Inside the Radical Right

What explains the cross-national variation in the radical right's electoral success over the past several decades? Challenging existing structural and institutional accounts, this book analyzes the dynamics of party building and explores the attitudes, skills, and experiences of radical right activists in eleven countries. Based on extensive field research and an original data set of radical right candidates for office, David Art links the quality of radical right activists to broader patterns of success and failure. He demonstrates how a combination of historical legacies and incentive structures produced activists who helped party building in some cases and doomed it in others. In an age of rising electoral volatility and the fading of traditional political cleavages, *Inside the Radical Right* makes a strong case for the importance of party leaders and activists as masters of their own fate.

David Art is Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University. He is the author of *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge, 2006), as well as articles on the radical right in such journals as *Comparative Politics*, *German Politics and Society*, and *Party Politics*. Art is co-convenor of the European Consortium for Political Research's Standing Group on Extremism and Democracy. During 2008–2009, he was a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute, and he has been awarded grants from the Fulbright Program, the German Academic Exchange Service, and the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University.

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The Development of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe

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For Henry

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Preface

This book is about people who join radical right parties in Western Europe. Its central claim is that the qualities of these individuals determine whether such parties develop into major players or remain marginal forces. In contrast to most studies of the radical right, and indeed of political parties in general, it focuses on agency rather than structure and demonstrates that political choices – sometimes choices that seem insignificant at the time – can produce radically different outcomes in societies that are all facing the same basic set of large-scale transformations. That a micropolitical turn provided the key to understanding the development of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe first occurred to me as I was conducting interviews with radical right politicians in Austria and Germany. So it is appropriate to begin with them.

In 2000, the editor-in-chief of the left-liberal weekly *Falter*, Armin Thurnher, coined a new term for some members of the radical right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) that combined the German *Faschisten* (fascists) with the Austrian-German *fesch* (good looking): the *Feschisten*. The thirty-one-year-old FPÖ finance minister, Karl-Heinz Grasser, always dressed to the nines, was the unofficial leader of this new breed of Freedom Party politician. A number of highly educated, ambitious, and capable people had entered the party since Jörg Haider had come to power in 1986. Members of the older cohort remained as well, but these were generally respectable people in their communities. During my interviews – which I arranged by phone and email – I came across a few odd characters. By and large, however, Freedom Party politicians struck me as individuals who quite easily could have become Social Democrats

or Christian Democrats. If they held overtly racist opinions, they were sophisticated enough not to reveal them to me.

In Germany, locating members of the Republikaner (REP) party proved to be a challenge. Their office in Berlin was open only on Tuesday mornings, and no one ever seemed to pick up the phone. After several weeks of trying, I finally coaxed the telephone number of the head of the Berlin REP organization out of the party's only (unpaid) staff member. When I visited the REP leader at his home, he spent most of the time defending the Waffen-SS. He was good enough to personally put me in touch with several other party members, explaining that efforts to reach them on my own were doomed because they were highly distrustful of anyone who wanted to talk with them. It quickly became apparent why. Several interviews lasted three hours or more, most of which were devoted to anti-Semitic and anti-Mason conspiracy theories. Racial slurs were tossed around with abandon. That I might not share these opinions never seemed to occur to my interviewees, and I had the distinct feeling that they were suffering from intense loneliness. When the head of the Bavarian wing of the REP told me later that the party attracted only those "who had nothing else to lose," I knew exactly what he was talking about.

As these two anecdotes suggest, there are major differences in the personnel of radical right parties. This is not to deny that parties are heterogeneous or that one could find seemingly moderate and competent members of the REP, and extremist members of the FPÖ, if one looked hard enough. Yet this book will demonstrate that the activists of successful radical right parties tend to look a lot like those from the FPÖ and that the anecdote about REP members captures an essential feature of failed radical right parties. On the basis of their attitudes and motivations, I develop a tripartite typology of radical right activists: *moderates*, *extremists*, and *opportunists*. I show, first theoretically and later empirically, how different distributions of these activists matter for party development. I also demonstrate how some parties are able to attract highly educated and experienced activists, while other parties mostly recruit activists with low socioeconomic status, little to no political experience, and "nothing else to lose." Why some parties are able to attract activists that are a net benefit to party building, while others seem to attract only people that doom such an endeavor, is one of the central questions of this book.

Radical right parties have captured enormous academic and media attention over the past quarter-century. Although some of the best known of these parties – such as the French National Front – may be in electoral

decline, others appear poised to rise and occupy a new generation of scholars and journalists. Indeed, it is now difficult to imagine West European politics without radical right parties. While the cases of success and failure will undoubtedly look different in five or ten years, I believe that the basic developmental patterns that this book uncovers will be repeated in the future. For those who want to understand where radical right parties are headed, it is important to understand where they have been.

But this book is really about more than radical right parties, important as they are for party politics and policy making, and integral as they are to basic structural transformations in European politics, such as immigration, European integration, and globalization. It is a study of party building in an age when the major social cleavages that had structured partisan competition in Europe for decades began to decline in importance. One of the chief consequences of electoral dealignment and rising electoral volatility is that the political parties are masters of their own fate to an even greater extent than before. And as it becomes harder to read off the success of political parties from the basic contours of societies, the organizational choices that parties make and the quality of people that they attract are likely to matter even more. Radical right parties certainly faced a unique set of hurdles in these respects, but new types of political parties, as well as mainstream parties that are still trying to adapt to the new electoral environment, are faced with broadly similar challenges.

I benefited from the counsel of many people while writing this book. Going back a ways, Ivo Banac, David Cameron, and Juan Linz at Yale first sparked my interest in European politics and in challenges to liberal democracy. Suzanne Berger at MIT taught me a great many things about comparative politics, the two most important being that structure does not always overwhelm agency and that empirical reality is usually more interesting than deductive theorizing. I am grateful to the following colleagues for reading parts of the project as it evolved: Ben Ansell, Tim Bale, Tor Bjørklund, Judith Chubb, Consuelo Cruz, Jennifer Fitzgerald, Mark Franklin, Matthew Goodwin, Wade Jacoby, Elizabeth Remick, Jens Rydgren, Debbie Schildkraut, Chris Wendt, and Daniel Ziblatt. Those who went beyond the call of duty and suffered through the entire manuscript include Erik Bleich, Elisabeth Carter, Antonis Ellinas, Jane Gingrich, Sarah de Lange, Peter Mair, Cas Mudde, Oxana Shevel, Amos Zehavi, and Adam Ziegfeld. Yannis Evrigenis deserves special mention, as his office ceiling collapsed on him during a rainstorm as he was penning one critical comment after another in the margins. Although the manuscript was perhaps physically intact after this onslaught, it was really

never the same again. Two anonymous reviewers at Cambridge University Press provided yet another round of very constructive criticism. I also benefited from conversations and email exchanges with the following people: Kai Arzheimer, Uwe Backes, Simon Bornschier, Jean-Yves Camus, Dirk De Bièvre, Pascal Delwit, Bruno De Wever, Lieven De Winter, Jørgen Elklit, Meindert Fennema, Peter Gundelach, Bernt Hagtvet, Gilles Ivaldi, Chantal Kesteloot, Valérie Lafont, Annete Linden, Nonna Mayer, Teun Pauwels, Alban Perrin, Jens Rydgren, Rinke van den Brink, Wouter van der Brug, Joost van Spanje, Stefaan Walgrave, and Lien Warmenbol.

I began this book at the College of the Holy Cross, finished it at Tufts University, and had the luxury of working on it for an entire year at the European University Institute (EUI). All three institutions provided generous intellectual and financial support. Several Research and Publication Grants from Holy Cross, combined with the helpful intercession of Chick Weiss, helped me get the project off the ground. At Tufts, support from the Faculty Research and Awards Committee and from Rob Hollister at the Tisch College of Citizenship gave me the opportunity to conduct as much fieldwork as I could manage. A Max Weber Fellowship from the EUI allowed me to concentrate on writing in an idyllic environment, where Ramon Marimon and Peter Mair were gracious hosts. I also benefited enormously from the intellectual camaraderie of many friends that I made at the EUI. In addition to those whose labors have already been mentioned, I would like to acknowledge Joshua Derman, Isabelle Engeli, Simona Grassi, Silja Häusermann, Stephanie Hofmann, Paolo Masella, Eleonora Pasotti, Miriam Ronzoni, Roger Schoenman, Violet Soen, and Simon Levis Sullam.

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I am fortunate to come from a family where writing is celebrated and where the struggle that accompanies it is understood. My father, mother, and sister continue to provide encouragement at every turn. I don't say

often enough how much they mean to me, so here it is in print. My wife, Julija, deserves a footnote on every page of this book, if only to remind me that her unrelenting emotional, intellectual, and spiritual support that I have come to take for granted is extraordinary. I dedicate this book to Henry, for all that he gave us in his short time with us.

Abbreviations

AN	National Alliance (Italy) / Alleanza Nazionale
BNP	British National Party
BZÖ	Alliance for the Future of Austria / Bündnis Zukunft Österreich
CD	Center Democrats (the Netherlands) / Centrumdemocraten
DF	Danish People's Party / Dansk Folkeparti
DVU	German People's Union / Deutsche Volksunion
FN	National Front (France) / Front National
FNb	National Front (Belgium) / Front National
FPÖ	Austrian Freedom Party / Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
FrP	Progress Party (Norway) / Fremskrittspartiet
FRPd	Danish Progress Party / Fremskridtspartiet
LN	Northern League (Italy) / Lega Nord
LPF	List Pim Fortuyn (the Netherlands) / Lijst Pim Fortuyn
MSI	Italian Social Movement / Movimento Sociale Italiano
ND	New Democracy (Sweden) / Ny Demokrati
NF	National Front (UK)
NPD	National Democratic Party of Germany / Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands
ÖVP	Austrian People's Party / Österreichische Volkspartie
PVV	Freedom Party (the Netherlands) / Partij Voor de Vrijheid
REP	The Republicans (Germany) / Die Republikaner
SD	Sweden Democrats / Sverigedemokraterna
SPÖ	Social Democratic Party of Austria / Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs

SVP	Swiss People's Party / Schweizerische Volkspartei
VB	Flemish Bloc / Flemish Interest (Belgium) / Vlaams Blok / Vlaams Belang
VdU	League of Independents (Austria) / Verband der Unabhängigen