
Introduction

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Introduction

This special issue gathers together recent contributions focussing on the institutional and extra-parliamentary manifestations of Southern European extreme and moderate right activism from a sociological, historical, and political science perspective. We concentrate for the most part on changes that have recently been undertaken by these political parties and movements in terms of ideology, political discourse, organizational structures, and action strategies.

The present volume is the result of the joint analysis, collaboration, and fruitful dialogue among participants of the Conference of the Italian Political Science Association (Rome, September 2009), and the Congress of the Portuguese Association of Political Science (Aveiro, March 2010). During these conferences, the contributors' attention was primarily focused on the analysis of single case studies within a more general framework that underlined the development of the extreme right over the last two decades.

These changes can be considered as the result of an interaction of different challenges that all parties — radical right not being excluded — have to face: an evident trans-nationalization of the political process (e.g., globalization) along with the effects of the European integration on the one hand, and the professionalization of politics in terms of political communication, action strategies, and organizational structures on the other.

These factors strongly affect extreme right parties and movements all over Europe, and it is the editors' opinion that focussing on these develop-

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ments can help to broaden the already existing literature on the radical right toward new research questions.

In the last two decades the radical right has experienced a significant rise in many West European democracies, both in terms of electoral success, with the gain of parliamentary and even governmental influence, and the mushrooming of many extra-parliamentary organizations (see among others, Mudde, 2007; Koopmans *et al.*, 2005; Norris, 2005; Carter, 2005). Radical right parties and movements can count on a broad repertoire of “enemies”: the European integration, immigration, the introduction of the Euro, the rising unemployment rate and the relevant traditional parties’ social policies and economic politics.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RADICAL RIGHT

Internationalization processes are mentioned by many scholars as one of the main causes of the recent mobilization of the extreme right in Europe, as a reaction against the structural, economic, and cultural changes brought about by modernity (Mény and Surel, 2000). Euro-skeptical positions and nationalism are considered to be two crucial elements of the new right-wing “populism” (Mudde, 2007; Kriesi *et al.*, 2008).

Some studies consider the rise of the extreme right as a reaction against post-materialism (Minkenberg, 1992). Betz (1994) interprets the development of the contemporary radical right as a form of “late modern populism”, and following Ignazi’s interpretation (1992, 1994) the rise of radical right parties should be understood as the product of a “silent counter-revolution” culturally characterized by a tendency toward “neo-conservatism” (*ibid.*, 245). Some authors, such as Heitmeyer (1992), refer more precisely to the influence of “anti-modernity/globalization” factors.

The attention that scholars devote to the definitional aspects and to the identification of the reasons for these parties’ emergence is reflected in the use of different labels to identify the same political subjects. This is manifested, for instance, in the never-ending terminological discussion about the nature of these political subjects, which includes references to their “extreme right”, “far right”, “fascist”, “radical”, “populist” main character.

The debate on the ideological profile of the radical right has tended to focus mainly on party organizations and to neglect the development of other social-based organizations. Moreover, it has mostly focussed on countries where radical-right parties have been more electorally successful (e.g., in Austria), or where extreme right movements were particularly violent (e.g., in Germany), leaving aside some of the countries where the radical right was less electorally strong and socially rooted — Spain and Portugal, for instance.

Apart from the above described controversies, some general tendencies can be identified in the development process of these parties and movements. During the last two decades, the radical right has, in fact, undergone changes in three main directions: ideology, strategy, and organization.

Ideologically, as noted above, radical-right parties have shifted to a populist platform and a populist form of communication. The issues included in their manifestos, as well as the main communication strategies implemented in order to reach a broader electorate, are common to those expressed by right-wing populist parties not deriving from extreme right ideological traditions. This shift toward a more populist rather than extreme right nature is reflected not only in the reduction or elimination of historical references to extreme right historical movements typical of the post-industrial radical right (Ignazi, 1994), but also in the inclusion in the party platform of issues calling for the protection of the native community, the valuing of the traditional family based on Christian principles, opposition to the Islamic culture and the Islamic “invasion” of Western countries, and the opposition to economic globalization phenomena, as well as a multi-faced and variable scepticism toward the European Union (Mudde, 2007). The common nature of these parties’ platforms can moreover be considered as a starting point for the creation of bridges between radical-right parties and radical-right movements.

Strategically, the above described convergence toward an ideological profile capable of capturing a broader electorate can be perceived as a way for these parties to intercept the so-called “protest voters”. The rising economic difficulties, the world-wide financial crisis, and the related feelings of uncertainty create a favorable terrain for a more open competition of these parties with the moderate right. In order to better implement this strategy, communication plays a central role. As Mazzoleni, Stewart, and Horsfield (2003) show, media have played a central role in the legitimization of these parties, not only in the cases of new right populist parties such as the Italian *Lega Nord*, but also in the above described evolution of extreme right parties toward a more populist approach (as evidenced in the cases of the French National Front and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreich*).

The *organization* of radical-right parties and movements has had to adapt to the new constraints created by these ideological and strategic shifts through a process of professionalization of the relationship with the electorate. This professionalization process is reflected not only in the adoption of the communication techniques of the so-called third phase of political communication, but also in the adaptation of the different party “faces” (Katz and Mair, 1994) to the phenomena of personalization and leadership. From this point of view, the “party on the ground” is particularly affected by this organizational change, not only in the central, but also its local branches.

In terms of strategies, particular attention will be placed on the investigation of the reciprocal influences between moderate right-wing political forces and actors and “radical” ones, in terms of propaganda, mutual self-location in the political space, and competition for the vote (Kriesi, 1999).

Indeed, the analysis of the moderate and extreme right is relevant from the point of view of their reciprocal influences. Scientific literature has evidenced complementary and sometimes contradictory elements concerning these aspects. Their investigation in a comparative perspective, with particular attention to the parties’ self-collocation on the right-wing continuum, is particularly interesting. Some authors underline how the moderate right in the opposition can generate difficulties to the radical right. In this case, radical-right parties have to face a more “tempting” competitor. On the contrary, the moderate right’s inclusion in the government can facilitate the anti-establishment discourse of the radical right (Kriesi, 1999, p. 419). Similarly, the inclusion of radical policies in the moderate right’s political agenda precludes the possibility for the extreme right to exploit sensitive issues for public opinion (von Beyme, 1998, p. 15). Alternatively, other authors underline how the shift to the right of moderate parties does not compromise radical-right parties. On the contrary, it would legitimize their political discourse, thus facilitating their success.

On the political side, alternative considerations concern the implementation of disproportional electoral systems and, on the social side, the effects of the economic crisis (mainly growing unemployment).

Regarding the introduction of disproportional systems, empirical research shows that the extreme-right elector does not seem to be discouraged from the existence of non-proportional systems, usually introduced by mainstream parties. On the other hand, the extreme right electorate seems to tend to vote for mainstream right parties in periods of economic crisis (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, p. 439).

It is important to analyze the effect of the exploitation of political cleavages as well. Radical-right parties have difficulties in gaining a political space in which they can act, while mainstream right parties still hold the monopoly of traditional and still influential cleavages (Kriesi, 1999, p. 410). On the contrary, the permanence of elevated conflict in the traditional cleavages, the emergence of new cleavages not completely exploited by the moderate right, and their combination with the “representation crisis” can open up new opportunities for radical-right political actors, which are often “newcomers” (Hainsworth, 2008, p. 26).

Moderate right leaders with a high charismatic profile (such as De Gaulle, Reagan, Thatcher) are often perceived by the potential electorate of the far right as more able to achieve political goals than the radical leaders. For that

reason, the former are preferred to the latter, who are considered, in comparison, as less successful in the political game.

Despite this, radical-right leaders can obtain the same self-promotion opportunities as moderate leaders by accurately managing their image in the mass media (Bos, van der Brug, Vreese, 2011).

The reciprocal influence between moderate and extreme right on the above-mentioned aspects characterizes altogether the case studies presented in this Special Issue.

Finally, this Special Issue refers not only to political parties and elections, but also to non-party organizations and to the feature of political communication and the political discourse. These elements are gaining importance in the extreme-right-specific literature. (Mazzoleni, Stewart, and Horsfield, 2003). It is indeed evident that making use of an anti-establishment and anti-party rhetoric, radical-right and populist parties and movements are able to gain visibility and mobilize citizens' disaffection feelings toward the national and European political class.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

In terms of geography, the Special Issue focuses on the extreme right in Southern European countries (i.e., France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal), illustrating the specific characteristics of these scarcely explored radical-right scenes and comparing them with other European cases.

The volume addresses the transnational dimension of the extreme right, underlying the opportunities and constraints of the processes of European integration and globalization. The shifting of power from the national to the supranational level affects not only mainstream political parties, interest groups, and social movements, but radical-right parties and movements as well (see also Kriesi *et al.*, 2008; Mudde, 2004).

The article by Nicolò Conti addresses the transnational dimension of the extreme right and its transformations (in terms of both orientations and behaviors, i.e. vote) related to the European Union. Examining extreme right parties in 15 EU member states, he analyzes the correspondence between the public discourse toward the EU and the voting behavior of extreme right parties' MEPs in the European Parliament. Despite the traditional radical-right parties' opposition toward the EU and the relative criticism and rhetoric, their voting behavior shows the expression of their dissent with a "surprising" respect for the institutional rules of the game.

Focusing on the political communication and (changes in the) ideology of the current extreme right facing processes of trans-nationalization, the contribution of José Pedro Zúquete highlights the radical-right parties' increasing

“Islamophobia”. Since the turn of the Millenium and the September 11 terrorist attacks, this element has been identified by social scientists as a key feature of the European extreme-right. This issue is examined under the spotlight of the anti-globalization feelings of the radical right and its peculiar theorization of a “Eurabia” future for the old continent. In the author’s opinion, the visions of a Muslim settlement and the “takeover” of Europe have the potential to create a cross-national reconfiguration of the extreme right ideology and a sort of convergence between different sides of the extreme right ideological spectrum.

The article by Manuela Caiani and Linda Parenti investigates the use of the internet by extreme right organizations as a modern tool of political communication. By focusing on the Spanish extreme right and conducting a formalized content analysis of about 90 right-wing organizational websites of different kinds (from extreme right political parties to sub-cultural skinhead groups, etc.), Caiani and Parenti explore the degree and the forms of use of the internet by these groups that underpin their different political purposes: propaganda, information, mobilization, etc. Particular attention is devoted by the authors to the interest of radical-right groups toward the potentiality of the Internet as a means for creating a transnational community. The results of the study are interpreted on the basis of the existing political opportunities in the off-line reality of the Spanish context.

Among the contributions focusing on the national Southern European case studies and the current mainly ideological development of the right in these countries, Madalena Resende investigates the adaptation process of Spanish center-right parties and their difficult relationship with the past. The chapter offers a comparison between the Spanish and the Polish center-right parties. Taking into account the new scenario posed by the EU, the article describes and analyzes the attempts to transform introverted conceptions of nation into extroverted nationalism by the center-right political forces in the two countries. It argues that the formation of a coalition where liberal reformists prevailed over nationalist conservatives proved to be a crucial condition to allow the reform of conceptualizations of the nation. Whereas in Spain liberal reformists were predominant in the *Partido Popular* (PP) and the party proceeded to reform its nationalism, in Poland no such stable settlement between liberals and nationalists was reached.

Moving on to the Portuguese case, José Costa offers an investigation of the Portuguese radical right and its recent evolution in terms of both ideology and strategies since the mid-1980s. Political far-right parties, as well as the broader “far-right associative movement”, are taken into consideration. In the period analyzed, the traditional counter-revolutionary, universal, and imperialist basis led to the myth that the multi-continental and multi-racial empire was replaced by a racialist identity typical of the ethno-cultural nationalism.

Through interviews with the party's leaders and cadres, Costa faithfully describes the historical and political evolution of the radical-right Portuguese party and locates it in the broad European post-industrial extreme right.

Focusing on the Italian case, Ricardo Marchi's contribution analyzes the main organizational and ideological changes of the Italian radical right since 1945, from the old heir of the fascist party, MSI (Italian Social Movement), to *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance), with its "democratization" and inclusion in the mainstream political system. Particular attention is devoted to the ideological transformation of the party from fascism to post-fascism (symbolized by the National Alliance party), and to the most recent transformation trend within the coalition, led by Silvio Berlusconi.

Finally Michelle Williams' article explores the case of the National Front within the context of the French radical right. By comparing the first eight months of Marine Le Pen's leadership with Jean-Marie Le Pen's former political strategy, her work explores the changes and continuities in policies within the party.

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