

1 Introduction

One of the serious social and political problems in many countries has been the increasing influence of political parties and organizations of the far right since the 1990s. This development has been discussed in a vast scholarly literature, especially in political science, and far right discourse has been analysed in various areas of discourse studies. Less explicitly studied have been the ideologies of the far right, also because no contemporary discipline has developed a detailed and explicit theory of ideology as a form of social cognition, and its relations to other cognitive structures on the one hand, and discourse and societal structures on the other hand.

1.1 Aims

Within my multidisciplinary theory of ideology (Van Dijk, 1998), the first aim of this study is to update this theory with a component accounting for the combination of various ideologies that characterize political parties on the radical right, for instance, the well-known combination of nationalism and racism in what has been called nativism. After an analysis of the polarized structures of ideologies as axiomatic forms of social cognition shared by ideological groups such as (anti)racists or (anti)feminists, ideologies are related with socially shared attitudes, such as immigration or abortion. These attitudes are defined as mental representations of the social issues of actual ideological struggle, e.g., between Liberalism and Radical Conservatism. These ideologically based sociopolitical attitudes influence the opinions and emotions of the experiences of individual members of ideological groups, as represented in their personal mental models. This complex cognitive framework is needed to account for the ideological structures of discourse and other sociopolitical practices.

The second aim of this study is to critically assess current studies of the radical right in terms of populism as a (thin) ideology and elaborating a discursive approach as a theoretical alternative proposed in other studies of populism in political science but with a more explicit theory of discourse.

Thirdly, to be able to describe and explain radical right ideologies, attitudes and discourse, we briefly summarize their political context and development, especially as a reaction to the success of the fundamental cultural changes, especially in the United States, Western Europe, and other countries.

Although the main aim of this study is to account for the ideologies and attitudes of the radical right, we will briefly also review studies of radical right discourse.

Finally, the main empirical aim of this study is a comparative analysis of the ideologies and attitudes of radical right parties in Chile, Spain, the Netherlands, and Sweden as expressed in their election programmes. It will be shown that the ideological structures of the attitudes in these countries adapt to their sociopolitical context. For instance, whereas Abortion is central in radical right discourse in Chile, it is less prominent in Spain, and marginal in the Netherlands and Sweden, whereas racist attitudes about immigration are shared by all radical right parties in Europe, but marginal in Chile. Since Vox in Spain has the most complete formulation of the cluster of radical right ideologies, we'll pay special attention to their discourse.

1.2 Terminology

Earlier I have used the general term 'far right' to refer to political parties and organizations that have been described also in terms of the 'extreme right', the 'populist right' and several other denominations, whether in scholarly discourse, or in the media. To avoid confusion, and following the scholarly literature (e.g., Mudde, 2010), and has been shown in the title of this Element, I'll use the term 'radical right' for those parties or movements that (still) operate within democratic structures such as elections, as distinguished from the extreme right.¹ Since we conceive of the radical right especially as a reaction against liberalism, we may also call it the 'reactionary' or 'illiberal right' (Orbán uses 'illiberal democracy'; see also Van Dijk, 2023d).

A vast literature on the radical right uses the terms 'populism' or 'populist' as a general characteristic of parties, movements, policies or ideas. We define 'populist' only in terms of a topos (a commonsense argument), a specific, *politically strategic multimodal structures of discourse* and interaction, semantically polarizing the (good) people vs. the (bad) elites. With others, we'll argue that populism is not an ideology (thick or thin). Because parties cannot, and should not, be characterized by their discourse structures, it does not make sense to speak of 'populist parties', nor of 'populist ideas'. Moreover, not all RR parties exhibit populist discourse structures, at least not in their official discourses such as election programmes. As is the case for underlying ideologies, such as those of nationalism or racism, radical right discourse is generally polarized (e.g., between Us vs. Them) and rhetorically hyperbolic. But it would be misplaced to talk about polarizing or hyperbolic parties. Rather, political parties should only be characterized by their

¹ In January 2024 there are 29,200 articles since 2010 in Google Scholar with the term 'radical right' and 39,300 with 'extreme right' in their titles, and 15,000 with 'populist right'. 'Reactionary right' is used in the titles of 2410 studies, and 'illiberal right' in 276 titles.

ideologies or attitudes or their position of the political left-right scale. Hence, radical right parties (a term describing their *political* position) may also be called racist, nationalist or neoliberal (their *ideological* position). For the same reason, frequent other denominations are inconsistent with an ideological approach, as is the case for ‘authoritarian parties’, because ‘authoritarianism’, besides a type of personality, is a form of political governance or control, and not an ideology.

The widespread terminological muddle in studies of the radical right testifies to much theoretical confusion about the various political, social, cognitive and discursive aspects of the radical right. Indeed, very few studies in political science on the radical right routinely cite, use and apply advanced studies of ideology or of discourse in other disciplines. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018: 1686) correctly emphasize that new studies of populism should be based on the existing literature on the topic. The same is true for their and others’ uses of such notions as ‘ideology’, ‘ideas’, or ‘discourse’ in political studies of the radical right. Indeed, complex phenomena such as the radical right should always be studied in multi-disciplinary frameworks.

2 Theoretical Framework: Ideology, Discourse and the Radical Right

2.1 Theory of Ideology

There is a vast literature, especially in political science, on the radical right, focusing especially on political parties and voters. Although the ideas of these parties are often discussed, this happens less in terms of an explicit theory of ideology and other sociocognitive structures. Hence, I first need to summarize and update my theory of ideology, used to study the ideologies of the radical right, to critically evaluate ideological definitions of populism and to show how ideologies are related to the discourses of electoral programmes in Chile, Spain, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

In order to focus on the ideologies and their expression in party discourse, my multidisciplinary theory of ideology will only be briefly summarized in a few points (for detail, see Van Dijk, 1998):

Ideology as Social Cognition

- Ideologies are **cognitive systems** (represented in Long-Term Memory) socially shared by members of ideological groups.
- Ideologies are based on the socioculturally shared **knowledge** of an Epistemic Community (a racist ideology *presupposes* general knowledge of other ‘races’, ‘ethnic groups, etc.).

- Ideologies are organized by fundamental **categories**:
 - Identity (Who are we?)
 - Action (What do we do?)
 - Goals (What do we want?)
 - Norms/Values /What is good/bad for us?)
 - Reference Groups /(Who are our Allies/Opponents?)
 - Resources (Which Resources (don't) we have?)
- The structures of ideologies are **polarized** between Us/Ingroup vs. Them/Outgroup
- Ideologies are acquired bottom-up from, and control top-down, more **specific**, socially shared **Attitudes about sociopolitical issues** (e.g., about abortion or immigration)
- Once acquired and shared in an ideological group, ideologies and attitudes are **relatively stable** (one does not become a racist or have an attitude on immigration overnight, and ideological groups are formed during a relatively long period).
- Contrary to widespread traditional conceptions ('false consciousness'), ideologies are not only 'negative' (what Others have). So, there are both racist and antiracist ideologies, feminist and anti-feminist ones.

The Social Basis of Ideologies

- Ideologies are the basic cognition of **ideological groups**, such as (anti-) racists and feminists.
- Ideological groups use many forms of **public discourse and communication** to acquire, share and change or adapt ideologies.

Ideology and Personal Cognition

- Ideologies and their Attitudes are **shared by the individual members** of an ideological group.
- Ideologies influence the opinions and emotions of individual people associated with events and actions of personal experiences represented in subjective **mental models**.

The expression of ideologies in social practices and discourse

- Through individual mental models, ideologically based opinions may be enacted or expressed in social practices (e.g., discrimination).
- The main expression of ideologies and attitudes are **socially shared discourse** of ideological groups (e.g., parties). These are also the discourses

through which attitudes and ideologies are **acquired and changed** by the members of ideological groups.

- As is the case for all discourse, also the structures of ideological discourse are adapted to the communicative situation, as it is subjectively represented by the participants in their mental **context models** (a Facebook Post, a turn in a debate in Parliament, or an election programme are different discourse genres, with different spatiotemporal parameters, different participants, different goals, different shared knowledge, etc.).

2.1.1 Ideological Configurations

The theory of ideology summarized earlier ignores the complexity of real-life ideological manifestations such as their uses by political parties. One of the theses of the present study is that the radical right cannot be defined in terms of a single ideology. This is generally the case for (political or other) collectives defined in terms of a position on the continuous Left-Right scale. Indeed, the same is true for the Right, the Left, the Radical Left, or Conservative vs. Progressive collectives (parties, organizations, voters, etc.).

To ideologically define positions or collectives, we need to introduce notions such as ‘clusters’ or ‘configurations’ of ideologies, as is often the case for the combination of Nationalism and Racism in terms of Nativism to characterize the radical right (among many studies of Nativism, see Rooduijn, Bonikowski, & Parlevliet, 2021). It should, however, be stressed that such a cluster or configuration is not itself an ideology, but a variable ideological structure that may be different in different countries. For instance, the radical right in Spain combines Catholicism with Machista Anti-Feminism, for instance, in the debate on abortion or feminism. Thus, as we’ll see in this study, for each country we need to explain radical right attitudes in terms of different ideological clusters, configurations that may historically change, and hence whether or not such a configuration can be used in attempts to persuade or manipulate the voters. There is a vast literature, especially in political science, on the influence of radical right attitudes on the voters, a topic that is beyond the scope of this study (among many studies, see, e.g., Harrison & Bruter, 2011; Koller et al., 2023; Schumacher, Rooduijn & Bakker, 2022).

2.1.2 Ideological Discourse Structures

As explained earlier, ideologies and specific attitudes influence many of the social activities of ideological group members. Through ideologically biased mental models of everyday experiences, ideologies finally also influence the

structures of text and talk of individual people. *Conversely, ideologies and attitudes are generally acquired and adapted through many types of discourse.* Hence, the crucial role of discourse studies and methods in the study of ideology and political parties.

The complexity of discourse allows many types of ideological influence: the choice of a word, the syntactic structure or the intonation of a sentence, the global topics of a text or conversation, rhetorical emphasis, (in) formal style, the arguments of a debate, the way a story is told, the images or music accompanying a discourse, and so on. My work on the structures of racist discourse (e.g., Van Dijk, 1984, 1993, 1998) has shown how ingroup-outgroup polarization of ideologies also influences polarized discourse structures at all levels, according to the following general strategies of what I called an *Ideological Square*:

- Emphasize OUR *good* things.
- Emphasize THEIR *bad* things.
- De-emphasize OUR bad things.
- De-emphasize THEIR good things.

Following these strategies, radical right discourse will proudly emphasize their nationalism and patriotism, demand respect for Law and Order, and negatively represent immigrants as well as socialists, and ignore or deny their racism or machismo. These are the predicted general strategies, and actual discourse analysis will need to show how exactly this is done.

With this brief summary of a more complex theory of ideology, its relations to shared attitudes and personal mental models and its expression in social practices in general and discourse in particular, we have the basic framework for the analysis and explanation of the ideologies and discourse of the radical right.

2.2 Reactionary Ideas of the Radical Right

The causes of the emergence of RR parties and their success with the voters in different countries are complex and analysed in many studies (see, e.g., Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). As always, sociopolitical and socioeconomic causes, such as poverty and economic crises, are fundamental, but seldom sufficient conditions, as we can see with the success of RR parties in rich Northern Europe. Crucial is how the causes are interpreted, conceptualized and explained, whether by politicians or ordinary citizens, and how the interpretations of the *symbolic elites* (Van Dijk, 1993), that is, those who control public discourse, are communicated to the public at large. Hence, in this study we selectively focus on the

cultural aspects of the emergence of radical right parties and how these formulate their ideologically based attitudes on relevant social issues, as is the case for such attitudes as those on immigration and abortion.

The general theory of ideology, summarized earlier, applied to the study of the radical right, implies that there is no unitary ideology of the radical right, but rather *strategic political positions on attitudes based on various ideologies* already extant in society, especially racism (including xenophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia, etc.) and nationalism (together usually called ‘Nativism’). These ideologically based attitudes did not develop as new and original ideas of the radical right, but in the form of a *backlash*, that is, *a reaction to the growing acceptance of ideologically based liberal attitudes that have developed in large part of the world, but especially in Europe and the United States, since the 1960s* (Norris & Inglehart, 2018).

The broader these liberal attitudes were accepted and even became dominant in some countries (or in their intellectual centres and cities, among younger generations, the better educated and among women), the members of conservative parties of the Right became more radical in the formulation and propagation of *reactionary* attitudes, and formed radical right parties, as was the case also in Chile, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands, and even influenced major conservative parties themselves, as is the case in the United States and the UK.

We share the hypothesis that this growing backlash spreading among (older, male, provincial, less educated, economically threatened) conservative voters, manipulated by the symbolic elites (those who have preferential access to public discourse: conservative politicians, journalists and scholars) are among the main causes of the generalized move to the Right, and hence the increased support of authoritarian radical right parties in many countries. This ‘cultural’ backlash is especially observable in the public discourse of RR parties but does not mean that socioeconomic and regional conditions don’t play a role in the growth of RR parties, as has also been shown in historical socioeconomic research (Cagé & Piketty, 2023).

In sum: the backlash against liberal values is a reaction of those losing cultural power or respect during the increase of liberal values. Depending on each country, these reactionary attitudes are often the negative mirror image of the corresponding liberal attitudes (see Table 1).

Reactionary radical right ideas and policies, as shown in Table 1, are based on relevant fragments of existing ideologies, such as racism, nationalism, sexism, militarism, and the attitudes they dominate, e.g., on immigration, abortion, gay marriage, law and order, and language policies. We’ll see next how the various

Table 1 The reactionary dimension of the radical right

Sociopolitical and cultural changes since the 1960s Dominant values: Equality, diversity, pluralism, solidarity, collectivism	Radical right reactions and radical conservatism Dominant values: Inequality, supremacy, homogeneity, individualism
NATION United Nations, Internationalism European Union Globalization Immigration Anti-colonialism Human Rights Progressive parties Politics of hope and solidarity	NATION Nationalism Nativism, our people first Anti-immigration Anti-internationalism, anti-UN, anti-EU Love and pride for nation: Patriotism Revisionism Neo-colonialism Conservative, populist parties Politics of paranoid fear
RACE/ETHNICITY Civil Rights Movement Black Power, Black Lives Matter/BLM Antiracism, Critical Race Theory/CRT Diversity Increased immigration Multiculturalism Critical history (of slavery)	RACE/ETHNICITY White priority/supremacy Continued racism/ethnicism Xenophobia Anti-BLM, Anti-CRT Anti-immigration Anti-multiculturalism Homogeneity Anti-Islam Revisionism
GENDER/SEXUALITY/FAMILY Feminism(s) Abortion laws Gay marriage LGBT+ Diverse families	GENDER/SEXUALITY/FAMILY Anti-feminism Anti-abortion laws and practices Against gay marriage Anti-LGBT Traditional families, family values
CULTURE Multiculturalism Multilingualism Religious diversity, agnosticism	CULTURE Anti-multiculturalism Our language first Our religion (Christianity) Anti-Islam

Table 1 (cont.)

STATE/POWER	STATE/POWER
Liberalism	Illiberalism, populism
Democracy	Authoritarianism
Anti-authoritarian	Law and order
No/anti death penalty	Death penalty
Anti-military	Militarism
Critical of police power abuse	Police powers
Anti-imperialism	Imperialism
Socialism	Anticommunism

attitudes on social issues are different in each country, although (anti)immigration, based on (anti)racism is very general in all European countries.

As shown in a wealth of literature, the ideologies and attitudes of the radical right, as summarized earlier, have gradually become more influential since 2000, together with the growth of radical right parties in many countries, especially in Europe (of many studies, see Rydgren, 2007). This does not mean that reactionary ideas and parties are new. Indeed, many of the fascist ideas of pre-war parties have maintained their influence in underground or marginal groups or organizations. This important historical influence will not be studied here (for the continuity of radical right discourse see, e.g., Feldman & Jackson, 2014).

2.3 Studies of Radical Right Ideologies

Although studies of the radical right parties in political science hardly provide detailed ideological analysis, let us critically summarize some of the main points of this research, often formulated in terms of ‘populism’.

2.3.1 Theories of Populism

Although radical right parties are often conflated in the media and even in scholarly studies with populism, a review of the vast number of studies of populism is beyond the scope of this study, even when these studies deal with ideology (see Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017). Again, to abbreviate the discussion on the radical right in terms of what is called ‘populist’ ideology, we summarize only some major points of the debate:

Populism as Ideology

The most influential scholar of the populist radical right, Cas Mudde, since his book of 2000 has also written on ideologies (e.g., Mudde, 2014). He defines