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The Radical Right as Social Movement Organizations

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Abstract and Keywords

Typically in sociology and political science, the radical right has been addressed through so-called breakdown theories, while left-wing radicalism has been analyzed from the perspective of mobilization theories, which are widespread in social movement studies. The chapter uses concepts taken from social movement studies in order to provide an overview of some scholarship on the contemporary radical right, looking first of all at the organizational structure in the radical right milieu and considering the complex interplay among various actors linked to each other in cooperative as well as competitive interactions. Second, it suggests that these networks use a broad repertoire of collective action. Third, and in line with the “cultural turn” in social movement research, we consider the frames through which the collective actors involved in the radical right construct and communicate their (internal and external) reality.

Keywords: radical right, radicalism, social movement studies, collective action, right-wing movement

TYPICALLY in sociology and political science, the radical right has been addressed through so-called breakdown theories, while left-wing radicalism has been analyzed from the perspective of mobilization theories, which are widespread in social movement studies.¹ For a long time, especially in the United States, unconventional forms of collective action were identified as crisis behavior. Considering collective phenomena as the sum of individual behaviors, psychologically oriented theories defined social movements as the manifestation of feelings of deprivation experienced by individuals, with aggression resulting from a wide range of frustrated expectations. Phenomena such as the rise of Nazism, but also more contemporary movements, were considered as aggressive reactions to frustrations resulting either from a rapid and unexpected end to periods of economic well-being and of increased expectations on a worldwide scale or from status inconsistency at the individual level. This type of approach resonated with interpretations

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of the extreme right as non-reflected reactions to social crisis and unsuccessful integration.

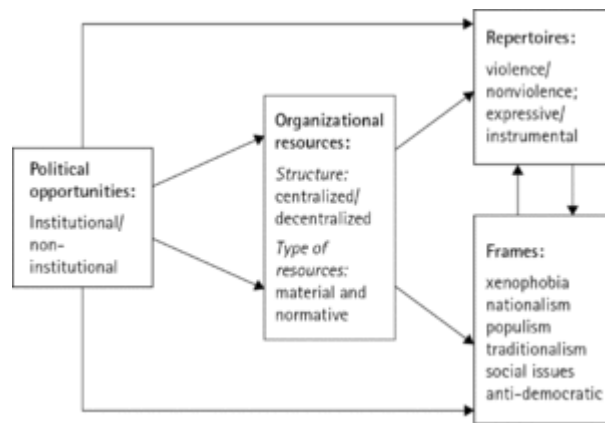
These studies have offered valuable insights in understanding the development of the radical right. Nevertheless, there are also some weaknesses. Research on the contextual characteristics of the development of the radical right has not always been able to explain the causal mechanisms that intervene between macro-level causes and micro-level behaviors. Additionally, the focus on some potential causes has left other possible explanations unexplored. Writing about the dramatic growth of popular support for xenophobic parties in the previous two decades, Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay (2002) have lamented that literature on the radical right tends to be society-centered, avoiding politics-centered arguments. The analysis of the meso organizational level has also been limited to the political parties, with selective attention (p. 328) to their strategic issue framing. When non-institutional activities of the radical right entered the picture, it was mainly in the form of political violence.

Some of the missing aspects in research on the radical right have become central in social movement studies. Though rarely applied to the analysis of right-wing groups, certain concepts developed from research on social movements have high heuristic capacity in this field as well. In particular, this approach has stressed political opportunities rather than social threats, organizational resources rather than grievances, frames rather than ideology, repertoire rather than violence, networks rather than individual pathologies, and relations rather than structures.

Building on this field of knowledge, Caiani, della Porta and Wagemann (2012) have proposed an analysis of the radical right as a social movement. Using some of the main concepts in the field, they have developed their analysis around the model presented below (Figure 17.1).

So-called breakdown approaches have been criticized in analyses of left-wing social movements that have conceptualized social movements as largely instrumental rational actors that mobilize around collective interests and/or identities. These have been opposed by resource mobilization approaches, which stress that in historical situations, in which structural strains and conflicts are always present, the emergence of collective action has to be addressed by looking at the conditions that enable discontent to be transformed into mobilization—that is, at how the resources necessary for collective action are mobilized. In this view, social movements are made up of actors acting in a rational way—or at least in as rational a way as those involved in conventional forms of political action. Protest actions are seen as deriving from a calculation of the costs and benefits and as being influenced by the presence of resources, in particular organizations and entrepreneurs (della Porta and Diani 2006). The (material and symbolic) resources available contribute to explain the tactical choices made by movements.

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Figure 17.1 The Radical Right as Social Movement Organizations

(p. 329) Repertoires for protest are seen here as influenced by a political opportunity structure (POS), which has both a formal, institutional aspect and an informal, cultural one. Cross-time and cross-national research on social movements has stressed the important influence of political context on a movement's capacity to mobilize, as well as on the

forms of its mobilization. Stable institutional characteristics such as the functional and territorial distribution of powers, as well as the contingent shift in the configuration of allies and opposition, have emerged time and again as important independent variables in explaining social movements' development. Beyond political opportunities, the discursive opportunity structure (DOS) plays a significant role in influencing the potential acceptance of social movement claims within a broader culture. As social movements are political actors, they tend to be very sensitive to the opening of channels of institutional access, which tend to facilitate protest but moderate its form. In contrast, closed (or closing) opportunities tend to produce radicalization of protest repertoires (see della Porta and Diani 2006 for a review).

Recently, two different theoretical developments have brought about some shifts in attention. On one hand, there has been growing focus on the cultural and symbolic dimensions of social movements (Jasper, Goodwin, and Polletta 2001; Flam and King 2005). On the other, a more relational vision of protest has been promoted, with attention paid to the social mechanisms that intervene between macro-level causes and macro-level effects (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). In a critique of the structuralist bias of previous approaches, attention moved toward the relational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms through which contextual input is filtered and acquires meaning. The effects of political opportunities depend in fact on the social construction of these opportunities by the relevant actors.

In what follows, we will use the abovementioned concepts taken from social movement studies in order to provide an overview of some scholarship on the contemporary radical right, looking first of all at the organizational structure in the radical right milieu and considering the complex interplay among various actors linked to each other in cooperative as well as competitive interactions. Like other social movements, right-wing ones are networks of more or less formal groups and individuals, and the extent and structure of these networks define their mobilizing capacity. Second, we suggest that these networks use a broad repertoire of collective action. While research on the radical right has usually focused either on electoral behavior or on violent action (with very few

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exchanges between the two fields of research), we analyze instead the different forms of protest used by the radical right, addressing the ways in which the available resources and political opportunities do influence these choices. While much research has focused on either violent or electoral behavior, our data allow us to locate those within a broader repertoire of collective action. Just as for the social movement organizations that have been studied in the left-libertarian movement family, studies of the radical right treat the movement as “eventful” in terms of its relational, cognitive, and emotional effects on the individual and collective actors that take part in it (della Porta 2015). Third, and in line with the “cultural turn” in social movement research, we consider the frames through which the collective actors involved in the radical right (p. 330) construct and communicate their (internal and external) reality (Snow and Byrd 2007). Located somewhat below the level of (broad and fixed) ideology, frame analysis fits our interest in the ways in which organizations bridge different specific issues. This resonates with our assumption that, much like other collective actors, radical right organizations have to be considered as acting upon specific concerns and attempting to mobilize a potential base of sympathizers.

Within a relational approach, we shall pay particular attention to processes of interactions between the radical right and other actors, both allies and opponents. In social movement studies, radical right groups have been addressed under the label of “countermovements.” Although criticized as too narrow a frame to account for the complexity of right-wing social movements, the concept of countermovement is useful in focusing attention on the conflictual interactions between movement families.

Political Opportunities for the Radical Right

The literature on collective action has emphasized that levels and forms of mobilization by social movements, interest groups, and citizens' initiatives are strongly influenced by political opportunity structure and discursive opportunity structure—the set of opportunities and constraints that are offered by the institutional structure and political culture of the political system in which these groups operate (see Tarrow 1994; Koopmans et al. 2005). In general, the concept of POS has been defined mainly by looking at the degree of “closure” or “openness” of a political system (e.g., in terms of electoral system, degree of centralization, configuration of power between allies and opponents, etc.), as well as in terms of more inclusive or exclusive cultural contexts vis-à-vis the challengers (e.g., the political culture of the elites, the way authorities manage collective action, etc.). Movement organizations have been shown to adapt to the public decision-making structure, mobilizing when and where channels of access open up (Tarrow 1994).

From this perspective, economic and social crises have been mentioned as determinants of the emergence and development of radical right movements and mobilizations (Prowe 2004), as well as political instability, allies in power (Koopmans 2005), the legacy of an authoritarian past (Koopmans et al. 2005; Mudde 2007, 233–255), youth subcultures and hooliganism (Bjørge 1995), and the diffusion of xenophobic values within society (Rydgren 2005, 2012). It remains controversial whether social support for radical groups decreases or encourages violence (Sageman 2004).²

Among studies focusing on economic aspects, there is the so-called deprivation school, which relates right-wing extremism to anomie and poverty, bridging the macro-level socioeconomic features and individual factors (e.g., Heitmeyer 2002, Perrineau (p. 331) 2002). In this regard, the sense of insecurity arising from the breakdown of traditional social structures (social class, family, religion) and the grievances generated in critical economic, social, or political conditions brought about by processes of globalization and modernization are considered “precipitant” factors favoring right-wing extremism and the emergence of violent behavior. Similarly, studies of current right-wing radicals both from political parties and from non-partisan radical right organizations stress that these people are usually young (often not even eighteen years old), with a lower-class background and lack of education and professional skills (Merkl 2003).

Difficulties in primary socialization, a result of the weakening of the sense of family and entrenchment in the community (Merkl 2003), are also a factor favoring right-wing extremism. However, there is also evidence that places in question the positive correlation between right-wing extremism and (low) economic status. For example, the study by Canetti and Pedahzur (2002) showed that right-wing extremist sentiments were unrelated to socioeconomic variables. Similarly, and contrary to common wisdom, a comfortable individual situation is found to be more conducive to radical right party

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affinity than job insecurity and deprivation (De Weerd et al. 2004, 81). In fact, according to Mudde, “populist radical right parties are supported by people who want to hold on to what they have in the face of the perceived threats of globalization (i.e. mass immigration and the post-industrial society)” (2007, 223).

Among the studies that focus on the political macro-level factors of right-wing extremism, many stress the effects of the institutional framework on the development of the radical right. Right-wing populist politics is defined not only by idiosyncratic issues orientation, but also by structural constraints, such as those of the electoral system and the partisan alternatives it affords (Denemark and Bowler 2002). These studies concentrate on long-term institutional variables (such as characteristics of the electoral systems; see Kitschelt 2007; Arzheimer and Carter 2006), as well as medium-term party-system factors (such as models of party competition; see van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005; Carter 2005; Kitschelt 1995) and short-term contextual variables (such as immigration levels; see Lubbers, Scheeper, and Billiet 2000).

Alternatively, there are studies (a minority, as mentioned earlier) that adopt concepts and hypotheses from social movement studies in order to understand radical right movements, such as the idea of political opportunity structure (e.g., Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Mudde 2010). This concept, used to explain the mobilization of social movements, refers both to stable contextual features (such as a country’s institutional framework, the functional and territorial distribution of powers, and the party system or form of government) and to dynamic and contingent factors (such as the shift in the configuration of allies and opposition, new laws, or changes in power relations) (Tarrow 1994, 85). While open opportunities imply easy access for new challengers in the political system, the lack (or closing) of these opportunities often culminates in escalation (della Porta 1995). Koopmans (2005), for example, in a cross-country study of racist and radical right violence in Europe, argues that this type of extremism seems to be motivated more by the lack of opportunities (such as through established political channels of expression) than by the presence of grievances in the society (such as the presence of (p. 332) immigrants, economic difficulties, etc.). Similarly, Arzheimer and Carter (2006) examine the influence of political opportunity structure on right-wing extremist party vote. By adopting a “three-pronged approach” that focuses on long-term institutional features, medium-term factors related to the party system, and short-term contextual factors, they find that the unemployment level, the position of the main right-wing party, the degree of disproportionality of the electoral system, and the presence of a grand coalition in government are key factors in the success of radical right parties across Western Europe.

Other studies focus on the relationship between societal support and violent right-wing radicalization, stressing that it can move in several directions, some unexpected. For example, the German “societal consensus” against right-wing extremism can also be exploited by activists to reinforce their collective identity by presenting themselves as victims (Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012). Indeed, the nation’s sensitivity concerning its historical past and German guilt have greatly increased the provocative

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potential of racist and anti-Semitic symbolism (Kersten 2004, 180), something that can be easily abused by the radical right.

Looking in particular at discursive opportunities, waves of right-wing violence have been linked to the spreading of values such as extreme nationalism, intolerance, xenophobia, authoritarianism, opposition to the left, and anti-parliamentarism (Prowe 2004). There are cross-national differences in the spread of these values. From a historical perspective, cultural racism is considered today's substitute for the biological racism of the past (Wieviorka 2004).

In brief, the main conclusion that we can derive from this section is that macro-level studies shed light on the contextual preconditions that may favor the emergence and diffusion of right-wing extremism. However, such studies could still greatly benefit from greater consideration of low-scale mechanisms and middle-range political variables capable of providing a link between these preconditions and individuals.

Radical Right Networks

While much attention has been paid to why individuals decide to mobilize, many scholars have concluded that grievances alone are not enough to create movements (Buechler 2000). Recent literature has pointed at the combination of underlying motives and social networks as the basis for movement recruitment and the path to popular mobilization (Diani and McAdam 2003). Social network analysis has been considered particularly interesting for social movements, which are networks whose formal characteristics have been addressed in the development of theories of collective behavior (Rosenthal et al. 1985; Snow et al. 1986; McAdam 1988; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; Gould 1993; Diani 2003). In fact, individual and organizational social networks are important elements in the processes of collective mobilization, increasing communication and coordination flows among groups (Diani 2011). They are also considered to influence individual (p. 333) behavior and readiness to take part in collective action (della Porta and Diani 2006), as in the case of friendship and family ties, which have been found to favor political participation, even in radical groups (della Porta 1995).

This holds true for radical right movements as well. The movement's very numerous websites have a faithful public, who use the Internet in order to meet each other, exchange information, mobilize, create fences, build barriers, and dig trenches (Roversi 2006; Caiani and Wagemann 2009).

In regard to the German radical right, Caldiron notes that a series of bulletin board systems connected to the Thule network substantially aided German neo-Nazi activists as they (successfully) fought against the dissolution of many of their groups in the first half

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of the 1990s, and those systems allowed the activists to conserve links and connections among themselves (Caldiron 2001, 335).

Recent research on about six hundred right-wing political parties and non-party organizations (including violent groups) in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States found that more than one-third of radical right organizations have cross-national and international contacts through links among their respective websites (Caiani and Parenti 2013, 67). In addition, all of them engaged in networking online in order to be connected with other radical right organizations (including those of different types—for example, political parties and subnational youth groups) of their own country.

Finally, and most important, the overall configuration of these radical right virtual communities constructed through networks online was different in each of the six countries, embodying a different potential mobilizational structure (Caiani and Parenti 2013, 121). The Italian and British radical right networks appear to be very fragmented, highly diversified, and difficult to coordinate, whereas the German network (and in part the French network) is denser and much more concentrated on a few central actors (a “star model,” in social network analysis language; Diani 2003). The Spanish network has a middle position between these two types. The American network appears even more fragmented and dispersed than the Italian and British ones, with many isolated organizations (a “segmented-decentralized” structure; Diani 2003, 312).

These results confirmed that radical right organizations are aware of the importance of social networking, “with community members effectively using this online service to make contact with other supporters within their localities, forming both on- and offline communities and networks in support of the radical right” (Bowman-Grieve 2009, 1003). Furthermore, the shape of networks has been connected to the forms of action used by organizations within a particular social movement sector, being likely to be more disruptive within highly segmented networks and more moderate within densely connected networks (Hadden 2008).

Studies that focus on extremist organizations from an organizational point of view also look at organizational changes. In Germany, for example, in the aftermath of the parliamentary decline of the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, National Democratic Party), non-partisan groups found themselves in constant danger of being banned by the law, so they dissolved their previous rigid (p. 334) structures and became organized in rather flexible *Kameradschaften*, or comradeships (Caiani and Wagemann 2009). In the United States, the Tea Party and its members have been found to have a loose, reticular organization, with uneasy relations with both the Republican Party and radical right groups (Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

Koopmans and colleagues (2005), in a cross-national study of radical right discourses, pointed out the importance of organizational characteristics to the groups’ strategic repertoire of action. In particular, they link different organizational forms (more institutional versus more flexible) with different types of political action (more moderate

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versus more controversial) (187). Moreover, the presence of a specific organizational form is related to specific factors, in particular the political space made available by the position of mainstream political parties on immigration, as well as the electoral strength of radical right parties (195).

Despite the growing importance of the linking practices of extremists and other groups, including through the Internet (Ackland and Gibson 2005, 1), there is only a limited number of empirical studies on these issues (for an exception, see Caiani and Parenti 2013). Indeed, research on radical right movement organizations and their networking is still in its infancy (Burriss, Smith, and Strahm 2000; Zhou et al. 2005), and the literature is mainly focused on radical right political parties and electoral campaigns. Furthermore, the few existing studies focusing on radical right movements and their networks (including online) usually concentrate on the U.S. case (see Burriss, Smith, and Strahm 2000, among others), and comparative studies are rare.

The Action Repertoire of the Radical Right

Despite the growing scientific interest in the subject, empirical investigations into the strategic choices related to the mobilization of right-wing organizations are still scarce, with few attempts to consider both external (structural) and internal (organizational) factors (Caiani and Borri 2013).

Research on the radical right has usually focused either on electoral behavior or on violent action, with very few occasions for exchanges between the two fields of research. Studies on political violence and the radical right have stressed the pathology of these behaviors, and sometimes even their irrationality. In studies of the individuals involved in extremist right-wing organizations, deprivation (relative or absolute) has been linked to psychological disturbances in explaining aggressive behaviors. Right-wing extremism in particular has been considered an anomic behavior—at best, a symptom of diffuse grievances. In breakdown theory, radical politics is explained by the weakening of norm-enforcing institutions (della Porta and Diani 2006, ch. 1). Looking at past European (and other) history, the spread of radical right-wing ideas has been linked to rising unemployment as well as economic crises and, more recently, rapid and large waves of immigration. From a political point of view, analysts refer to the incapacity to deal with these social conditions, as well as weak (or unstable) popular and elite support for democracy. This approach resonates with a mainly quantitative stream of research that has linked macro-level environmental causes (poverty, unemployment, authoritarian regimes, ethnic divisions) to aggregated indicators of political violence. (p. 335)

While this approach has some merit in terms of identifying the general preconditions for violent behavior, it also has limits. First of all, it focuses on just one part of radical right action—certainly a relevant component, as it often has dramatic results, but not the only (or even the most frequent) type of action. Additionally, research on macro-level

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conditions or micro-level behavior tends to leave unanswered the question of the causal mechanisms that intervene between conditions and effects (Coleman 1986). The social movement approach pays more attention to these mechanisms, whether explicitly or implicitly. Rarely applied to the analysis of political violence in the past, this approach has been increasingly used in recent research, mainly in case studies on specific historical instances of radicalization of political and social conflicts (see della Porta 2008 for a review), with some attempts at generalization (Tilly 2003). Even more rarely, social movement studies have inspired research on the radical right (for exceptions, see Koopmans et al. 2005).

A recent study of newspaper accounts of protest events looked at radical right mobilization in Italy, Germany, and the United States between 2000 and 2006 (Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012). It showed that, beyond violence, the radical right family uses a variegated repertoire of actions, including conventional political actions (lobbying, electoral campaigns, and press conferences); demonstrative actions (legal actions aiming to mobilize large numbers of people, such as festivals, street demonstrations, public meetings, and petitions; Gentile 1999, 242); expressive events (legal actions focusing on right-wing activists and sympathizers, in order to reinforce in-group cohesion and identity); confrontational actions (which aim to disrupt official policies or institutions and are therefore usually illegal, such as blockades, occupations, illegal but nonviolent demonstrations, and disturbing the meetings of political adversaries; Koopmans 1993, 640); and finally violent actions (illegal action implying some form of symbolic or physical violence against things or people). In particular, the study highlighted a clear difference between the more violent mobilization of the U.S. radical right and the mix of demonstrative and conventional action used by the Italian and German radical right (Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 88ff.).

Another study based on interviews with around thirty radical right representatives of organizations in Italy and Spain, either parties (Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore, Fronte Sociale Nazionale, España 2000, etc.), political movements (Hermandad de la Vieja Guardia, Fascismo e Libertà), or subcultural groups (CasaPound and Sindicato Universitario Español), held between 2010 and 2011, found that half of the actions and initiatives initiated by radical right groups and individuals in the two countries between 2005 and 2009 were violent (41.9 percent), ranging from acts of “light” violence against people or things (insults; threats to social, religious, or ethnic minorities; graffiti or slogans in praise of fascism and Nazism; desecration of Jewish cemeteries) to acts of (p. 336) “heavy” violence (assaults against left-wing activists, homosexuals, and immigrants; bomb attacks against political opponents such as trade union offices, squatted social centers, left-wing parties, or leftist newspapers). However, the remaining actions ranged from identity-building events (such as concerts and meeting) to demonstrative actions (including boycotts). Moreover, they showed that the level of radicalism varied according to the type of radical right group involved. Similarly in Italy and Spain, the most moderate groups are political parties and movements, whereas

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subcultural youth and neo-Nazi groups emerge as the most violent (Caiani and Borri 2013, 566).³

Another assumption imported from social movement research is that (right-wing) political violence stems from the radicalization of social and political conflicts. In this sense, it is the product of the interactions of a number of actors within what organizational sociology calls the organizational field. Radical right-wing groups interact with similarly ideologically oriented groups, either grassroots groupings or political parties. They confront opponents such as, for example, anti-racist groups or autonomous squatted centers. They also interact with political institutions, some of which can be perceived as allies (e.g., right-wing parties), some as adversaries. They might collaborate with secret police or have sympathetic support in the police forces, but they might also violently clash with the police on the street and be repressed by the courts. A study based on interviews with radical right activists in Italy and Spain found that in both countries their strategies of action tended to be more radical when the targets of the action were political adversaries such as left-wing opponents and immigrants (Caiani and Borri 2013, 564).

Moreover, as social movement scholars stress, for right-wing extremist groups just as for other political actors, the choice of repertoires of action is influenced by the available political opportunities. Political conditions influence their behaviors by determining the attitudes of potential allies and opponents, and therefore the chances of policy success as well as degree and forms of repression. Institutional actors might certify (that is, give legitimacy to) the groups' requests and/or values (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). But potential allies can also "decertify" the radical groups, isolating them and even calling for their repression. In addition, more-stable conditions—for example, legal provisions for outlawing political groups, the limitation of speech rights, the tradition of inclusion or stigmatization of radical right groups—have direct, structural effects on the radical right's chances for survival as well as their forms of action. All of this confirms the strict connections between "routine politics" and violence to which scholars of riots as well as underground politics have pointed (Auyero 2007). The political opportunity approach would suggest that right-wing organizations are more prone to use radical protest when dealing with closed political opportunities, and less likely to engage in radical strategies of action when political opportunities are more open (Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 76). In this respect, the previously mentioned study based in Italy, Germany, and the United States found a clear prominence of violent acts and incidents in the United States in comparison to the two European countries. This can be explained by the lack of radical right-wing parties in the United States that can play a role as institutional allies for the radical right milieu and channel the radical right mobilization into (p. 337) institutionalized party politics, thus contributing to a moderation of the action repertoires. However, the greater use of violence could also be related to the availability of material and symbolic resources of the U.S. radical right groups, which can exploit (including for non-democratic goals) the high degree of tolerance in the United States toward individual freedom of expression, even symbols of hate and violence, as well as the rights linked to the use of firearms. In Germany, however, the greater stigmatization

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of the radical right following the historical experience with Nazism seems to have reduced the propensity toward violent forms of action. Finally, the presence of relatively well-rooted and supportive moderate right-wing parties as potential allies and/or more unstable countercultural milieus is considered to have an impact on the organizational strategic choices of right-wing radical groups (see Kersten 2004 on Germany). For instance, there is evidence that hooliganism can be a fertile recruiting ground for radical-right activists. Usually (violent) skinheads and other right-wing activists are organized both in an extremist group and in more moderate and institutionalized organizations, such as, for example, the Junge Nationaldemokraten (JN, Young National Democrats), the youth organization of the NPD in Germany (Wagemann 2005). In fact, after several electoral defeats, the NPD has developed close contacts with militant activists (Heitmeyer 2002). Non-partisan organizations are seen to be suitable loci of recruitment for activists, since a formal party organization is less attractive than group life in non-partisan violent organizations (Speit 2004, 19).

Additionally, the different degrees and forms of interactions between movements and countermovements influence the tactics of the radical right groups (della Porta 1995). The rare social movement studies concerned with the radical right have suggested looking at them under the label of “countermovements.” Countermovements arise in reaction to successes achieved by social movements, and the two then develop in symbiotic dependence. Even though the concept of countermovement has been criticized as too narrow a frame to account for the complexity of right-wing social movements, the concept is useful in focusing attention on the conflictual interactions between different movement families, which might lead to a strong sense of conflictuality and the prevalence of a Manichean view of politics (Klandermans and Mayer 2006; della Porta 1995). Moreover, movements and countermovements tend to imitate each other, reciprocally adapting particular tactics and the choice of arenas in which to act (see, for example, Meyer and Staggenborg 1996).

Framing on the Radical Right

Recent social movement studies have stressed the importance of looking at cognitive, emotional, and normative aspects of mobilization (della Porta 2015; Fligstein and McAdam 2011). Political opportunities are filtered through the visions that radical right organizations and individuals have of them: that is, they define their strategies based on their appreciation of the potential support they can obtain. In this sense, they are (p. 338) not only structurally given, but also culturally constructed. Cognitive mechanisms are, therefore, relevant in influencing organizational and individual behavior. Especially in closed countercultures, such elements as public opinion, potential alliances, and the risks of non-action are filtered through the group’s construction of external reality. Feelings of injustice, self-perceptions by the group, widespread myths, and

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dominant narratives all affect the construction of this “imagined” reality. Structural effects are mediated by the militants’ perceptions of the reality through which their political involvement develops (della Porta 2008).

In addition to cognitive mechanisms, normative mechanisms also play a role. As the resource mobilization approach has stressed for social movements, apparently anomic behaviors are often governed by inherent norms: this applies to crowds as well as to such dissimilar forms of political action as social movements and terrorist organizations. Both individuals and organizations justify their activities within a broader normative system, however deviant it may be from the society’s most commonly accepted one. Very often, individuals and organizations appeal to general norms that they feel have not been implemented, claiming that they act in order to stand in for institutions they perceive as too weak (Davis 1973).

Indeed, as is the case for any collective actor, radical right organizations have to motivate individuals to action, providing followers and potential followers with rationales for participating in and supporting their organizations (Bjørgero 2004). The main tool for determining the link between individual motivations at the micro level and environmental conditions at the macro level is therefore the analysis of the activists’ perceptions and of the small-group dynamics that intensify and radicalize their involvement (della Porta 2015). In order to understand radical politics—like other forms of politics—it is therefore important to investigate individual and group understandings of the external reality, as well as their position in it. The concept of “frame” was developed in social movement research to address the symbolic construction of external reality. Frames can be defined as the dominant worldviews that guide the behavior of social movement groups. They are very often produced by the organization’s leadership, which provides the necessary ideological background within which individual activists can locate their actions. The social science literature on frames has taken two different approaches (Johnston and Noakes 2005). Some authors focus on individual cognitive processes, analyzing the way in which normal people try to make sense of what happens by framing events into familiar categories (see Gamson 1988). Others look instead at the meso organizational level and consider the instrumental dimension of the symbolic construction of reality by collective entrepreneurs (Snow and Benford 1988). Frame analysis focuses on the process of the attribution of meaning, which lies behind any conflict. There are three stages of this process: recognition of certain occurrences as social problems, possible strategies to resolve these problems, and motivations for acting on this knowledge. Snow and Benford (1988) define these steps as the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational dimensions of framing.

Group-level analyses (and frames) have to date been relatively neglected in the literature on extremism and political violence, which focuses in particular on organizations (p. 339) and their dynamics, leaders, ideologies, and propaganda. Among the works on radical right political parties, there are a few studies that employ qualitative data sources (such as interviews with party activists) to account for the internal dynamics of right-wing activism and groups. For example, drawing on 140 interviews with party activists in

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different countries, Art (2011) explains the cross-national variation in radical right electoral support using the dynamics of party building and, in particular, the ability of radical right parties to recruit through their discourse and to maintain a moderate and educated membership and leadership.

Other meso-level studies underline the important role of frames and the framing activity of groups for their maintenance and survival. Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson (2012) have showed that the activists of the American Tea Party, often swing voters of the Republican Party, frequently have experience with local associations, often are religious, and often have very conservative beliefs. Tea Party activists express anxiety about the Great Recession by despising those who draw public assistance without deserving it, singling out blacks, Latinos, and especially illegal immigrants. They favor minimalist state intervention and oppose taxes. Other main elements of radical right rhetoric include the superiority of one race (or religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) over others (O'Boyle 2002, 28); racism in terms of "otherness" (Minkenberg 1998, 45); right-wing activists as "executors of a general will" (Heitmeyer 2002, 525); and "blood" and "honor" (Wagemann 2005). However, the radical right, in Europe as in the United States, is a "plural family" (Caldiron 2001), including various types of organizations that have different ideological tendencies and that mobilize around different issues. Some of them are characterized by neofascist or even neo-Nazi positions, while others have reduced their neofascist aspects to a sort of "right-wing socialism" with anti-globalist and anti-liberalist traits. They cover a wide range of groups: extreme right political parties and movement (parties include the Front National in France, the British National Party [BNP] in the United Kingdom, and the Movimento Sociale Italiano; movements include the National Alliance in the United States and the Bloc Identitaire in France),⁴ neo-Nazi groups (such as the English Blood and Honour),⁵ revisionist/negationist and nostalgic groups (the Reduci della Repubblica Sociale Italiana),⁶ cultural right wing associations,⁷ publishers and commercial sites (for example, those selling militaria), and subcultural youth organizations such as skinhead, music, and sports groups.⁸ Furthermore, there can be "single-issue extremists," groups active on a specific subject, such as anti-abortion or animal- or environmental- rights extremists (Freilich, Chermak, and Caspi 2009); examples of single-issue organizations are the English Campaign for a Referendum on Immigration and Stop the Islamification of Europe.⁹

Finally, beyond the types of groups common to the European countries, in the American context some additional types of organizations are present online: white supremacist groups (which endorse neo-Nazi ideology and favor an authoritarian government), Christian Identity organizations (which, as mentioned, have strong racist and anti-Semitic positions based on religious arguments),¹⁰ Ku Klux Klan groups (whose main characteristic is support of racial segregation),¹¹ and militia and patriot organizations (such as the Oklahoma Constitutional Militia), which are often armed (p. 340) paramilitary groups with anti-government and conspiracy theory as their core ideology (Freilich, Chermak, and Caspi 2009).¹² Despite being referred to as "far right," empirically many of these groups are not easily placed according to traditional political categories, often combining elements of left-wing and right-wing philosophy with populist

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language and rhetoric. In addition, while most far-right social movement organizations belong to the (non-parliamentary) extreme right rather than to the (parliamentary) radical right, there are exceptions. For example, *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) is organized as a loose network, with ties among the ultras (organizations of football fans) as well as in the party system through *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany). Some of its leaders, however, were very visible, and used an aggressive style of language. From the beginning, Pegida's demonstrations were met by counterdemonstrations that, in most cities, greatly outnumbered Pegida's supporters. Surveys at Pegida's demonstrations indicated that the overwhelming majority of participants were men (80 percent), mostly were between thirty-six and fifty-five years old, mostly were non-religious (70 percent), had relatively low salaries and educational level, had a strong propensity toward law and order as well as the defense of national interests, and were very unhappy with the functioning of democracy in Germany (Geiges, Marg, and Walter 2015, 66–70). While the organization presents itself as endorsing non-violence, the presence of hooligans as well as the radical right at its demonstrations is accepted (Geiges, Marg, and Walter 2015, 118).

In terms of framing, Pegida called for “European patriots” to protest against “Islamization” as well as “economic asylum seekers” and Salafists. While most had formerly voted for the Christian Democrats or the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP, Free Democratic Party), many participants had voted for AfD in the last elections (Geiger, Marg, and Walter 2015). It also employs populist framing, in which the mainstream media as well as the main parties are accused of lying to the people. Core claims include a new immigration law, direct democracy, and more investment for internal security. The enemy tends to be defined broadly, including immigrants, Muslims, Jews, Arabs, Turks, counterdemonstrators, “party democracy,” and the European Union. The attack on Islam is often justified as being in defense of Western values, including democracy and freedom. In terms of action, Pegida used protests in the street, with regular Monday demonstrations that was reminiscent of the civil rights movement in the former German Democratic Republic, as was its slogan, “We are the people.” The first demonstration took place on October 20, 2014, in Dresden, with 350 demonstrators. Attendance at subsequent demonstrations increased quickly, reaching 15,000 on December 15 and 25,000 on January 12, but declined after that.

The role of ideology, and in particular political ideology, in current right-wing movements continues to be somewhat controversial. Indeed, whereas radical right ideology is clearly identifiable,¹³ its militants have a very diffuse idea of politics and are not always politically engaged. Many studies argue that only a minority of recruits join right-wing extremist groups because they agree with their ideology and politics, or because there is some form of political commitment. For example, in most cases young people do not join racist groups because they are racists, but instead gradually adopt racist views because they have become part of a racist group. New recruits are usually not particularly concerned about politics or ideological content, but frequently have vague feelings of hostility against foreigners (Bjørge 1997). Enticements to join violent right-

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wing groups, such as access to alcohol, the martial physicality they embrace, and—very important—right-wing hate music, are far more centrally motivating than political ideology (Merkl 2003). The desire to belong to a group also plays an important role (the “protection factor”; see Bjørgo 2005).

Other studies underline the role played by political entrepreneurs (the leaders of the organizations), who exploit the violent attitudes of the activists and provide them with the necessary ideological justifications. Because right-wing extremists generally dehumanize their enemies, attacks on targeted groups such as black people or enclaves of foreign workers (in Europe) are justified by their ideology. Griffin (2003), in an article about acts of political violence in which participants risk death, postulates three distinct forms of political fanaticism that can lead to suicidal behavior: the fanaticism of politicized religions, the fanaticism of political religions, and the fanaticism of “the loner” (87). The role played by the need to “sacralize” life appears to be of crucial importance in all three forms. Activists can fall back on ideological frames provided by political entrepreneurs and use these frames to choose their victims (Heitmeyer 2002). Thus, a very dangerous mixture of radical ideology and violent attitudes emerges: “There is an overlap between the ideological orientation of the [ideologues of political right-wing extremism] and the willingness of [intoxicated members of youth gangs] to select objects of attack that meet [the required] ideological distinction” (Zimmermann 2003, 231).

Conclusion

There has been in recent years a revival of research on the radical right. Although offering important knowledge, this wave of research has been selective, focusing especially on radical right parties. In general, research on the (non-party) radical right has followed a “breakdown” approach, identifying societal, political, and cultural dysfunctions and pathologies as causal preconditions for the growth of the radical right. Explanations for the electoral success of the populist right have stressed frustration in response to economic distress, massive migration, and economic globalization. This frustration is perceived as bringing about fear and rage, which is then channeled toward radical parties. In essence, these explanations favor anomie as the basis of xenophobic scapegoating.

Recent research has also characterized the radical right as a successful social movement of “losers of globalization” (Kriesi et al. 2008). Reactions to globalization take different forms: “The radical left opposition to the opening up of the border is mainly an opposition to economic liberalization and to the threat it poses to the left’s achievement at the national level. The populist right’s opposition to the opening up of the borders is (p. 342) first of all an opposition to the social and cultural forms of competition and the threat they pose to national identity” (18). The success of the radical right in mobilizing these

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“losers” is often cited as the reason parties have shifted their focus from the economic dimension in the 1970s to the cultural one today (265).

In this chapter, borrowing some of the main concepts of social movement studies, we started with the observation that grievances alone are not sufficient to explain either the radical right mobilization or its characteristics. The understanding of these mobilization processes requires us to consider the availability of resources to be mobilized and of actors that mobilize them, as well as the opening of political and discursive opportunities. In order to understand the development of social movements of the radical right, we have therefore to look at their cognitive framing, their repertoires of action, and their capacity for networking.

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Notes:

(1.) Many URLs of the Radical Right organizations constantly appear and disappear, since they are monitored by authorities and closed. They often are re-opened again under different names. Therefore it is possible that some URLs active at the time of the analysis are not existing anymore at their previous web address. However, the identity and name

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of the groups remain the same, therefore it can be easy to search their new websites browsing the Web.

(2.) For details about these specific dimensions of the political and cultural opportunities for the extreme right, see Koopmans et al. 2005, Mudde 2007. Other important aspects commonly considered as part of the POS and COS for right-wing groups are the presence of allies in power (e.g., center-right parties) and nostalgic attitudes toward fascist or Nazi regimes.

(3.) In this category are usually found those groups that define themselves as political parties or movements and that openly partake in political activities, such as elections, political debates, and policy issues (Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012). Close to these types of radical right organizations are also youth organizations related to parties and political journals, magazines, and reviews.

(4.) These organizations refer to the Third Reich and are apologists for Hitler and the German National Socialist ideology. Their websites, for instance, contain Nazi symbols and references to the purity of the Aryan race and racial hatred.

(5.) The main characteristics of the revisionist and “negationist” groups are historical revisionism and Holocaust denial, a proposal to rewrite history, and documentation of the crimes of communism. These groups refer to the twenty years of Fascist regime in Italy and the Salò Republic and are apologists for Benito Mussolini. The main difference between these and neofascist/neo-Nazi groups is that the former do not refer to contemporary political events. Holocaust denial groups are particularly present in the U.S. case.

(6.) These extreme right organizations can be divided into two subgroups: traditional cultural associations, on one hand, and “new age” and “neo-mystic” groups, for example the Italian group Sodalizio del Cerchio Antico, on the other. The latter are characterized by their frequent reference to Celtic mythology or a kind of new spiritualism that challenges the official Christian religion (Caiani and Parenti 2013).

(7.) These groups are characterized by music (which they define as “antagonistic”) and sport as their main interests, and their sites often include fascist or Nazi symbols or symbols taken from Celtic mythology. Contacts between skinheads and soccer hooligan groups are very frequent in some European countries (e.g., in Italy). In Germany, there is the specific category *Kameradschaften*, organizations with a flexible structure whose classification between neo-Nazi and skinhead groups is controversial.

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(8.) These websites are racist and anti- Semitic, advocating violence as a strategy to achieve their goals.

(9.) <http://www.referendum.1hwy.com> and the SIOE website, <http://sioeengland.wordpress.com>.

(10.) See http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Christian_Identity.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=Christian_ID.

(11.) These websites are racist and anti- Semitic, advocating violence as a strategy to achieve their goals.

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(12.) In order to make the categories of extreme right organizations comparable across our countries, in the following analyses we have grouped the KKK and Christian Identity groups in the category “cultural organizations,” militia and patriot groups in the category “nationalists,” and white supremacists in “political movements.”

(13.) Its ideological cores are nationalism, xenophobia, anti-establishment critiques, and sociocultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde 2007).

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