1 Introduction

[The newcomers are bent on improving their position and the established groups are bent on maintaining theirs. The newcomers resent, and often try to rise from, the inferior status attributed to them and the established try to preserve their superior status which the newcomers appear to threaten.

—Elias and Scotson, The Established and the Outsiders, 1994 [1965]

What motivates voters to support radical right parties? This book’s core argument is that radical right voters are driven by their resentment against aspiring minority groups, and that radical right parties mobilize to curtail minority accommodation.

Consider the story of radical right mobilization against the Russian minority in Latvia, where Russian-speakers constitute more than a quarter of the population. In 2011, the electoral victory of a pro-Russian party, Harmony, emboldened Russian-speaking nationalists to compel the government to redress their grievances. Over a year-long campaign, pro-Russian movements and organizations gathered more than 180,000 signatures, forcing Latvia’s authorities to call a referendum on granting official legal status as a state language to Russian. This escalation of minority demands reinvigorated an anemic Latvian far right, which mobilized around opposition to any concessions toward the Russian minority and united the conservative right with the far right to form a counter-coalition. On November 18, 2013, a torch-lit parade commemorating the ninety-fifth anniversary of Latvian independence attracted a large crowd of more than 12,500 people.\(^1\) Organized by the far right and conservative youth movements in Latvia, the procession signaled a discernable surge in ethnic

\(^1\) The size of the crowd was remarkable and roughly equivalent to the 2009 anti-government gathering of protesters and violent rioters against the 2008 economic downturn.
polarization, and a clear retort to the increasingly assertive Russian-speaking community. The protest emphasized Latvian independence and the Latvian language. Mobilization against the escalating demands of the Russian-speaking minority translated into a rejection of the language law and serious electoral gains for the Latvian radical right.\(^2\)

Shifts in language rights often precede surges in radical right mobilization against encroachments on the dominant group’s control over state affairs. Such radical right parties across Eastern Europe, which capitalize on popular discontent with politically assertive minorities and with public policies that cave to their demands, form the substance of this book. The core question is: Under which conditions do these parties at the fringe of the political spectrum rise to prominence and obtain seats in the parliament?

It is often assumed that economic malaise, institutional volatility and xenophobia lurk behind the rise of a family of parties variously referred to as the “far” right, the “extreme” right and the “radical” right. Economic malaise often leads to withdrawal from politics or to voting for redistributive center-left parties (Dolezalova et al. 2017; Grittersova et al. 2016), but not necessarily to political mobilization against minorities or radical right voting (Stockemer 2017). Institutional volatility, caused by the collapse of major parties, can actually rejuvenate the political system rather than send it on a downward spiral toward the extremes. Xenophobia is pervasive and socially accepted in many places covered in this study; thus, politicizing prejudice is not an innovative political strategy that would bring in new voters or differentiate radical right voters from the voters of many other parties.

This book proposes a new explanation for the rise and fall of radical right parties. In order to account for the electoral volatility of radical right parties, this study emphasizes the bilateral relationship between radical right parties and their “electoral enemies,” the politically organized promoters of minority accommodation. It highlights the relational aspect of the dominant group’s grievances (Abdelal et al. 2006; Brewer

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\(^2\) The National Alliance party – which serves as an umbrella for conservatives, economic liberals, the young nationalists from All for Latvia and the more established radical right party, For Fatherland and Freedom/Latvian National Independence Movement – has performed extremely well, both in the 2014 parliamentary elections and in the elections to the European Parliament, winning, respectively, 17 and 14 percent of the popular vote.
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and Gardner 1996; Pratto et al. 2006). Groups are organized in social hierarchies (Goffman 1957; Koopmans 2005; Lipset 1960; Merton 1938) and the dominant group enjoys the privilege of governing the polity. Membership in the dominant group is mostly determined by nationality in Eastern Europe, where dominant groups are titular nationalities, and this is often affirmed constitutionally (Ramet 2007). While the concept of the dominant group mostly reflects majority–minority relations along ethnic lines, other attempts to change group-based social hierarchies (e.g., along lines of sexual orientation, religious confession or a historically defined non-native status) can trigger similar resentment among fringe members of the dominant group.3

The proposed theory therefore suggests that mobilization of the fringes of the dominant group is by opposition to the advancement of minorities, achieved via state-sanctioned policies and state-approved changes in narratives that relate to majority–minority relations.4 The backlash that ensues when radical right parties mobilize against minority ascendance represents a reaction to the relative status enhancement of minorities, which engenders symbolic as well as objective humiliation for members of the dominant groups that face the prospect of diminished status. These shifts in the status quo between the dominant group and other groups are situational. This means that they reflect the context in which minority–majority hierarchies are entrenched, and also the erratic nature of the political demands issued by ethnic, religious and social minorities. Radicalized fringes of the dominant group view majority–minority relations as a zero-sum game. A negative shift diminishes their status as the major stakeholders in the state, since they view the ascendance of some groups as inevitably implying the descent of others. As long as minorities and their advocates do not mobilize politically, the radical right is generally quiescent.

The book assesses this theory of radical right mobilization in the new democracies across post-communist Europe, which offers an...

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3 According to social dominance theory, the concept of the dominant group can also evolve around age, gender and other categories, such as religion or descent, that reflect power relations in various contexts (Sidanius and Pratto 2001).

4 Social dominance theory suggests that these are attempts to erode the hierarchy using the hierarchy-attenuating institutions that serve to balance the impact of hierarchy-enhancing institutions (Pratto et al. 2006). However, it also expects the dominant group to be the most xenophobic one.
important laboratory to study this phenomenon. When Eastern European countries shed their autocratic yokes after 1989/1991, they were ripe for far-right political movements to emerge and succeed. The left was discredited, at least in the European parts of the post-communist empire, which created an opening on the right. Moreover, the economic transition was painful for many. Yet when inflation, unemployment and insecurity skyrocketed, very few populists and demagogues emerged to capitalize on mass economic misery. Intolerance, xenophobia and homophobia were an everyday staple of communist societies, however suppressed by censorship and selectively contained by the police state. The newly democratizing societies were “free to hate” (Hockenos 1993), yet identity politics was surprisingly tame in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall across most of Eastern Europe, with the important exception of parts of the former Yugoslavia. The perfect storm of far-right mobilization after the collapse of communism never materialized in most places, until many years later; and in other countries, it has still not surfaced. For almost two decades, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the average vote share for radical right parties was in the single digits (Figure 1.1) – quite lackluster when compared with Western European radical right parties (Kopecky and Mudde 2003; Mudde 2017, 2005a). Despite a permissive electoral environment, radical right parties in Eastern and Central Europe...
struggled to surpass the minimum electoral thresholds and obtain seats in parliaments.\(^5\)

In general, we can identify two distinct waves of political mobilization of the far right in Eastern Europe. The initial wave, immediately after 1989, was quite mild, and reflected the enthusiasm of independence from Soviet interference. However, the mobilization that followed after the founding elections was a backlash against a system of governance based on political pluralism in which minorities organized and acquired political power. The second wave was more vicious and reflected two decades of experience with building political regimes based on diversity of views and interests. This created an aperture for minorities and their advocates to ascend to power and challenge the dominant group’s grip on the state.

1.1 The Argument

The radical right is a highly variable political phenomenon – both over time within countries and across them – with important consequences for the quality of democracy (Arzheimer 2018). It therefore merits more systematic theorizing and rigorous comparative analysis, which this book aims to contribute.

The first task is to define some key terms. I define a radical right party as a single-issue party that occupies a niche, extreme position in the party system, and is either nationalistic and/or socially conservative.\(^6\) A party that is nationalistic and socially liberal on gender issues, such as the Czech Communist Party, is not a radical right party. Parties are classified on the “second” (identity-related) dimension of party competition, regardless of their economic platforms. In fact, most radical right parties in Eastern Europe are left leaning and argue that governments should protect national economic interests and the dominant group.

\(^5\) Figure 1.1 includes the following countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia–Montenegro FRY, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine. Figure 1.1 excludes the Croatian Party of Democratic Unity (HDZ), which is an outlier and a borderline case of a radical right party (at least in the 1990s when it was a post-war ruling party). Figures and tables that disaggregate vote shares for the radical right parties are in the Appendix.

\(^6\) Niche parties include radical parties, green parties and territorial parties (Adams et al. 2006; Meguid 2005).
Radical right parties might supplement their appeals with populist, anti-establishment or anti-corruption rhetoric but these are not central features of their platforms. Selective anti-minority mobilization against politicized groups does not need to appeal to the “volonté générale” to aggravate voters. A direct connection between the populist leader and the electorate is not necessary to push back against minority rights. Moreover, radical right parties join governing coalitions and have been known to participate in graft, which erodes their anti-establishment appeals. Populism, anti-globalism and anti-elitism are ideologies compatible with radical right platforms, but do not in my view define them.7

The second issue is to clarify why the study of the radical right is important. First, the “new” radical right is the fastest growing party family in Europe (Golder 2016; Mudde 2007), and has adapted to the current circumstances and professionalized (Art 2011). In Western Europe starting in the late 1980s, and in Eastern Europe after 1989, the radical right has made a surprising comeback on the European political scene and cannot be ignored. Second, the radical right increasingly affects domestic policy decision-making, especially on minority issues and ethnic relations, in both the East and the West (de Lange 2012). Third, radical right parties have started to undermine the cohesion of the European integration process, and the process of radicalization has only accelerated after the fourth wave of European Union (EU) enlargement in 2004.

This book theorizes that the ire of radical right voters is not directed at any minorities, which would make it indiscriminate, but specifically at minorities (and their allies) that aspire to change the status quo by using the political process to their advantage. This resentment, embodied in the belief that certain minorities are undeserving of special rights that elevate their status, is distinct from xenophobia and overt

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7 The politics of exclusion and contestation is closely linked to populism. Populism is defined as the rule of “pure many” mobilized against the “corrupt few” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013). Being an elusive political category, it can be studied as a “thin” yet coherent ideology, rhetoric, ethos or “empty signifier” as well as a social movement or an expression of contentious politics. Following the will of the many is antithetical to democracy. Nadia Urbinati views populism as a disfigurement of democracy, since it reifies the popular will by suppressing the plurality of opinion and democratic procedures: “populism is a politics not of inclusion but primarily of exclusion” (Urbinati 2014: 147). By definition, the popular will of the people must be the will of the majority or the dominant group.
racism. Contrary to some conventional wisdom, I argue that radical right mobilization does not originate in the demons of xenophobia and group hostility, but rather stems from policy shifts that reflect political competition between majority- and minority-oriented parties and factions. Since resources are finite and prestige originates in hierarchies, any change in the status quo of minority-majority relations implies a loss, typically for the majority, and subsequently a grievance that can be politicized. Radical right parties are not interested in the annihilation or eradication of minorities, but rather in suppressing their desire to exercise greater political power, influence policy, obtain government resources and acquire positions of prominence. In short, the book’s central claim is that radical right support is fueled not by prejudice and xenophobia but by dissatisfaction with and resentment against ascending minority groups.

Changes in language rights, as the book’s opening story suggests, can signal an important shift in status. If a minority language becomes a regional language, in an area densely populated by a distinct ethno-linguistic group, this implies that minorities can officially communicate in their language with local state authorities, use their own names for villages and cities, and accrue more resources to educate their children in a language other than the one associated with the dominant nationality. Similarly, legislation that changes the status of an ethnic group to a “nationality” or “national minority” implies that the collective becomes eligible for more state funds. Such legislation signals that the group can mobilize, and/or that it has a political patron willing to advocate on its behalf. The shift simultaneously detracts from the status of the dominant group, which is now expected to treat the ascending minority more as an equal, and this mobilizes opposition against the change. Political groups associated with such shifts, and advocates of minorities that aim to change the status quo, invite the wrath of radical right party supporters.

Although it is intuitive to associate support for radical right parties with worsening economic conditions, rampant corruption or voter apathy and prejudice, the theory and evidence offered in this book suggest that none of these explanations withstands closer scrutiny. Instead, this book proposes that radical right support originates in policy hostility, defined as opposition to policies that change the status quo of ethnic relations. Radical right parties compete on a platform
that seeks to counterbalance or roll back the political gains of minorities to the status quo ante.

1.2 Democratization and Radical Right Mobilization

The process of minority accommodation coincided with the process of democratization in post-communist Europe. Post-authoritarian democratic pluralism introduced new political rules of engagement, which empowered the dominant group to search for its national identity through a process of political competition, but also emboldened it to use the banner of the “people” in order to silence minority voices. By making demands and using the openness of the democratic process to their advantage, minority groups increased the salience of identity in the political process – but this did not always result in panic, especially when the dominant group was preoccupied with other critical issues, such as major economic and institutional reforms or international threats.

The principles of radical right politics proposed here are general, but the empirical scope of this book is limited to post-communist democracies. The post-communist context is unique in that the process of democratization preceded and ultimately facilitated the expansion of minority rights once autocratic regimes weakened and a plurality of voices entered the competitive political arena. This differs from more established contexts, such as in Western and Southern Europe, where the democratic opening occurred earlier and the struggle over minority rights was not associated with a concurrent regime change. What is nonetheless general is this: the ability of minorities to extract concessions by aptly using the toolkit of democratic procedures leads to resentment among members of the majority who begin to question the loyalty of the regime elites to the dominant group.

Another general principle is that radical right mobilization is inherently cyclical and sporadic. As minorities and their advocates are pushed back, the perceived urgency of reifying the dominant group and its leading position diminishes. But power-seeking minorities eventually regroup and offer their services to major parties in exchange for favors, and new demands arise. With time, new identities may emerge and new issues may enter the political arena. Minorities that have been
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silent in the past have incentives to adapt to national and global circumstances and to issue fresh demands. Radical right mobilization mirrors such situational shifts, and thus any theory must incorporate these dynamics if it aims to predict the variable fortunes of radical right parties over time.

For example, in the span of just a few years, the radical right party Jobbik, which is now the second-largest party in Hungary, shifted its platform away from the one that was antagonistic toward Jews and toward a platform that mobilized against Islamic refugees from the Middle East. An opportunity arose, and the party seized it. Yet, in 2016, the party rejected a referendum on refugee quotas that would insulate Hungary and went on to declare its support for the Palestinian state and (conservative) Christian European values, while simultaneously drawing on support from rebellious youth movements and rock bands. Similarly, Jobbik’s vitriolic incitement against Roma, which constitutes an important part of their anti-minority platform, has also fluctuated over the years from severe to rather mild. These quick, reactive shifts reflect the episodic nature of identity politics and the erratic salience of minority groups in domestic politics.

Radical right mobilization evolves around the exclusion of minority groups from access to power rather than around pocketbook economic issues. In this view, radical right mobilization represents a revolt against a political system that allows minorities to gain political power and advance minority causes. In a zero-sum setting, minority gains imply majority losses. Even though mainstream parties have delivered positive-sum payoffs in most European post-communist democracies over the past two decades, parties also subscribed to ideas, such as minority protection and pluralism in the public domain, which have diluted the primacy of the dominant group.

Polities differ in how far they are willing to go to resolve the tension between “the people” and “the other” by curbing the pluralist dimension of representative democracy. In most cases, niche radical right parties endanger the political rise of minorities and minority rights, but do not threaten the system of representative democracy itself. That

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8 For example, sexual minorities take cues from nearby countries that have pioneered gay and lesbian rights, and realize that they can also take advantage of pluralism (O'Dwyer 2018).

9 A few of these benefits include membership in the European Union, along with stability, access to markets and freedom of movement.
potential typically lies with large, radicalized mainstream parties, capable of thwarting electoral laws, institutions of oversight, independent courts and free media. The study of radical right parties thus reflects positively on the resilience of democratic institutions in managing majority–minority relationships and dealing with the challenges that arise when minorities become politicized.

While the ability of mainstream parties to fend for the dominant group shapes the radical right politics, so too do other seemingly unrelated issues that are strategically framed through the prism of encroachments on sovereignty. For example, corruption can morph into a betrayal in the eyes of the electorate, once it is framed as a socioeconomic sovereignty issue (Klašnja et al. 2014; cf. Hanley and Sikk 2014). The shady sales of large state-owned lands and forests to foreign entities, corrupt large-scale privatizations of strategic assets to foreign firms and bribery in military procurement contracts that endanger national security are not just about personal enrichment and filling party coffers. These activities expose the lack of loyalty that mainstream parties have to the nation, its land, its historical industries and its status as a sovereign state. This framing compromises the mainstream parties’ commitment to the dominant group and creates an opportunity for radical right parties to mobilize.

Younger and older democracies may react differently to such framing. Older democracies ought to be more resilient, having lived through decades of political contestation and having successfully absorbed (some) ascending minorities into the mainstream in the past through the democratic process. Resilience can also arise from a deeply internalized memory of overcoming past democratic breakdowns associated with violent, state-sponsored killing of minorities (e.g., Western Germany). Paradoxically, the absence of reflection over a deep historic trauma that has been overcome can leave some older democracies unprepared to deal with right-wing mobilization.

However, all else equal, younger democracies are generally more vulnerable to the corrosive effects of anti-minority mobilization. One danger stems from the parallel processes of building up democratic institutions and the state itself. Democratization allows minorities to ascend to power, which tempts politicians and voters – who want to ensure the supremacy of the dominant nationalities in state affairs – to select authoritarian shortcuts. Emboldened illiberal leaders then use the process of shutting out minorities from access to power channels as