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Introduction

On March 8, 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy created a political uproar during the French presidential campaign when in a televised interview he proposed creating a "ministry for immigration and national identity." His political rivals immediately denounced his plans as an attack against the French republican tradition and accused him of flirting with the xenophobic ideas of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front. Shortly afterward, though, the Socialist candidate, Ségolène Royal, asked her supporters to "reconquer the symbols of the nation" instead of "abandoning the national anthem to the extreme right." She said that if elected she would "ensure that the French know the words to *La Marseillaise*, and that every family owns a national flag" to "fly from their window on national holidays."[1] So intense was the row over French identity that it sidelined the more traditional materialist concerns that tend to define Left-Right competition. As the *New York Times* put it at the time, "the battle over French identity has overtaken discussion of more practical issues like reducing unemployment and making France more competitive."[2]

Although partisan appeals to national identity are not always as explicit as in the French elections, they are a much broader phenomenon in Western Europe. In September 2007, for example, British

[1] Agence France-Presse, "French flag sparks tug-of-war in election race," *Agence France-Presse*, March 25, 2007.
[2] Elaine Sciolino, "Identity, staple of the Right, moves to the center of French campaign," *New York Times*, March 30, 2007, p. 1.

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Prime Minister Gordon Brown stirred controversy when he stated at the Labour Party's annual convention that he wanted to create "British jobs for British workers." The Conservative opposition accused Brown of stealing the phrase from a pamphlet of the extreme Right British National Party and of disregarding European Union (EU) law. A month later, international media spotlights turned to the Swiss legislative elections, where the Swiss People's Party relied on a controversial campaign against immigration to win a record 29% of the Swiss vote. A People's Party campaign poster showed white sheep kicking a black sheep out of Switzerland, alluding to the party's proposal to deport aliens who commit criminal offences. Even in Germany, where historical alarms go off whenever politicians make appeals to German identity, the Christian Democrats resorted in December 2007 to anti-immigrant rhetoric. Ahead of state elections in Hesse, the state premier, Ronald Koch, turned an incident of youth violence into a discussion about foreigners in Germany, explicitly associating certain ethnic groups with crime. "We have spent too long showing a strange sociological understanding for groups that consciously commit violence as ethnic minorities," he stated in an interview in the popular tabloid *Bild*.[3]

Partisan appeals to national identity are not a recent phenomenon. Since the 1980s, mainstream parties have incorporated national identity themes into their programs, creating a new axis of political competition. As this book shows, issues such as immigration, citizenship, asylum, and historical memory have become a constant source of partisan rivalry. This rivalry is often missed by conventional accounts of party politics, which tend to focus on traditional materialist themes. Although these themes continue to dominate partisan competition, in the past few decades, they have been supplemented by a set of non-materialist issues that cut across traditional party cleavages. Public apprehension over globalization has helped push these issues into the political mainstream by giving parties incentives to "ethnicize" politics in search of new electoral niches. The political turn toward national identity has taken different forms in different countries and in different times but has caused similar political rifts between those who defend or oppose certain conceptions of the national collective.

[3] Nikolaus Blome, "Wer in Deutschland lebt, hat die Faust unten zu lassen!" *Bild*, December 28, 2007.

It has also set in motion similar political processes and brought about comparable political effects. This book sets out to explicate these processes and to analyze their effects. It will show that the way political parties have competed over national identity explains why some West European countries have experienced a surge in electoral support for the Far Right, while other countries have not.

Party positioning in the competitive space is an important determinant of political outcomes, but its analytical utility is limited by the varying capacity parties have to communicate their messages to voters. Often missed by standard accounts of party competition, this variation is particularly strong between established and newer parties and, hence, most relevant to the discussion of Far Right parties, which sometimes lack the organizational and financial resources necessary to make their positions known. During their earlier phase of development, smaller parties need the media to publicize their views to national publics. The media can help small parties communicate their messages to much broader audiences than their organizational or financial resources would otherwise allow. Moreover, they can confer legitimacy and authority to political newcomers, and they can dispel voter doubts about their electoral viability. In this sense, the media control the gateway to the electoral market.

Politicians are acutely aware of this gate-keeping role of the media and are often critical of those helping give the Far Right publicity. In April 2007, for example, the leader of the Swedish Social Democrats, Mona Sahlin, was criticized for participating in a televised debate with the leader of the Far Right Sweden Democrats. She was accused of helping the party get much more exposure than its poor electoral standing would have justified or its finances would have allowed. Media treatment of Far Right parties has also come under fire in Greece. In June 2007, the leader of the Greek Communist Party, Aleca Papariga, accused the Socialists of "directing" certain media to grant the Far Right Greek Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) prime-time exposure to hurt the Conservatives. She complained that the leadership of LAOS frequently participated in major television shows and that its exposure far exceeded its limited electoral strength.[4] Her arguments echoed

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[4] «Ενίσχυση ΛΑΟΣ από ΠΑΣΟΚ καταγγέλλει η κ. Παπαρήγα», *Καθημερινή*, 6 Ιουνίου 2007 ("Papariga reports strengthening of LAOS from PASOK," *Kathimerini*, June 6, 2007); Γιώργος Χρ. Παπαχρήστος, «Καραμπόλα για τον ΛΑΟΣ» *Τα Νέα*,

those of many French observers, who criticized Socialist president
François Mitterrand for facilitating the rise of Le Pen in the mid-1980s
by instructing public broadcasters to grant him exposure. This book
seeks to subject these arguments into systematic comparative analysis.
It will show that we cannot fully explain the divergent electoral for-
tunes of Far Right parties in Western Europe without examining the
degree of communication resources they have at their disposal.

The focus on party and media behavior marks a departure from the
voluminous literature that seeks to explain the divergent electoral tra-
jectories of the West European Far Right parties. It similarly asks why
Far Right parties have been successful in some but not other politi-
cal settings, yet its answers differ. This book emphasizes political –
instead of sociological, institutional, and economic – variables, and it
focuses on explaining variation in Far Right performance across time
rather than across countries. Using this temporal approach and a wide
array of evidence, it traces party competition and media behavior in
the past few decades. This book argues that the way mainstream par-
ties have dealt with national identity issues has structured the politi-
cal opportunities available to the Far Right and that the treatment
of Far Right parties by the mass media has affected their capacity to
make electoral advances.

Why the Far Right

Two decades after Klaus von Beyme complained that "there is virtually
no comparative literature on the topic" (1988: 14), Far Right parties
have earned more scholarly attention than any other party family in
Western Europe. The empirical record justifies this burgeoning schol-
arly interest: in the past sixty years, no other party family has managed
to make such significant electoral advances across so many countries in
such a short time. As Figure 1.1 shows, since the mid-1980s, Far Right
support has quadrupled in Western Europe. In sixteen West European
countries, parties that are thought to belong to the Far Right polled

6 Ιουνίου 2007 (George. Chr. Papachristos, "Row over LAOS," *Ta Nea*, June 6,
2007); Γιώργος Χρ. Παπαχρήστος, «Πάγκαλος μαινόμενος κατά ΚΚΕ» *Τα Νέα*,
7 Ιουνίου 2007 (George Chr. Papachristos, "Pangalos angry with KKE," *Ta Nea*,
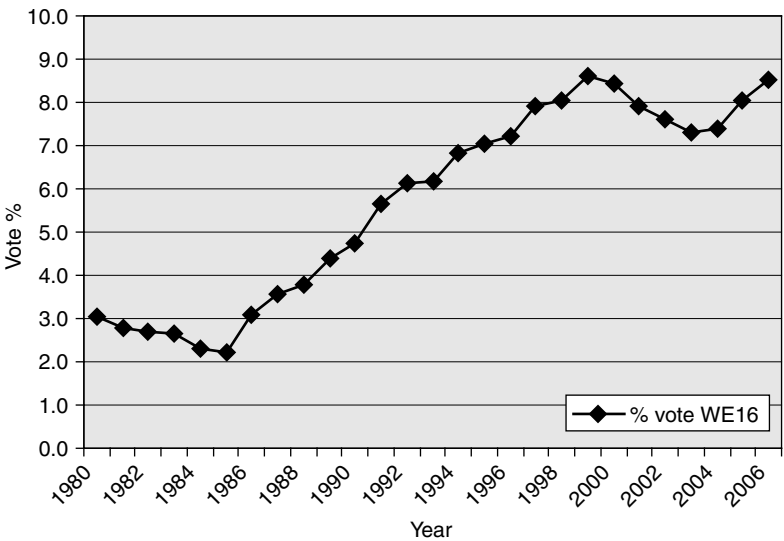June 7, 2007).

FIGURE 1.1. Far Right support in Western Europe, 1980–2006
Mean vote for all parties included in scholarly literature as being on the Far Right, which ran in national legislative elections in sixteen West European countries (Norway, Switzerland, and EU15 except Luxembourg) between 1980 and 2006.
Sources: Mackie and Rose 1997; Caramani 2000; www.electionworld.org.

8.5% of the national vote in 2006 compared to 2.2% in 1985. They have consolidated a sizable presence in Austrian, Belgian, Danish, French, Italian, Norwegian, and Swiss politics. Yet, although this phenomenon is transnational, it is far from pan-European. In countries such as Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, the Far Right has failed to become a permanent force in national politics.

Apart from the geographical spread of the phenomenon, there are also good normative reasons to justify the exponential growth of the scholarly literature on the Far Right. Far Right advances have evoked memories of interwar democratic disintegration, and they have reshaped the contours of legitimate political discourse, injecting it with xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Even where Far Right parties have been least successful, as in Germany, they have had an important influence on policy outcomes, especially on issues such as immigration and crime. Many observers consider the rise of

the Far Right as one of the greatest threats that democratic pluralism has confronted since the interwar years. Before democratic societies can successfully combat the intolerance and exclusivity that is usually associated with right-wing extremism, there must be an effort to understand why the Far Right has become such a potent political force in contemporary politics. That hundreds of books, articles, and dissertations have found it so hard to come up with definitive answers for the sources of Far Right support is suggestive of the complexity of the phenomenon and the need to devise new conceptual tools to understand it.

New Building Blocks

This book engages directly with the burgeoning literature on the Far Right, extending its findings in a number of ways. The first is by focusing on how parties compete over national identity issues. This study joins ranks with those works emphasizing the sociocultural effects of globalization and postindustrialism, linking socioeconomic development with changes in value priorities. There is already a significant body of literature making this link (e.g., Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). But in its emphasis on postmaterialist values, this literature tends to downplay the flip side of postmaterialism – what Piero Ignazi has called the "silent counter-revolution" (1992). Sometimes viewed as neoconservative backlash against postmaterialism, this revolution is thought to bring about heightened concerns about sociocultural values and issues, such as "nationalism, law and order, ethnocentricity and bourgeois morality" (Minkenberg 1992: 58). Such concerns create demands for self-affirmation, self-defense, and self-assurance (Ignazi 2003) that encourage individuals to seek refuge in collective forms of identification.

The most common of such forms is national identity. By eroding the link between the citizens and states, globalization creates an identity crisis that reinforces the need for national identification and creates demands for cultural protectionism. This book shows that mainstream parties sought to profit from these demands by playing the nationalist card – by radicalizing political competition over national identity issues. The radicalization of such issues sets in place a new axis of political contestation – the "national identity axis" – delineating partisan

differences over perceptions of the national collective. Immigration has been at the epicenter of partisan arguments over national identity. But it is not the only issue contested on this axis. In the past twenty years, citizenship laws and asylum regulations have also led to highly charged debates in Western European parliaments. Recent decades have additionally witnessed the politicization of historical memory and the eruption of bitter partisan disputes over the way European societies remember their pasts (Art 2006). One contribution of this book is that it brings together primary and secondary evidence to carefully trace partisan competition over these issues and to assess its effects on electoral outcomes. It shows that party positioning on national identity issues has structured the political opportunities available for Far Right breakthroughs.

The second contribution of this book is the examination of how the media affect the electoral fortunes of Far Right parties. Scholarly analyses often acknowledge the role of the media in the rise of this phenomenon (e.g., Kitschelt with McGann 1995: 130; Norris 2005: 270; Mudde 2007: 248–253), but so far comparative analyses of media effects remain rare (e.g., Mazzoleni et al. 2003). For the most part, the literature assumes a perfect electoral market, in which parties can easily communicate their messages to voters. Although this assumption is valid for major parties, which have easy access to state and institutional resources (Katz and Mair 1995), it does not hold for most Far Right parties. Because of their smaller size, such parties tend to lack the organizational capacity to recruit and to mobilize potential voters and the funds to publicize their messages to national publics. The media, then, can make up for their organizational deficiencies and financial shortages by helping them become known. Moreover, media exposure can bestow prestige and legitimacy to controversial appeals and give the impression that political newcomers have a mass following. Far from being neutral bystanders, media outlets determine the capacity of new actors to take their message to a wide audience with minimum organizational effort (Tarrow 1998: 126–129). Simply put, the media is a political resource that can lift marginal parties from obscurity and push them into the political mainstream.

One of the main findings of this book is that the Far Right is more likely to thrive in those political contexts in which the media is willing to grant it exposure. Using evidence from the analysis of media

content as well as from interviews with journalists, this book finds substantial variation in the way the media has treated the Far Right across time and across countries. In some settings, the media helped the Far Right to capitalize on the political opportunities available in the electoral market and to achieve electoral breakthroughs, whereas in others it blocked its entry into the mainstream political discourse. By systematically examining the association between political parties and the mass media, this book is suggestive of the role the latter can play in bringing about electoral change.

The third contribution of this book is the explication of a temporal approach to party development. Instead of focusing on variation in Far Right voting across countries, this book traces Far Right trajectories across time. It breaks party development into distinct phases and shows that some factors best explain the earlier trajectories of Far Right parties whereas others explain the later ones. The basic idea is that once parties pass a "threshold of relevance," their fortunes are shaped by different factors than before. Using this idea, this book examines the trajectory of Far Right parties before and after their initial electoral breakthrough and reassesses existing accounts of Far Right performance. It shows that mainstream party competition is more important during earlier phases of party development than in later phases. Mainstream parties have the biggest shares of the electoral market, and the way they position themselves in the competitive space structures the opportunities available for political newcomers. Tracing this positioning across time, this book identifies a particular pattern of competition that changes the structure of opportunities available to new contestants. The temporal analysis of party competition documents the programmatic oscillation (Ignazi 2003) of mainstream parties on national identity issues. The argument that runs through this book is that mainstream parties played but then retracted the nationalist card, creating opportunities for Far Right breakthroughs.

Moreover, the stage-based view of party development reassesses the emphasis often placed on party-specific characteristics. This book acknowledges the importance of party organization, leadership, and appeals but points out that prior to electoral breakthroughs these characteristics are of limited explanatory utility. Specific party attributes are more important after Far Right parties achieve electoral

breakthroughs, for sustaining and extending their initial electoral gains. Badly organized, poorly led, and narrowly focused parties are likely to become flash phenomena. Such parties are likely to be co-opted by major parties and to quickly disappear from the electoral map. On the contrary, parties that manage to establish solid organizational structures, avoid leadership struggles, and extend their programmatic appeals are likely to resist subsequent efforts by their mainstream competitors to co-opt them. Using this temporal approach, this book suggests why some Far Right parties survive their first breakthrough whereas others do not. And why mainstream parties are sometimes able to regain the political space lost to the Far Right whereas in other times they are not.

"Ethnocrats" on the March

First, a few definitions and some context are necessary. What do Far Right parties have in common? And how do they differ from their predecessors? This section offers a definition of the Far Right, and the next one sketches its postwar electoral trajectory, identifying three distinct "growth waves."

The inclusion of parties such as the French National Front, the Austrian Freedom Party, or the Belgian Vlaams Blok in the same party family presumes they share basic characteristics that set them apart from other families. But no two scholars have so far been able to agree on what these characteristics are. In fact, the identification of a common set of features has proven so troubling that it became the subject of scholarly inquiry itself (Mudde 1996). This book adopts a minimal definition (Gerring 2001: 78) applicable to all Far Right parties across Western Europe. Whereas some have described the Far Right as antisystemic (Ignazi 2003), antidemocratic (Carter 2005), antiestablishment (Givens 2005), and populist (Betz 1994; Mudde 2007), there is an emergent realization that the most distinctive characteristic of the Far Right is nationalism (Eatwell 2000: 412; Hainsworth 2000; Mudde 2000; Givens 2005). In part, this growing scholarly consensus reflects a gradual ideological convergence of the parties themselves toward the ethnopluralist principles of the new right (Nouvelle Droite) and their programmatic shift to questions of national and cultural identity (Betz 2002). The concept of the "nation"

is at the heart of this ideological turn and "certainly functions as a 'coathanger' for most other ideological features" (Mudde 2007: 16). According to two prominent students of the Far Right, its worldview is based on "a myth of homogeneous nation, a romantic and populist ultra-nationalism which is detected against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principle of individualism and universalism" (Minkenberg and Schain 2003: 162–163; cited in Ignazi 2006: 227). The scholarly consensus on the ideological essence of the Far Right is consistent with interviews with Far Right politicians in Austria, Germany, and Greece. Although they differed on other issues, they all shared an ethnocentric conception of politics. Adjusted to the particularities of each country, this conception approximates one of the most common definitions of nationalism – that it is the political principle calling for the congruence of the political with the national unit (Gellner 1983: 9).

Indeed, no other party family equates in such an explicit manner the state with the nation, citizenship with ethnicity, and the *demos* with the *ethnos*. This emphasis on a nationalist conception of politics – or "ethnocracy" – is what sets the Far Right apart from other parties. The introduction of the Hellenic Front's manifesto – a small Greek extremist party that boasted ties with the Le Pen's National Front – is not atypical of Far Rightist ideas: "The ideology of the Hellenic Front is Greek nationalism. Greek nationalism is inseparably linked with freedom of the Greeks and with the struggle for the national integration of Hellenism."[5] Echoing these ideas, the party's former leader and current LAOS MP, Makis Vorides, claims that "there are objective criteria for who belongs to the Greek nation. We speak the same language; we have lived through the same experiences and wars; we believe in the same God."[6] Despite their strong attachment to nationalism, all Far Right parties claim to be loyal defenders of democratic principles. But in their democracy, there is barely any place for non-nationals. In the manifesto of the Sweden Democrats, a small

[5] Hellenic Front, http://www.metopo.gr/idea.htm (last accessed: April 30, 2004; site no longer available); see also Ελληνικό Μέτωπο (1994) *Πολιτικό Πρόγραμμα: Αποφάσεις του Ιδρυτικού Συνεδρίου, Αθήνα 9–10 Απριλίου 1994*, Αθήνα: Ελληνικό Μέτωπο [Hellenic Front (1994) *Political Program: Decisions of Founding Congress, Athens 9–10 April 1994*, Athens: Hellenic Front].

[6] Interview #11, February 2004, Athens.