence that the radical right parties have similar levels of potential supporters yet varying levels of electoral success. I then review the comparative literature on radical right parties.

1.2. SUPPORT FOR THE RADICAL RIGHT

The level of support for radical right parties is only a puzzle if it can be shown that a party’s support is higher than the percentage of the vote it actually receives. In this section I examine survey evidence and European Parliament election returns to determine if there is a baseline of support for the radical right. Although support for the radical right varies, I argue that each country has a set of voters who would be willing to support the radical right if it had a substantial chance of winning an election.

Underlying Baseline of Support

The small percentage of the vote received by the radical right in Germany may simply be an indicator that there is a lower level of support for the radical right in Germany compared with France and Austria. To determine

¹ Legislative coalitions made up of what are usually the two largest parties on the left and right are known as grand or great coalitions.