



*Social movement studies have rarely addressed right-wing extremism and, conversely, research on the radical right has rarely located it within a social movement perspective. With its systematic cross-country comparison and focus on networks, this volume constitutes a very valuable exception. Theoretically innovative and empirically sound it demonstrates how much there is to gain by bridging insights from the two fields.*

Donatella della Porta, European University Institute, Italy

*A lot has been said and written about the galaxy of extreme right groups in Western democracies, and their relation to the Internet. Caiani and Parenti shift the conversation from anecdote and speculation to systematic empirical analysis. Drawing upon dominant paradigms in social movement research, and carefully exploring both online networks and offline activism, the authors have produced a text that will appeal not only to those focusing on the extreme right, but to all those interested in the relationship between militancy and communication technology at large.*

Mario Diani, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona, Spain, and  
University of Trento, Italy

*This book is a major contribution to the study of right-wing political parties and movements and their use of modern technologies. Scholars of political science in general, and in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication and Information Communication Technologies studies will find an intriguing analysis of the relation between political organizations and the Internet. The well written, original and thought provoking volume sets a high standard for the analysis of the interplay between 'online' and 'offline' reality.*

Johannes Pollak, Institute for Political Science & Webster University Vienna, Austria

*Practitioners and scholars have highlighted the threat posed by political extremists using the Internet to further their objectives. These conclusions are mostly based upon speculation. Conversely, this fascinating book's careful comparative study uses mixed methods to empirically examine how right-wing American and European organizations attempt to harness the Internet to construct their identities, recruit and spread their message. It fills major gaps and offers important lessons for both policy makers and academics.*

Joshua D. Freilich, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, USA

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# European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet

MANUELA CAIANI and LINDA PARENTI  
*The Institute for Advanced Studies, Austria*

**ASHGATE**

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Published by

Ashgate Publishing Limited  
Wey Court East  
Union Road  
Farnham  
Surrey, GU9 7PT  
England

Ashgate Publishing Company  
110 Cherry Street  
Suite 3-1  
Burlington, VT 05401-3818  
USA

www.ashgate.com

#### British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Caiani, Manuela.

European and American extreme right groups and the Internet

1. Right-wing extremists--Europe. 2. Right-wing extremists--United States.
  3. Right-wing extremists--Social networks--Europe. 4. Right-wing extremists--Social networks--United States. 5. Online social networks--Political aspects--Europe.
  6. Online social networks--Political aspects--United States. 7. Internet--Political aspects--Europe. 8. Internet--Political aspects--United States.
- I. Title II. Parenti, Linda.  
324.1'3'02856754-dc23

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Caiani, Manuela.

European and American extreme right groups and the Internet / by Manuela Caiani and Linda Parenti.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-0961-8 (hardback) -- ISBN 978-1-4094-0962-5 (ebook)

1. Right-wing extremists--Europe. 2. Conservatism--Europe. 3. Right-wing extremists--United States. 4. Conservatism--United States. 5. Internet--Political aspects--Europe.
6. Internet--Political aspects--United States. I. Parenti, Linda. II. Title.

JC573.2.E85C35 2013

322.40285'4678--dc23

2012030855

ISBN 9781409409618 (hbk)

ISBN 9781409409625 (ebk – PDF)

ISBN 9781472400109 (ebk – ePUB)



Printed and bound in Great Britain by the  
MPG Books Group, UK.

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## Acknowledgments

This book draws on data derived from two research projects. The first is a pilot project on right-wing extremism on the Web, conducted by Manuela Caiani within the framework of the START Terrorism Research Award Program (grant number 2008ST061ST0004).<sup>1</sup> The second is a project on ‘Right-Wing Political Mobilization Using the Internet in Six European Countries (Austria, France, Italy, Great Britain, Spain and Germany) and the United States,’ funded by the Austrian National Bank (Jubiläumsfondsprojekt ONB, Nr. 14035), directed and conducted by Manuela Caiani and several collaborators, including Linda Parenti, at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) of Vienna. Any opinions, findings and conclusions in this book are only those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding institutions. In addition, for the samples of right-wing organizations for the US, German and Italian cases, as well as for the construction of the codebook for the *protest event analysis* section, we relied on the VETO project on ‘The Radicalization of Political Activism,’ directed by Prof. Donatella della Porta, with the collaboration of Claudius Wagemann, at the European University Institute. We warmly thank both for their help. We are grateful to Elena Pavan for her help and useful suggestions concerning the social network analyses, to Rossella Borri for the protest event part and to Lorenzo Mosca and Alice Mattoni for their precious advices concerning the literature on Internet and politics. Any failings in what follows remain solely of the authors. To the anonymous referees and Ashgate, we offer our thanks for the useful comments and the English editing of this manuscript. We also thank Alina Seebacher, Patricia Kröll, Pauline Reiner, Jan Schedler and all the staff of the IHS for their support. Finally we thank the journals *Information, Communication and Society*, *South European Society and Politics* and *Acta Politica* for permission to reproduce here some material previously used in articles published there.

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1 START National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (University of Maryland): [www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu).



# List of Abbreviations

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AN	Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance – Italy)
BNP	British National Party (United Kingdom)
BPP	British People’s Party (United Kingdom)
BPPWD	British People’s Party Women Division (United Kingdom)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union – Germany)
CIS	Centro di Investigazione Sociologica (Center of Sociological Investigation – Italy)
CMC	computer mediated communication
COMM	commercial groups and publishers
COS	cultural opportunity structure
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union of Bavaria – Germany)
CUL	cultural, New Age, neo-mystical, traditional Catholic groups; including Christian Identity and KKK groups
DHS	United States Department of Homeland Security
DOI	digital opportunity index
DVU	Deutsche Volkunion (German People’s Union)
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ES	Spain
EUMC	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FN	Front National (French National Front)
FPO	Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)
FR	France
ICT	information and communication technologies
IMF	International Monetary Found
IRC	Internet relay chat
IT	Italy
JN	Junge Nationalisten (Young National Democrats – Germany)
KKK	Ku Klux Klan (United States)
LN	Lega Nord (Northern League – Italy)
MFL	Movimento Fascismo e Libertà (Freedom and Fascism Movement – Italy)
MIL	Militia, Patriot organizations
MSFT	Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (Tricolor Flame Social Movement – Italy)
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement)

NAT	nationalistic and patriotic organizations (including Militia, Patriot)
NAZI	neo-Nazi groups
NF	National Front (United Kingdom)
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party – Germany)
NR	nostalgic, revisionist and negationist groups
NSM	National Socialist Movement (United States)
NSP	National Socialist Punk (United States)
OTH	single-issue organizations, other groups
PdL	Popolo della Libertà (Freedom's People – Italy)
PM	political movements (including white supremacists)
POS	political opportunity structure
PP	political parties
PxC	Plataforma per Catalunya (Platform for Catalonia – Spain)
REP	Die Republikaner Partei (German Republican Party)
SIOE	Stop Islamification of Europe (United Kingdom)
SNA	social network analysis
SNS	social network sites
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center (United States)
SUB	subcultural organizations
TE-SAT (Report)	Terrorism Situation and Trend (Report)
TOS	technological opportunity structure
UISP	Unione Italiana Sport (Sporting Italian Union)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
URL	uniform resource locator
USA	United States of America
VB	Vlaams Belang (Belgian Flemish Interest)
WTO	World Trade Organization

## Chapter 1

# Extreme Right Organizations and the Internet: An Introduction

We commonly look at the Internet as a crucial modern tool for the development of a 'global village', diffusion of information, communication and equality among citizens, global thinking and universalism. It has further raised hopes about its effects on democracy in societies, and in particular on the role of civil society and its organizations. However, it is also evident that the Internet has a dark side, which is not widely explored.

How and how much do right-wing extremist organizations throughout the world use the Internet as a tool for communication and recruitment? What is the potential role of the Internet for the identity-building process of right-wing groups, and how does the use of the Internet influence their mobilization and action strategies? How do right-wing radical groups utilize the Internet to set their agenda, build contacts with other extremist groups, spread their ideology and encourage mobilization?

In this volume, we try to answer these questions, locating the complex relationship between extreme *right groups* and *the Internet* in a broader scenario of new challenges and opportunities provided by new technologies to civil society organizations (Mosca 2007). Indeed, whereas the use of the Internet to conduct politics is a well-known and much-studied phenomenon mainly concerning left-wing social movements (e.g. the anti-globalization movement, the Zapatista movement, etc.), or concerning institutionalized political actors (such as institutions and political parties), so far, little scientific attention has been devoted to the extreme right and the Internet. Furthermore, there is no systematic comparative analysis on how the extreme right uses the Web infrastructure in different countries. On the descriptive level, we must note that the current debate on the potential role of the Internet for right-wing organizations is characterized by much theoretical speculation on the basis of scarce and fragmented empirical evidence. We know little about how and to what extent extreme right groups use the Internet for their political communication and mobilization.

This book aims to fill this gap. By conducting a systematic comparative analysis of different types of right-wing organizations in Europe and the United States and mixing qualitative and quantitative research techniques, it systematically explores the role of the Internet for the construction of identity of right-wing organizations as well as for influencing their mobilization, organizational contacts and action strategies.

In order to empirically investigate these different aspects of the potential role of the Internet for extremist groups, this research employs three methods. It uses

*social network analysis*, based on online links between right-wing organizations, to investigate the organizational and potential mobilizational structure of the right-wing milieu. It conducts a comparative formalized *content analysis of websites* operated by radical right-wing organizations in order to address the communicative dimension of right-wing radicalism through the Internet. Websites may indeed be considered as “combinations of technologies, actors, and types of actions yielding different emerging structures of online civic participation” (Bruszt et al. 2005: 151). The aim of this part of the study is to trace the specific use of the Internet for diffusing propaganda, promoting ‘virtual communities’ of debate, raising funds, and for organizing and mobilizing political campaigns. It performs a *protest event analysis* of the daily press in the last five years (2005–2009) in order to observe the recent evolution of the ‘offline’ mobilization and repertoires of action of right-wing groups, linking them to their online practices. Finally, a consultation of government and watchdog sources and far right documents allow us to reconstruct the context of right-wing mobilization, both online and offline.

The analysis focuses both on right-wing political parties and on non-party organizations, even violent groups, in six selected countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, for a total of 556 groups. Our main goal is to analyze and explain differences between different types of right-wing organizations and different countries, against the background of the political, cultural and ‘technological opportunities’ in the offline sphere. Indeed, we assume that different processes of radicalization using the Internet may be adopted by different types of groups in various political and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, after defining the main concepts (including right-wing extremist groups and cyberactivism), we shall discuss some main hypotheses from the literature on political mobilization and social movements, but also from research on media and political communication studies (political activism and CMC, computer mediated communication and ICTs (information communication technologies), within which this research on extreme right groups and the Internet can be located: in particular the influence of the political, cultural and technological ‘opportunity structures’, offered by the national contexts in which these groups operate and the characteristics of different types of right-wing organizations. Additionally, we will discuss the role of the Internet for right-wing groups within different approaches to political mobilization and political violence and terrorism, as well as in the context of theories on the democratic potential of Internet. We shall continue the chapter by describing the research methods and the empirical material (sources) on which this book is based and we will conclude with an overview of the content of the volume.

## Cyberactivism and Democracy

Internet politics, cyberactivism, or online activism, can be broadly defined as the use of electronic communication technologies for various forms of ‘politically

oriented' activism, namely an activism in the civic political sphere through the Internet (Vegh 2003: 71). In fact, cyberactivism "crosses disciplines, mixes theories with practical activist approaches, and represents a broad range of online activist strategies, from online awareness campaigns to Internet-transmitted laser-projected messaging" (McCaughey and Ayers 2003: 2).

Ever since social scientists began exploring the role of the Internet in politics, about a decade ago, the debate has focused on many effects of the Internet on society, especially its influence on participation and pluralism (Mosca 2007: 1). The transformative potential of new information and interactive technologies has been often referred to by the first wave of enthusiasts (e.g. Ayres 1999; Meyers 2001; Norris 2001) as able to open "a new era of an expanded and vibrant global civil society." In order to refer to the (new) interactions between citizens and politics in the era of electronics, new terms have been introduced, such as *e-participation* (i.e. the formulation of political opinion online), *e-governance* (i.e. the online access to information and public services), *e-voting* and *e-referendum* (i.e. the possibility to participate in online elections) (Cotta et al. 2004: 254–258), and above all *e-democracy* (della Porta and Mosca 2005a), defined as the growth in the opportunities for citizens' political participation as a result of the Internet (Rose 2005). Optimistic commentators on the new technologies have stressed several positive effects arising from them, such as their capacity to overcome the one-to-many character of the once-dominant mass media in favor of unmediated connections among the new global citizens, as well as their potential to "revive a dormant public sphere by creating new networked spaces for participation and de-territorialized domains for deliberation" (Bruszt et al. 2005: 149).

In particular, it has been argued that new ICTs and especially the Internet would encourage citizens alienated from institutions of representative democracy to become involved in new types of political activities and to become re-engaged with traditional forms of participation (Russo and Smets 2012). Indeed as a new means of communication, these technologies would provide a larger portion of the population with information on politics which had previously been limited to the few, thereby improving the possibilities for the public to become more interested in politics and consequently more engaged in it (*ibid.*). The presence of self-managed resources, such as the websites, might also reduce the 'filtering' function of journalists on political issues.

Today we have thousands of NGOs, organized social movements, lobby groups and political activists who make use of the Internet for their activities (Axford and Huggins 2001: 75). Cyberspace is indeed becoming a vital link and meeting ground for civil society organizations and political collective actors, fostering the emergence of "multiple mini-public spheres" (*ibid.*: 75). Moreover, as for democracy 'from below', it is stressed by scholars that the ICTs also "create strategic innovation ... that could not so easily have been made in an offline environment" (Coleman and Blumler 2009: 119). Indeed, contrary to 'passive consumers' or voters in the mass communication democracies, "the global cybercitizen would

be a user as producer, contributing to online debates and interacting directly with others” (Bruszt et al. 2005: 150).

Regarding the participation in politics, the Internet would therefore allow an expansion of not only the ‘users’, but also of the producers of (political) information, increasing the channels of participation. Being horizontal, bidirectional and interactive, communication via the Internet should reduce hierarchies, by increasing participation from below (Warkentin 2001). Indeed during the debates among citizens within the cyber-sphere social relations of solidarity can be consolidated and the interest for the community reinforced (della Porta and Mosca 2005a).

In addition, as noted, by increasing the channels of information available to citizens, and facilitating in this way the participation of those who do not normally have a voice, the Internet would also reduce political inequalities at different levels (Aynes 1999; Cotta et al. 2004: 256; Myers 2000). From this point of view, the Internet is considered to increase not only the amount of information available, but also the pluralism of sources and contents. However, as underlined by Garrett in his recent review on the state of the art of the studies on Internet and collective actors “what is absent in the literature is the empirical analysis of the negative consequences of new ICTs” (2006: 218).

First of all, skeptics (e.g. Coleman 2003, 2005; Margolis and Resnick 2000) have pointed out that the Internet could reduce citizens’ participation instead of increasing it. For example, it has been said that virtual participation could risk obscuring and substituting (therefore decreasing) real participation. In addition the ‘equalizing’ effects of the Internet have also been called into question, underlining that this new medium could favor organizations and people already rich in resources and committed in politics (Margolis and Resnick 2000 quoted in Mosca 2007: 2). Following this reasoning, emphasis has been therefore put on the possibility that media of the contemporary age and their new channel of the “virtual marketplace” would empower those elites able to use the new tools of communication (Cotta et al. 2004: 256). Those supporting this approach stress that technology is accessible only to the few (i.e. is connectivity really so ubiquitous? Who has access?) and call attention to “the dangers of the emergence of another exclusive and elitist public, not much different from the bourgeois public sphere” (i.e. how does Internet usage correlate with other demographic or social class variables such as gender, age, occupation, income, level of education, and so on? Bruszt et al. 2005: 150). In this regard, some authors suggest that innovation of the Internet stays only in its technology, while often “rather than using the virtual world to explore new ideas and possibilities, we remain creatures of habit and convention” (Hindman 2009; Street 2011: 268).

For what concerns pluralism, there are no doubts that the Internet has increased the amount of information (in terms of quantity) and has made access to it easier. By disseminating alternative information and by creating a new open space for debate, the Internet has been seen as opening opportunities for public communication for media-activists who seek to criticize, create and redefine forms

and media content (Klinenberg 2005). However, some skepticism has arisen on the quality of interactions through the web (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 532) as well as of the information available on the Internet. A big issue therefore emerged: is Internet communication able to overcome social and/or ideological barriers? (Rucht 2005, quoted in Mosca 2007: 2; Sunstein 2001). Shulman (2009, quoted in Karpf 2012: 171), for example, argues that online mobilization results largely in “comments by the public of low quality, redundant and generally superficial.” On the one hand, it is true that the Internet allows “the construction of new public spheres where social movements can organize mobilizations, discuss and negotiate their claims, strengthen their identities, sensitize the public opinion and directly express acts of dissent” (Mosca 2007: 2). On the other hand, as noted with reference to ‘social capital,’ such processes do not necessarily foster the emergence of ‘collective goods.’ Being composed of all the social resources which ‘help to do things’—namely those aspects of social structures which facilitate the action—“[social capital] does not bring automatically to ‘harmony’ and social integration, but it can also favor conflict and be reinforced by them” (Foley and Edwards 1997: 551). As scholars have started to talk about “bad social capital” in order to underline that the external outcomes of associational activities are not always positive (Berman 1997; Coleman 1990), similarly concerning the Internet, observers have begun to doubt the positive effects of it. In particular, the risk of a sort of “balkanization” of the Web is underlined, with a tendency for Web users to get in contact only within ideologically homogeneous groups (Cotta et al. 2004: 257; della Porta and Mosca 2009). In sum, if the empowering potential of the Internet is obvious, and the democratic ‘equalizing’ and ‘normalizing’ effects are still under debate, the necessity to study also the undesirable effects of it is called for, since as stated “there are numerous theoretical arguments regarding the ways in which technologies could contribute to social ills, including violent conflict escalations, overwhelming flows of misinformation, and political polarization” (Garrett 2006: 217–218). Some scholars, though still at a theoretical level, even suggest alarming scenarios according to which “politically extreme online communities mobilize participants to socially detrimental actions” (Sunstein 2001, quoted in Wojcieszak 2009: 564). As argued the new technologies, above all the Internet, could have many effects at the same time and “it is more correct to assume that they could reinforce and weaken democracy, as well as exert scarce influence on democratic processes” (Bimber 2003: 30). In addition there is still a limited reflection on what becomes the meaning of the Internet for politics and in particular democratic politics, when those using this new medium are actors which might have ‘anti-democratic’ goals. This represents a matter of considerable scientific (and normative) significance to both scholars and practitioners of political communication since the Internet can greatly influence politics, being at the same time a source of information, a tool of communication and a portion of the public sphere (Polat 2005). The virtual Net is not exempt from limitations, simplifications and manipulations (Ceccarini 2012: 90). It will therefore depend on the aims and content of the political communication and mobilization spread

through this new medium, the quality of the virtual public sphere created and therefore the consequences on democracy.

This book shall enter into this debate by investigating an object of study thus far rarely explored in the literature on civil society organizations and ICTs: the use of the Web by radical (right) organizations.

### **New Technologies and (Extremist) Civil Society Organizations: ‘Mind the Gap’**

As mentioned, the research on the Internet and politics online has so far been partly selective, mainly focused (at least at the beginning) on institutional politics and/or on some specific types of political actors.

The first studies on the use of the Internet related to the political context, concerned the *institutional communication* via the Net (Coleman et al. 1999). In particular, political institutions and their websites were examined (Trechsel et al. 2003). Everything began with the investigation of public administration and the opening of new channels of direct communication (more open, faster, more transparent, Zuurmond 2005) between them and citizens. According to these authors, by decentralizing communication, the Internet could make institutions and authorities more accessible and transparent to people (e.g. Trechsel and Mendez 2005), enhance transparency and collaboration among public institutions, offices and agencies (e.g. Fountain 2001), and the digital interactions between governments and citizens (e.g. e-governance, see Cotta et al. 2004: 255–256).

Other works on (institutional) online politics have focused on *political parties*, especially during electoral campaigns (see, for example Kluver et al. 2007; Trechsel et al. 2003). Many studies have therefore explored the ways political parties utilize the Web for electoral and political events (e.g. Baringhorst et al. 2009; Gibson et al. 2003; Hooghe and Vissers 2009; Strandberg 2009; Vaccari 2008; Xenos and Bennett 2007), as well as single candidates’ websites and blogs (e.g. Jarvis and Wilkerson 2005; Stanyer 2008). Several analyses focus on the contents of parties’ websites (e.g. Gibson et al. 2003; Margolis et al. 1999; Trechsel et al. 2003), others on party ‘profile’ on the Internet (Hooghe and Teepe 2007), or on more specific topics such as party networks and hyperlinks (e.g. Ackland and Gibson 2005). In this regard, research has shown that political parties tend to utilize the Net according to a ‘top down’ approach, mainly to “provide information to potential voters, journalists, and other political actors, but did not seek to engage or involve or mobilize citizens” (Kluver et al. 2007: 262). For instance, research on political parties and candidates in Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and the United States have showed that political parties mainly use their websites to transmit political information and propaganda (ibid.). Similarly, other works on the topic have suggested that “the Internet is not used to increase interactivity in party communication with voters, activists and citizens” and when there is this interactivity, it is mainly controlled from above (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 2). However, there are also indications that “the use of the web did not simply

reify existing political structures”, implying some transformations in the actors themselves (Kluver et al. 2007: 262). In addition, recently studies on political parties and the Internet have started to pay attention to more dynamic Internet platforms such as social network sites (SNS) and video channels such as YouTube for example (e.g. Utz 2009, see also the analysis of the 2008 American presidential election by Towner and Dulio 2011). Political campaigning through the Web and the role of political party websites and blogs during elections have been studied either in national case studies and comparative research, as well as at the European level (Kluver et al. 2007). The use of the Internet for information and propaganda (in particular concerning the rhetoric of images and words) could be relevant, it has been argued, also regarding extreme right organizations (Lilleker 2006: 162–164).

As the Internet can influence the behavior of individuals and organizations, the strand on *social movements* and ICTs have addressed the impact of the Internet on the main dimensions that concern social movements: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes (Garrett 2006: 203). Works on social movements and the Internet have especially looked at left-wing organizations both at national and transnational level (e.g. among others, Bennett 2003, 2004; Bennett and Segerberg 2011; Bennett et al. 2008; Calenda and Mosca 2007; Cernison 2008; della Porta and Mosca 2006; Mattoni 2012; Rucht 2005; Stein 2009; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010). The main focus is the way the Internet and new ICTs are used by these groups to promote, organize and diffuse protests online, as well as on the organizational and structural changes of the movements fostered by Web interactivity (for a complete overview see Van de Donk et al. 2004). Concerning mobilizing structures these studies have stressed particularly the intertwining between the Internet and organizational and identification processes of social movements (Mattoni 2012). Moreover, a special attention is paid to the emergence of online international protests such as Seattle and the new global movement (e.g. Andretta et al. 2002; Bennett 2003; on the Zapatista movement see Chadwick 2006). However, more recent works have argued that it is reductive to consider the new technologies—especially those based on Web 2.0<sup>1</sup>—only as tools of information and organization of political mobilization for collective actors (Bennett 2003). Beyond influencing the traditional logic of collective action (in terms of effects on the organizational and identity aspects of social movements), digital media indeed led to a new logic of “connective action” (or “connective action networks”) (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 1), where communication becomes a prominent part of the organizational structure, giving birth to new types of mobilized actors based on personalized content sharing across media networks (ibid.: 1–2). In these new forms of mobilization high levels of organizational resources are no longer required for the development of action, nor the formation of a ‘collective identity.’ This results in a big change in the core dynamics of action, where protests seem

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1 See for example the studies of Askanius and Gustafsson (2010), Bennett and Segerberg (2011, 2012) and Merlyna (2012).

to operate with little involvement from conventional organizations, sustained and reinforced over time by a mix of online media and offline activities (ibid.: 3).

In recent years, academic interest in the Internet and extremist social movements and organizations has flourished, especially after the events of September 11. However, the empirical research on this topic is still little, mainly developed within the field of terrorism studies and focusing on religious extremist groups (e.g. Bailey and Grimaila 2006; Benard 2005; Hoffman 2006; Ulph 2006; Vidino 2006).

### New Technologies and Extreme Right Groups

Existing empirical studies on the extreme right and the Internet mainly concentrate on the American right (see for example Burris et al. 2000; for an exception on the Italian case, see Caiani and Wagemann 2009; Tateo 2005).<sup>2</sup> Rarer is instead attention given to this phenomenon in Europe (the exception being the use of the Internet by right-wing political parties for electoral campaigns, see Cunha et al. 2003). Yet, the use of ICTs, in particular the Internet, by right-wing extremist groups is an increasing issue worldwide, as many official sources (e.g. TE-SAT Reports) and watchdog organizations (e.g. see the ADL) underline.<sup>3</sup> According to the American monitoring organization Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), almost 1,000 right-wing groups were active in the United States in 2010,<sup>4</sup> most of them with a presence online. An online directory of extremist sites lists 1,280 websites, 42 racist blogs, 30 mailing lists, 33 Usenet newsgroups, 75 Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channels, 231 clubs and groups on Yahoo! and MSN (The Hate Directory, Franklin 2007).<sup>5</sup> The number of illegal far right postings in social networks and video platforms doubled from 2007 to 2008, says a recent study of the German Ministry of the Interior.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, although, as observed, extreme right organizations in the United States are more skillful in making use of new technology than their European counterparts, groups well-versed in the use of the Internet exist in several European countries, above all in Sweden, Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom and

<sup>2</sup> For other recent studies on the extreme right and the Web, see Atton (2006), Chau and Xu (2006) and Zuev (2010).

<sup>3</sup> For Europe, see the recent investigation of Bartlett et al. (2011).

<sup>4</sup> SPLC Report. "Rage on the Right: The Year in Hate and Extremism." *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2010, Issue Number: 137 (<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/rage-on-the-right>).

<sup>5</sup> For other important databases tracking hate sites, see the US Anti-Defamation League (<http://www.adl.org/learn/default.htm>) and the Simon Wiesenthal Center (<http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=fwLYKnN8LzH&b=242023>).

<sup>6</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "NaziNeonazis on the Net: Videos as Propaganda-Instrument" (our translation), August 14, 2009.

Austria (Caldiron 2001: 335). In 2009, 1,800 far right websites have been counted in Germany (in 2008 it had been 1,707 and in 2007, 1,635 websites). The neo-Nazi 'Kameradschaften' and the National Democratic Party (NPD) alone had 511 websites.<sup>7</sup> According to the 2010 report of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution the number of right-wing extremist websites increased in the year 2009. They focus often on the recruitment of young people. For the authorities it is hardly possible to control the online activities (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2010: 31–32).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, a 2002 study conducted by UISP (Italian Sport Union) on "racism, soccer and the Internet" found that among the websites maintained by soccer fan clubs, the Italians ones were among the most racist (Wetzel 2009: 365). Some of these websites are easily reachable, and apparently 'neutral.' Others are more complex to access and more violent and radical, at the borderline between legality and illegality according to the Mancino Law (Fasanella and Grippo 2009: 158).

In this book we will contribute to this stream of research with a piece of empirical work investigating the degree and forms of use of the Internet by such actors for conducting politics with other means. Indeed, while the number of websites is, in itself, interesting, however, it is the role that the Internet plays within these extremist organizations that provokes scientific interest. As Caldiron (2001) states, the Web works above all as a 'public space' of *debate* where discussions are exchanged and new contacts are made. In Germany, for example, the series of Bulletin Board Systems connected to the Thule network aided German neo-Nazi activists to conserve links and connections amongst themselves, avoiding the dissolution of many of their groups in the first half of the 1990s (*ibid.*: 335). Besides serving as a communication forum, the Internet also plays a role in discussing and promoting new issues for the extreme right, which rapidly seem to adapt to new technologies and adopt issues, concepts and strategies of communications related to them. In Austria, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution issued a warning regarding the case of the Alpen-Donau right-wing homepage, where politicians were threatened and pictures and private addresses of policemen and journalists were published. According to Willi Lasek, the Alpen-Donau website is a contact point for nearly all extreme right groups (Gepp 2011: 14).

Following social movement literature, ICTs are indeed changing the ways in which activists and organizations communicate, collaborate and mobilize, and there are many studies, within a wide range of fields (e.g. sociology, political science and communication), that investigate these changes (Garrett 2006). Research stresses that extreme right organizations use the Internet for several different purposes. Studies of political scientists (Whine 2000), as well as non-governmental organizations (e.g. Stern 1999) have found that the Internet is used for disseminating *propaganda* and inciting violence (Glaser et al. 2002). It is argued that the Internet enhances the traditional tools of political consensus seeking, also

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<sup>7</sup> See Jugendschutz.net which works on youth protection for the federal countries of Germany.

<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/bmi\\_verfassungsschutz/](http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/bmi_verfassungsschutz/).

for extremist groups (Hoffman 1996; Karmasyn et al. 2000; Mininni 2002). Indeed, “the web, boundless, difficult to be controlled, in a state of continuous change, is the ideal place for those at the boundaries between legal politics and illegal activities” (Fasanella and Grippo 2009: 156). In fact, the Internet can be used by right-wing groups as a means to rally supporters, preach to the unconverted and also to intimidate political adversaries (ADL 2001<sup>9</sup>). Glaser et al. (2002) even point out that racists often express their views more openly on the Internet.

Beyond considering the Internet as a tool of *communication*, current research also pays attention to the Internet as an organizational process in itself (Tarrow 2002: 15). As such, the Internet is thought even to influence the characteristics of the movements, their structure, ideology and scale (Kavada 2003: 3). Indeed, communication technologies “afford opportunities to debate, mobilize, reflect, imagine, critique, archive, and inform” (Downing and Bröoten 2007: 538, quoted in Padovani 2008: 3). Focusing on American extreme right groups, Zhou and colleagues (2005) have shown that extreme right organizations use the Internet in order to facilitate *recruitment*, to reach a *international and global audience*, and to find and keep *contacts with other groups*, avoiding national laws and police investigations (e.g. Lee and Leets 2002,; Tateo 2005).

When considering the relevance of ICTs at the symbolic level, research on social movements has underlined the capacity of the Internet to generate *collective identities* (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Brainard and Siplon 2000; Myers 2000). It is said that the Internet can have an impact on this, facilitating the exchange of resources and information; altering the incentives and calculations of actors about what behavior is desirable and appropriate; creating solidarity and sharing objectives; and socializing actors (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 538). Moreover, studies on terrorism and political violence stress that isolated individual ‘consumers’ can find a common identity through extreme right websites, convincing themselves that they are not alone, but instead part of a community, even if it is a ‘virtual’ one (Post 2005).<sup>10</sup> A recent qualitative study on right-wing activists conducted by a team of Dutch researchers (De Koster and Houtman 2008) has shown that the Internet is used by them to create and reinforce a ‘sense of community.’ Indeed, consumers within these virtual communities (such as forums online, chats and other interactive arenas) discuss their motivations of participation and their expressed goals (Lilleker 2006). In Austria, for example, the Internet is considered to play a central role in the neo-Nazi subculture. The operators of the websites bypass the authorities by using providers in the United States where the renewal of Nazism is

9 [http://www.adl.org/poisoning\\_web/introduction.asp](http://www.adl.org/poisoning_web/introduction.asp).

10 Concerning the processes of radicalization of Islamic fundamentalists in Europe, for instance, the role of the Internet and the building of an extremist ideology through it has been cited along with several other dimensions like the psychological factors (e.g. childhood trauma, paranoia, personality disorders), the breakdown in social bonds supporting the individual, the push factors of international crises and the influence of radical imams and militant movements (Oxford Analytica 2006).

not forbidden by a 'Prohibition Status' (Verbotsgesetz).<sup>11</sup> These sites, advertising concerts and 'cultural' initiatives play a central role in the ideal building of the extreme right community, which—although virtual—can constitute the basis for the extreme right mobilization and recruitment in the real world. However, the contribution of ICTs to the development of shared collective identities is still a debated issue among scholars. Whereas some argue that the online environment can foster collective identification processes, they still admit that it is no substitute for face to face interactions among activists (Mattoni 2012, see also Diani 2000: 397). In addition, if so (i.e. if there is a positive effect brought about by the Internet on identity building) the further question is "how and to what extent" (Mattoni 2012). Other commentators ask about the type of identity fostered by the Internet (i.e. 'more pluralist', 'more open?' see della Porta and Mosca 2005a: 180).

Furthermore, as students of social movements have stressed, the Internet can play an important role in helping the processes of *mobilization*, by reducing the cost of communication between a large number of individuals (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 542), solving the problem of leadership and coordination, and by allowing the organization of transnational and even global demonstrations (Petit 2004). Indeed, it is said that the network infrastructure behind the Internet offers "a peculiar organizational pattern to social movements in which various nodes, such as individuals, activist groups and even other social movement networks can be connected in a non hierarchical and fluid way" (Castells 2001: 135–136). As for right-wing extremist movements, in 1998 for example, an investigation conducted by *Der Spiegel* uncovered the role of the 'Widerstand' (resistance) circle in the planning of violent campaigns and attacks (ibid.: 336). Collective actors with few material and financial resources offline can find in the easy access and low-cost arena of the Internet a useful tool for coordination and actions. They are for example online petitions, netstrikes<sup>12</sup> and mail-bombings,<sup>13</sup> even illegal actions of hacking and cracking as well as illegal denial of services and malware<sup>14</sup> (e.g. Axford and Huggins 2001; Chadwick 2006). All these actions are called 'cyber-protests' to refer to "initiatives designed to disrupt official versions of online information by, for example, slowing or closing down 'targeted' sites on the Internet through many people simultaneously requesting so much data from a site that it cannot cope" (Jordan 2007: 75).

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11 *Online Standard*, "Neonazis unterstützen FPÖ," August 31, 2009, online: <http://derstandard.at/1250691664677/Vorarlberg-Neonazis-unterstuetzen-FPOe> (accessed May 4, 2011).

12 Netstrike is when hundreds of activists try to access a target website simultaneously and repetitively by creating a virtual sit-in.

13 Mail-bombing consists of sending thousands of emails to a website or a server until it overloads and gets jammed.

14 Malware consists of a malicious software for disrupting or denying operations, obtaining secret information or gaining unauthorized access to system resources (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malware>).

Finally, the Internet is also considered a crucial tool for right-wing groups facilitating *contacts* with other right-wing organizations in other countries (De Koster and Houtman 2008), which in turn can increase the mobilization potential of the right-wing sector. Indeed, “through hyperlinks, groups can share their audience ... conveying a sense of wider world of supportive and sympathetic voices” (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 1). According to some analyses of American extremist organizations, most sites contain external links to other extremist sites, including international ones (see for example the study of Gerstenfeld et al. 2003, on about 160 American extreme right groups). Other research has showed the use of so-called ‘Web-rings’ by extremist organizations, namely, websites whose specific function is to link national and international Web communities to each other (e.g. Qin et al. 2007). However, also the impact of the Internet on mobilization of collective actors divides the debate between optimistic and more skeptical views. The latter ones argue that “technology-enabled additions to the repertoire of contention also potentially limit activists,” indeed “by formalizing the role of participants, automated tools supporting online action offer a constrained set of actions, thereby excluding important opportunities for collective action” (Garrett 2006: 215). Others point out that the Internet can increase differences among organizations and people (i.e. the digital divide), favoring groups of citizens already active and interested in politics (Norris 2001). Furthermore keeping a website active and updating it requires collective actors and organizations and considerable financial and professional effort. In general, what is sure is that political activism through the Internet can be also problematic (Chambers and Kopstein 2001, for other studies on the pros and cons of the impact of the Internet on politics, see also Bakardjieva 2009; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Hindman 2009; Leighninger 2011).

In this volume, we will address these issues. In the light of the several functions illustrated so far that the literature suggests the Internet can play for civil society organizations, we will explore which ones actually are exploited by extreme right groups and to what extent. In doing so we will discuss what the limits and potentialities of the Internet are for such groups.

### **Extreme Right Organizations: A Definition**

Moving on to necessary definitional criteria of our object of study: what do we mean by extreme right organizations? First of all we must note that ‘extremism’ has become a very common term nowadays, both in social science and outside academia. However, its usage is rather awkward: nobody arrives at a satisfactorily comprehensive definition. The concept refers to individuals or groups who advocate or resort to measures that lie beyond the moral and political centre of society (Eatwell and Goodwin 2010: 8). It can be associated with ideologies

(values systems) or behaviors.<sup>15</sup> Historically, it has been also used to indicate totalitarian regimes such as communism and fascism.

When applied to extreme right groups, extremism is commonly defined by the elements of anti-constitutionalism and anti-democracy: it is the rejection of the fundamental values, procedures and institutions of the democratic state (Carter 2005). One of the difficulties regarding the definition of extremism is that the real meaning of the concept is ultimately attributed by others to a group rather than by a group labeling itself. Indeed, it is not a value-neutral term, but it is adopted in a pejorative way, as “a term of damnation” (Eatwell and Goodwin 2010: 7). Some go even further, stressing that extremism can be also used “to criminalize protest, discredit any form of ‘radical thinking’ and label political dissent as potentially dangerous” (Neumann 2008: 3). Furthermore, approaching the notion of extremism, one is confronted with several different synonyms such as fanaticism, zealotry, bigotry, immoderation, terrorism and revolution; some of them, such as, for example, radicalism, are often used interchangeably with extremism.

Extremism can take several forms, which vary across countries and groups and can be divided into at least four types: left-wing, right-wing, nationalist or religious. Left-wing extremism includes a range of Marxist-Leninist, environmental, animal rights, anarchical and anti-globalization groups. Nationalist extremism includes groups inspired by a desire for independence, territorial control, or autonomy because of ethnic or other affiliations. Religious extremists act to comply with a religious mandate or to force others to follow that mandate (Jones and Libicki 2008). These different analytical categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be found in combination in the empirical reality.

In this research we are interested in extreme right organizations, namely those groups which have as main goal a (total) change of the political, social and economic system on the basis of an ideological model based on nationalism, exclusionism, xenophobia, the quest for a strong state, welfare chauvinism, revisionism and traditional ethics, also with references to national socialism (ibid.: 14; Mudde 2007: 21). Right-wing extremism includes racist and fascist groups. Right-wing extremism is said to be against human equality, whereas left-wing extremism is said to be against individual freedom. However, one common feature of any type of extremism, including right-wing extremism, is interpreting the world through ‘black or white’ or ‘all or nothing’ categories (Mandel 2002). Extremism divides the world between friends (those who support their cause) and enemies (those who oppose it), without seeking a common ground among contending parties, nor does it seek common perspectives, as liberalism does (Downs et al. 2009: 153). The ‘in-group’ is usually seen as treated unfairly, humiliated or deprived of what it otherwise deserves, whereas the ‘out-group’ is considered as benefiting directly

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15 In this sense some scholars, taking into account an action-based and a values-based form of extremism, also distinguish it as consisting of three components: extraordinary, excessive and intolerant political opinion, belief or activity; violent political activity; and activity aimed against the democratic constitutional state (Downs et al. 2009).

from this injustice (Mandel 2002). Furthermore, recent academic attempts to define the (new) extreme right have tended to shift attention from ‘old’ fascism to ‘new populism.’ The ‘old’ extreme right, referring to fascism, has been identified with ultra-nationalism, the myth of decadence, the myth of rebirth (anti-democracy) and conspiracy theories (Eatwell 2003; Ignazi 1997; Merkl 1997). Today populism is considered as one among the four main traits that characterize the common ideological core of the new extreme right (Mudde 2007: 21).<sup>16</sup> At the same time, it insists on the primacy of the people over the elite, portraying itself as the voice of the people (Mény and Surel 2002).

Despite the still open debate on conceptual definition and terminology (which it is beyond the scope of this book to address in detail),<sup>17</sup> extreme right organizations and movements are usually associated, empirically, with various political parties in Europe, such as the Austrian FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs), the French FN (Front National), the Belgian FN (Front National) and VB (Vlaams Belang), the German REP (Die Republikaner), etc. (ibid.: 44). In this research we use the term ‘extreme right/radical right’ to refer to those groups which exhibit in their common ideological cores the characteristics of nationalism, xenophobia (ethno-nationalist xenophobia), anti-establishment critiques and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (ibid.). This deliberately includes political party and non-party organizations, even subcultural violent groups.

### **The Extreme Right and the Internet between Opportunities and Resources: Research Design**

Turning to the explanatory level, in this book we propose an analysis of the extreme right political activism with the Internet using a theoretical framework combining insights from research on political mobilization and social movements, on the one hand, and media and political communications research (in particular on CMC studies), on the other. 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 so-called political and cultural opportunity structure (POS and COS), namely the set of opportunities and

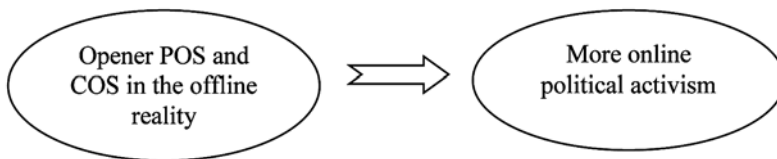
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<sup>16</sup> Populism has been conceptualized as a political *rhetoric*, that appeals to “the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment” (Abts and Rummens 2007: 407), or an *ideology*, “that considers society to be ultimately separated in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* of the people” (Mudde 2004: 543). For a review of the literature on the concept, see Deiwiks (2009).

<sup>17</sup> It goes beyond the scope of this study to enter into the terminological debate, i.e. extreme right vs. far right (see for example Carter 2005; Norris 2005), and we will use the two terms interchangeably in this book.

constraints that are offered by the institutional structure and political culture of the political system in which these groups operate (see Koopmans et al. 2005; Tarrow 1994).<sup>18</sup> The concept has been conceptualized mainly looking at the degree of ‘closure/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.). To a certain extent, movement organizations adapt to the public decision-making structure, mobilizing when and where channels of access open up (Tarrow 1989).

From this perspective, and focusing on right-wing political mobilization and communication, we can hypothesize that in countries where the political and cultural opportunities available for extremist right-wing groups (e.g. laws against racism and xenophobia, the degree of legal control on neo-Nazi/neo-fascist groups, electoral constraints toward minor parties, the level of societal consensus against the Nazi past)<sup>19</sup> are favorable (i.e. ‘open’), this has a positive impact on their political activism (also online) (Figure 1.1a).



**Figure 1.1a Hypothesis 1**

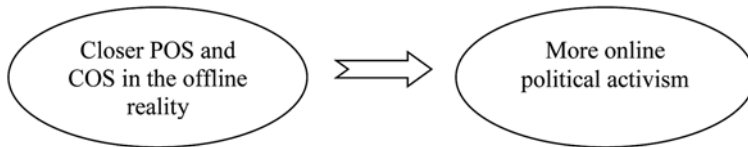
However, on the other hand the opposite can also be true and we could find that extreme right groups facing a political and cultural ‘closed’ context to them in the (offline) reality rely more on the Internet in order to have their voices heard. Indeed, as has been underlined, the media is a political resource for the dissemination of political information which can help extreme right parties overcome their organizational or financial deficiencies (Ellinas 2009: 209). In fact, “the media

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed review of the literature on the concept of POS and its operationalization, see Meyer (2004).

<sup>19</sup> For these specific dimensions of the political and cultural opportunities for the extreme right, see Koopmans et al. (2005) and 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), an authoritarian past (Mudde 2007: 233–255), nostalgic attitudes toward fascist or Nazi regimes (Chirumbolo 1996), and the diffusion within society of xenophobic ideologies (Rydgren 2005a). We will illustrate these aspects in details in Chapter 2.

can provide an additional or substitute channel for those groups excluded from the institutional political system to gain legitimacy and authority” (ibid.).

As a consequence, we should expect more Internet activities by right-wing extremist groups in countries that have strong legal regulation against extreme right groups, high electoral thresholds for small parties, etc. (Figure 1.1b)



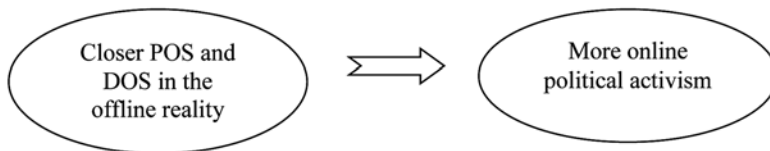
**Figure 1.1b Hypothesis 2**

For example, the German context seems to be particularly conducive for extreme right-wing political activism on the Web. The activities of the German extreme right are very much limited in the real world by the existence of legal regulation and this also has an effect on the organizational reality of the groups. Furthermore, cultural opportunities for right-wing extremist organizations are also very restrictive (Wagemann 2005), with a very broad ‘societal consensus’ in Germany against the Nazi past and a high level of public sensitivity toward these issues, according to which right-wing extremism can be seen as broadly stigmatized as unacceptable (Kersten 2004: 186). A more visible presence online might help to overcome this lack of organizational capacity (Caiani and Wagemann 2009).

A second hypothesis can be referred to a different set of more specific context conditions, namely the ‘technological opportunities’ for political mobilization and communication online (that we would call ‘technological opportunity structure’, TOS).<sup>20</sup> Here the debate concerning the issue of the ‘digital divide’ comes up. In fact when reflecting on the potential of the Internet, it should be kept in mind that even in technologically developed and wealthy countries, a considerable portion of the population is excluded by a lack of access to this new medium (della Porta and Mosca 2005: 11–13). Digital differences emerge in the access to the Internet between countries (that is what we are interested in our study), as well as between social classes in the same nation (Mosca 2007; for details see Chapter 2), and

<sup>20</sup> It is worth mentioning that at the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, it has been proposed the creation of a composite Digital Opportunity Index (measuring several aspects, including price and affordability of ICTs, Internet and mobile, relative to average income, etc.), for measuring the development of Information Society. This internationally agreed index enables cross-country comparisons, as well as comparisons of growth in digital opportunity over time. For details, see <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/doi/index.html>.

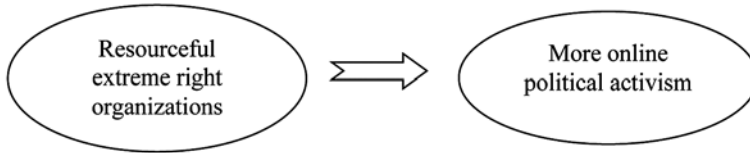
a discussion of the presence and characteristics online of certain civil society groups from different countries (extremist groups in our case) should also take into account this aspect. We therefore expect that the degree of the political use of the Internet by right-wing groups will depend on the interaction between the political and cultural opportunities available for the extreme right in a country and the level of technological opportunities in the country (i.e. higher or lower) for the access to the Internet. Extreme right-wing groups will be therefore more Web-oriented in those countries with closer political and cultural opportunities that provide relatively few institutional channels of groups' access to the political process, but with a more open TOS, offering more conducive technological possibilities. In such countries, which include for instance the United States, the Internet may imply an improvement in the balance of opportunities and constraints. Official statistics on Italy and Germany for example show that there are significant differences between them in the relative access of citizens to the Internet: 64.6 percent of the German population use the Internet, whereas it is 57 percent for Italy. In both countries, the percentages have increased over time, without, however, enlarging or reducing the gap between the countries (see della Porta and Mosca 2005b: 12, Figure 1.1c).



**Figure 1.1c Hypothesis 3**

Third, the exact mix of opportunities and constraints that different country contexts imply for online political mobilization and communication will in our view be exploited differently by *different types of right-wing organizations*. Indeed, as social movement research has stressed, strategic choices are influenced by the characteristics of specific actors, including the availability of their material and symbolic resources (della Porta 1995; McCarthy and Zald 1996), namely the resources which they are able to mobilize. While for some right-wing organizations the Internet may imply a more positive balance of opportunities (e.g. adding new channels to the traditional tools of politics), other groups in the same country may stand to lose influence (e.g. as a result of their difficulties in exploiting all the potentialities of this new instrument and arena of communication). Considering this, we expect to find important differences in the (degree and forms of) strategic use of the Internet among extreme right organizations within country contexts. For example, as the literature argues, a high level of resources (e.g. financial, organizational, formal, etc.) endorsed by an organization might facilitate “a more

effective use of the web” (della Porta and Mosca 2009: 783), as some investigations on political parties and NGOs seem to suggest (Ward 2001; Warkentin 2001, see Figure 1.1d).



**Figure 1.1d Hypothesis 4**

As for their resources, extreme right organizations richer in assets may indeed feel more at ease in making use of the additional channel of the Web for their political activism, since a well-organized, technically sophisticated and fresh website requires notable resources to be run (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 547). If this is true, the well-organized and institutionalized right-wing political parties and movements should be found to be more Web-oriented than fragmented and informal groups such as subcultural youth organizations.

Nevertheless, we have also to take into account a converse tendency, namely that the weaker extreme right organizations tend to rely more on the Web for their political mobilization and communications (hypothesis 4) in an attempt to trigger what has been called the ‘boomerang’ effect (Keck and Sikkink 1998), i.e. efforts to overcome their relative weakness in the offline reality by using the Internet.<sup>21</sup>

Second, beyond material resources, symbolic resources and cultural traditions also might play an important role (della Porta 1995) in facilitating or limiting the development of political strategies, also based on the Web. For instance, youth organizations can be more active in the use of the Web since “there is evidence to suggest that there is a generational migration to online political spaces” (Coleman and Blumler 2009: 86), whereas political parties and in general more institutionalized and formalized organizations tend to rely more on face-to-face communication and on traditional channels of communication of the group (Tarrow 2003: 31, quoted in della Porta and Mosca 2006: 546). Indeed, as it has been underlined, old organizations tend to incorporate the use of Internet into the old logic of internal communication, while new ones tend to use Internet in order to improve the internal communication (della Porta and Mosca 2005; Ward 2001). From this point of view, subcultural youth groups, such as musical and skinhead

<sup>21</sup> Hypothesis 4 represents an attempt to transpose the concept of ‘boomerang effect’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998), which in its original formulation refers to the additional opportunities offered by international arenas and allies for weak social movements, to mobilization in the Internet arena.

organizations, could be expected to be more motivated to use the Internet than, for instance, political parties, which are traditionally linked (therefore culturally, cognitively) to more conventional means of doing politics (Calenda and Mosca 2007) (Figure 1.1e).

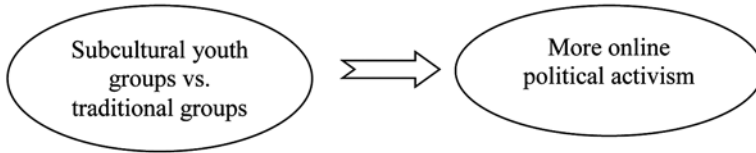


Figure 1.1e Hypothesis 5

Furthermore, in terms of specific forms of using the Internet, we can expect that different types of extreme right organizations will use the Internet for different purposes and goals.

In particular, subcultural youth organizations will use the Web primarily in order to accomplish internal and expressive goals (Gentile 1999), such as, for example, creating and reinforcing a 'virtual community,' rather than for external and more 'political' goals, such as publicizing a political campaign or organizing offline mobilization. Hypothesis 6, which this project intends to corroborate empirically with a systematic investigation, is suggested by the results of a recent qualitative study conducted by a team of Dutch researchers (De Koster and Houtman 2008, see Figure 1.1f).

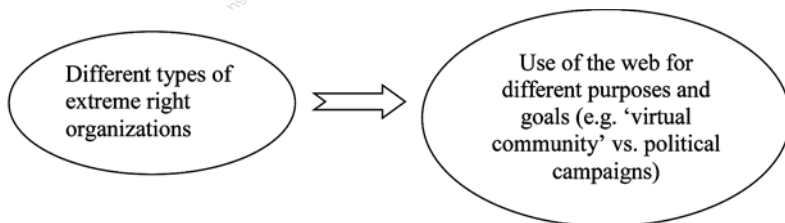
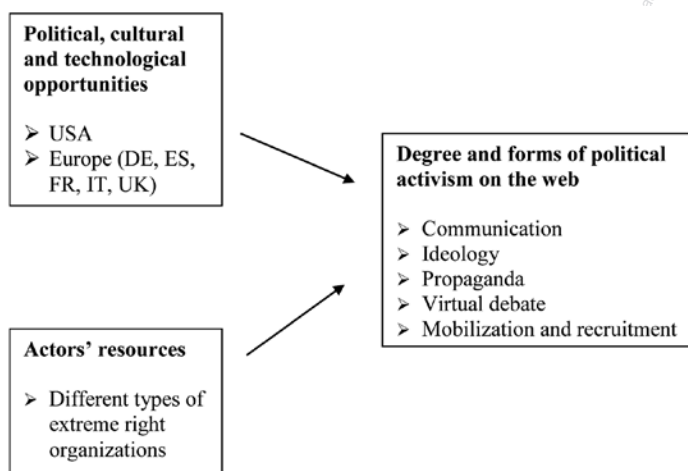


Figure 1.1f Hypothesis 6

If hypotheses 1 and 2 are true, we should primarily find differences between countries in the degrees and forms of the political use of the Internet by right-wing groups, regardless of the types of groups that are at stake, since we expect extreme right groups to adapt to their national environments (namely to the political, cultural and technological opportunities available to them in their own countries). The underlying expectation of these hypotheses is that *context matters*.

In contrast, if the symbolic and material resources of extreme right groups matter in explaining degrees and forms of their political use of the Internet (hypotheses 3 and 4), we should find more similarities across countries between different types of right-wing groups (e.g. all political parties vs. all subcultural skinhead groups). The underlying rationale in this case is that actors' *resources matter*.



**Figure 1.2 Theoretical model for the analysis of the potential role of the Internet for right wing extremist organizations**

### Our Cases

Our *research design* includes *two comparative dimensions*: cross-national and cross-right-wing organizational type. *Cross-nationally*, as mentioned, we have decided to focus on six very different Western democracies as case studies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States).

As for the country selection, the first choice was indeed to compare the United States and Europe, because those are the geographical areas that mostly experienced a resurgence of right-wing extremism and activities in the last two decade (Carter 2005; Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005). Second, this set of countries was chosen because they provide for sufficient variation along the dimensions we considered potentially relevant to Internet usage by right-wing extremist groups. They are: country specific laws against racism and xenophobia, laws on the freedom of speech and association, electoral constraints toward minor political parties, the degree of legal control on neo-Nazi/neo-fascist groups, the degree of a country's 'digital divide,' as well as the elite and societal approach to right-wing extremism. For example, unlike in parts of Europe, the recent revival

of the extreme right has not been manifested in election results in the United States. While some of the issues raised by these groups (such as for instance the right to carry arms and hostility to abortion) have a relatively wide resonance in the American society, the extreme right has been considered an unacceptable participant to democratic elections and the US electoral and governmental system contributes to its absence in this arena.

In turn, within the European context, we contrast Western countries with successful extreme right-wing parties (e.g. France, Italy) with some where these forces have been unsuccessful (e.g. Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom). In addition in our sample, we find countries that have experienced Nazi-fascist authoritarian regimes (Italy, Germany, Spain, and France – the latter one for a limited period) and others that did not (the United Kingdom and the United States). This entails a different degree of societal consensus and political elites' sensitivity against extreme right organizations and movements. Moreover, even among countries with a similar historical heritage there is variation along the dimensions we consider relevant for the study of right-wing political mobilization (also on the Web). For instance, among the two countries that in the inter-war period witnessed the rise to totalitarian state power of fascist movements (Italy and Germany), Italy was the first European country in the last 50 years in which the extreme right reached full political and institutional recognition (Koopmans and Statham 1999). In Germany, on the other hand, the radical right has been completely marginalized, never entering the national parliament, except for occasional electoral successes at the sub-national level (Wagemann 2005).

Third, this study focuses on the entire milieu of the extreme right in each country, including political parties, non-party organizations and violent groups (for an overview of the categories of extreme right groups we used for our website collection and classification, see below pp. 000–000). Looking at *different types of extreme right groups* allows us to investigate if different categories of right-wing movements and organizations—for example more or less traditional (e.g. neo-fascist and Holocaust denial organizations vs. subcultural skinheads); more or less formal and institutionalized (e.g. right-wing political parties vs. political movements and cultural associations)—use the Internet for different ends. Indeed, the extreme right is commonly described as being far from a united family (Minkenberg 2009), including instead various kinds of very different groups which range from extremist right-wing parties to several political movements and an extremely differentiated subcultural extreme right area (Fasanella and Grippo 2009; Roversi 2006, for a different categorization of the extreme right see also Schellenberg 2009: 531–532). All of these groups have different goals and identities, some of them being more oriented toward political action, such as political parties, others toward socio-cultural activities, such as right-wing associations (Gentile 1999); some are organizationally powerful, others weak. Looking at the degree and the forms of Internet usage of such different groups offers us an occasion to explore whether the use of the Internet is patterned by their offline features. In sum, designed as such, this research is an opportunity not only

to engage in a critical examination of what is the role of the Internet for (right-wing) social movements, but also how this relation emerges in different contexts and applied to very different kinds of movements.

## Data and Methods

In our research we approached the extreme right and the Internet with an attempt at combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques, mainly derived from social movement studies. First of all, we conducted a *social network analysis* (SNA), based on online (hyper) links between extreme right organizations (websites), in order to characterize, using some of the most common measures of SNA (i.e. in-degree/out-degree, average distance, etc.), the structure of the extreme right milieu in each selected country (e.g. centralized vs. fragmented) and their mobilization potential, as well as the existence of an extreme right community transcending national boundaries (i.e. transnational linkages between extreme right organizations).

Sociologists have long examined a variety of social groups that exist outside the visible mainstream of society (i.e. ‘hidden communities,’ Blee 2009: 1). In our study, with the social network analysis part, the first goal is to reconstruct a map of all extreme right organizations in each country with a presence online—a difficult task, according to several scholars, since it is impossible to determine the real dimension of the ‘population’ (Schafer 2002). The Internet is in a state of continuous flux, and there is no exhaustive directory of websites (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). In order to identify the organizations, codify their websites’ content and codify their national and international linkages, we therefore applied a ‘snowball’ technique. Based on sources of various kinds (official reports, secondary literature, etc.),<sup>22</sup> we first identified the most important extreme right organizations in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States (as for example the political parties). Then, starting from these and focusing exclusively on ‘friends’ links explicitly indicated by these organizations,<sup>23</sup> we discovered the websites of minor and less known groups.<sup>24</sup> The process was repeated up to the point at which it became impossible to add new sites or organizations to our

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22 The list of radical right organizations is compiled using publications of the most important watchdog organizations in the selected countries, among which the US Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Centre, the Italian Osservatorio Democratico, etc., institutional reports (e.g. the TE-SAT yearly reports) and news reports.

23 Namely a “separate page or dedicated section specifically for links to other websites” (Bruszt et al. 2005: 153).

24 On the ‘reputational’ approach, see Scott (2000). For the inclusion of an organization in our sample of ‘radical right-wing organizations’, we relied on the self-definition of the group and the predominant nature of the message transmitted through the website (for a similar method see Tateo 2005).

sample for each country that had not already been mentioned. We have arrived in this way at identifying approximately 100 organizations in each country (300 in the United States)<sup>25</sup> (see Table 1.A in the Appendix for the list of organizations included). In particular in the case of the United States, due to the extremely high extreme right population online, we applied a stricter sampling strategy (see also Caiani et al. 2012). Starting from the most recent SPLC list including 900 far right organizations active in the United States, we reduced that number by keeping only those organizations that had been listed for at least three years (2005–2008); and collapsing chapters under the respective federations or umbrella organizations. We thus arrived at 277 organizations, a number manageable for our analyses (e.g. social network analysis). We then manually searched the websites (URLs) related to each single organization, using as potential sources The Hate Directory (Franklin 2007), Google and Wikipedia. In this process, we excluded those groups for which it was impossible to find a URL, either because they were no longer existent or because they were not active or not accessible (for example, some sites could be visited only by members). In this way, we arrived at a final sample of 134 American extreme right websites as the basis for our analysis.<sup>26</sup>

We have thus classified those organizations found in the six countries into broader categories<sup>27</sup> and codified the relational patterns between them in a manual process.<sup>28</sup> In all cases, we excluded the use of more automatic and systematic techniques for the research of all the links that can be found on a webpage, in order to (manually) select only those links on the pages of partner sites, assuming that these can be considered proxies for affinity relations and a measure of closeness between the organizations.<sup>29</sup>

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25 In particular they are: 58 right-wing organizations for France, 87 for Spain, 129 for the United Kingdom, 69 for Germany, 79 for Italy and 134 for the United States.

26 Furthermore, some URLs were eliminated due to redundancy (e.g. two labels referring to the same website). For this sampling strategy see also Freilich et al. START project.

27 For the classification of the organizations, we have relied on the most common typologies that have been proposed for the study of the extreme right (see, for instance, Burris et al. 2000; Tateo 2005), adapting them to the specificities of each country (e.g. for Italy, Wetzel 2009: 332–341; for France, Camus 2009: 130–139; for the United Kingdom, Husband 2009: 254–260; for Germany, Schellenberg 2009: 183–188; for Spain, Movimiento contra la Intolerancia 2006: 5–6. Moreover see Freilich et al. 2009: 500–501 and Michael 2003 for the American case) (for details, see Chapter 3).

28 The right-wing websites collection and links codification was conducted for the Italian case between June and December 2008, for the Spanish case between March and June 2009, and for the American case between August 2009 and January 2010. For all the other cases between January and February 2011.

29 The Web content analysis has been conducted for the Spanish case between March and June 2009, and for the American case between August 2009 and January 2010. For the UK, France and all the other cases between December 2010 and April 2011. The Web content analysis has been done by coders (country language speakers) trained in the

However, while a focus on relationships is inherent to network analysis, current research often focuses on the structure of linkages at the expense of the meaning of these relationships (Diani 2003). In order to overcome this partial view, we complemented the *network analysis of hyperlinks* with an in-depth *content analysis* of extreme right websites that have been performed on a reduced sample of right-wing sites for each country, chosen as representative of the different types of extreme right groups maintaining a presence on the Web, for a total of 295 organizations (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Ideal scheme for the codification of extreme right organizations by broader categories of groups**

Type of extreme right group	Sample for network analysis	Sample for content analysis	Example group (name and URL)
Political parties			
Political movements			
Nostalgic and revisionist organizations			
Neo-Nazi groups			
Cultural, New Age and neo-mystical assoc.			
Subcultural area, skinhead, sports and music groups			
Commercial organizations and publishers			
Total (N)			

sampling selection and coding procedure. We visited each website and used a codebook to record data on specific features adopting a procedure that we had refined in a previous pilot project on Italian radical right websites (January–December 2008).

**Example for Italy**

Type of group	Sample for network analysis	Selection and sample for content analysis	Example group (name and URL)
Political party	5	3	Forza Nuova ( <a href="http://www.forzanuova.org/">http://www.forzanuova.org/</a> )
Political movements	19	8	Fascismo e Liberta` ( <a href="http://www.fascismoeliberta.it/">http://www.fascismoeliberta.it/</a> )
Nostalgic and revisionist organizations	30	16	Il Ras ( <a href="http://www.ilras.tk/">http://www.ilras.tk/</a> )
Neo-Nazi groups	4	2	Parole dal Terzo Reich ( <a href="http://www.paroledalterzoreich.com">www.paroledalterzoreich.com</a> )
Cultural, New Age and neo-mystical assoc.	7	2	Sodalizio del cerchio antico ( <a href="http://utenti.lycos.it/sodalizio/indice.htm">http://utenti.lycos.it/sodalizio/indice.htm</a> )
Youth subcultural area, skinheads, sport and music groups	22	11	Veneto Fronte Skinheads ( <a href="http://www.venetofronteskinheads.org">http://www.venetofronteskinheads.org</a> )
Commercial organizations and publishers	8	4	Il Presidio ( <a href="http://www.ilpresidio.org/index.html">http://www.ilpresidio.org/index.html</a> )
Total (N)	95	46	

Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures “to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message” (Weber 1990: 9).

Therefore, for the purposes of a systematic content analysis of the organizational websites, we have used a formalized codebook (see Table 1.B in the Appendix). For its construction we relied on terrorism research (e.g. Weimann 2004), as well as on studies that use a formalized approach to the investigation of extremist websites (e.g. Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; Qin et al. 2007; Zhou et al. 2005). We have also drawn on recent similar studies on civil society websites (e.g. see Bruszt et al. 2005) and on left-wing organizations’ websites in Europe (see the Demos project).<sup>30</sup> The codebook focuses on the following broad dimensions that we consider relevant to Internet use by right-wing extremist groups: (a) *information* (including variables recording how much the organization

30 <http://www.demos.eui.eu>.

diffuses informative materials such as articles, bibliographical materials etc. on its website); (b) *communication* (including variables measuring how much the organization makes use on its website of communication tools such as email, telephone contact, feedback forms, etc.); (c) *ideology* (with variables aiming at detecting the website use for portraying the goals of the group, defining its general policies, and presenting the foundational ideology); (d) *propaganda* (including variables to capture the presence of content concerning propaganda directed toward ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders,’ e.g. hate symbols, multimedia materials); (e) *virtual community/identity* (with variables referring to the use of the Internet as an arena for debates and discussions, e.g. forum, newsletters, chats, etc.); (f) *mobilization* and *recruitment* (concerning the use of Internet as a tool of activation of members and sympathizers for offline as well as online actions, e.g. publicizing political campaigns, promoting online petitions, providing instructions for offline actions, etc.); and (g) *internationalization* (with variables related to the use of the Web to build transnational contacts with other extremist groups and to appeal to an international audience, e.g. content of the Web translated in other languages, etc.). These features can be considered the elementary forms of online political participation (Bruszt et al. 2005: 152). In order to empirically investigate each of these broad dimensions, we use several ‘lower level’ indicators.<sup>31</sup> In sum, for each website, we recorded the presence or absence of these seven features of political activism online, yielding the above-mentioned sub-variables.

In a third step, we have conducted a *protest event analysis* (PEA) based on newspapers (between 2005 and 2009), looking at the degree and forms of offline mobilization of right-wing extremist organizations as well as at their strategies of action. Following a long-standing tradition of research on social movements and contentious politics (Kriesi et al. 1981; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 1978), this method provides researchers with extensive and systematic sets of data on protest activities and their different components and dimensions. Indeed, despite its limitations and biases (for a detailed illustration see Franzosi 1987; McCarthy et al. 1996; Mueller 1997), PEA is a technique of quantitative content analysis, that allows for the quantification of many properties of protest, such as frequency, timing and duration, location, claims, size, forms, carriers and targets, as well as immediate consequences and reactions (e.g. police intervention, damage, counter-protests, etc.) (Koopmans and Rucht 2002). Datasets are constructed on the basis of specifically selected press sources (media) or archival databases, such as police and municipal records, and permit investigation over time and large geographical areas with regard both to quantitative and qualitative aspects of protest actions (Forno 2003; Rucht et al. 1999).

In order to conduct the protest event analysis we made use of a formalized codebook. Our unit of analysis (the ‘protest event’) consists of the following

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<sup>31</sup> Each feature is recorded as a dummy variable, attributing a value 1 if a given feature is present and zero if it is not found on the website (for a similar method, see Bruszt et al. 2005).

elements (variables for the coding): an actor who initiates the protest event; the form of action; the target at which the action is directed; an object actor whose interests are affected by the event; and finally the substantive content of the event, which states what is to be done (issue). Each protest event concerning a right-wing actor and taking place in our six countries under study has been coded.<sup>32</sup> Starting from these definitional assumptions, we conducted a protest event analysis drawing on newspaper articles published in the major quality national newspapers in each country analyzed. In particular we have used the following: *La Repubblica* for Italy; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) for Germany; the *Guardian* for the United Kingdom; *Le Monde* for France; *El País* for Spain; the 'US Newspapers and Wires'<sup>33</sup> included in the LexisNexis database<sup>34</sup> for the United States. In order to retrieve relevant articles we conducted a keyword search of the electronic editions in each case.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, an in-depth analysis of official documents (e.g. annual reports, legal documents, archival material, statistical databases, etc.) concerning the extreme right in the selected countries, as well as of the available primary information produced by the far right organizations themselves (e.g. leaflets, newspapers, e-zines, etc.) have helped us to reconstruct the political, cultural and technological context of right-wing mobilization, both online and offline, and the characteristics

32 In our study a 'protest event' consists of a political event initiated by an extreme right actor (either collective or individual, even an anonymous one), regardless of the type of actor (e.g. political party, subcultural skinhead group, etc.) and regardless the form the event takes (e.g. heavy or light violence, unconventional symbolic and expressive actions, conventional actions, etc.).

33 In general, it is commonly held that multiplying the sources of the protest event analysis (e.g. relying on both media and judiciary sources or on newspapers from different political orientations, left-wing and right-wing, for each country) is preferable in order to reduce the possible bias. The argument is that biases are consistent over time and most studies demonstrate that results tend to be stable especially within individual newspapers and over longer periods of time (e.g. McCarthy et al. 1996). However considerations of costs and time have determined our methodological choices. For instance, several studies have shown that taking two newspapers instead of one in general duplicate the time of coding, without however increasing "the amount of events obtained adding a second source" (Koopmans and Rucht 2002: 238). The combination of two newspapers for example (e.g. of different ideological orientation) offer only one-fourth of events more than each source individually (ibid.).

34 This source contains newspapers published in the United States and wire services covering American news.

35 As for the sampling criterion, data have been collected from the LexisNexis database and or from CD-ROM versions of the selected newspapers using several keywords (e.g. 'extreme right', 'neo-Nazi', 'white supremacis\*', 'far right', 'skinhead\*', 'Nazi', etc.). A reiterative process has been used by searching with all keywords for each year, and then eliminating redundant articles. Copies of original articles were stored to go back to qualitative information not captured by the variables of the codebook. Inter-coder reliability tests were undertaken for article selection and coding.

of the extreme right milieu in each country. To find official sources and statistics concerning the extreme right, we mainly conducted systematic thematic Internet research on the websites of government bodies of the selected countries (see for instance the annual report *Verfassungsschutzbericht* from the German government)<sup>36</sup> as well as at the European level (e.g. see the Europol annual *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*<sup>37</sup>). As for statistical data (see for example Chapter 2), we have drawn on a series of major academic and governmental extremism databases available (e.g. the Terrorist Organization Profiles database offered by the START Centre at the University of Maryland, which provides background information on more than 850 extremist organizations around the world during the last four decades; the Global Terrorism Database, also provided by START, which has the most comprehensive incident listings in existence; the Worldwide Incidents Tracking System of the National Counterterrorism Center, which offers one of the largest databases on political violence, etc.). Furthermore, as integrative sources of information we relied on the various democratic watchdog associations, numerous in our selected European countries as well as in the United States, which constantly monitor right-wing organizations and violence and which offer important documents on the phenomenon (such as newspaper articles, reports, press releases, etc.). Among the most prominent watchdog organizations in our countries are the US Anti-Defamation League,<sup>38</sup> the US Southern Poverty Law Centre<sup>39</sup> and the Italian Osservatorio Democratico.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Content of the Volume**

In the following chapters we will investigate several different aspects of the potential role of the Internet for extreme right groups. After having discussed in the present chapter some main hypotheses from literature within which this research on extreme right groups and the Internet is placed, in Chapter 2 the influence of the political, cultural and technological ‘opportunity structures’ offered by the national contexts in which these groups operate will be analyzed in detail. We will discuss and specify the hypotheses cross-nationally, characterizing the six opportunity contexts and radical right-wing milieus.

Chapter 3 applies instruments of social network analysis to study the communication networks within the American, Italian, French, English, German and Spanish extremist right. Web links between right-wing organizational websites are used as a proxy. Indeed, as we will explain, extremist groups increasingly

36 [http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/en\\_fields\\_of\\_work/rightwing\\_extremism/](http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/en_fields_of_work/rightwing_extremism/).

37 [http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU\\_Terrorism\\_Situation\\_and\\_Trend\\_Report\\_TE-SAT/TESAT2008.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TESAT2008.pdf).

38 <http://www.adl.org>.

39 <http://www.SPLC.org>.

40 <http://www.osservatoriodemocratico.org/>.

use and abuse the Internet for their propaganda and recruitment, but also for their internal communication. In a macro, micro and meso analysis, the various specificities of the six national political sectors are demonstrated and linked to the offline reality.

Chapter 4 investigates to what extent the different structural configurations of the extreme right that emerged in the different countries are reflected in differences in the strategic use of the Internet by right-wing organizations. The content analysis of the websites of extreme organizations will help us to shed light on this important question, particularly with a view to the identity-building process and political communication and mobilization of these groups through the Web. The findings will be illustrated, comparing different types of extreme right organizations and contexts and underlining the main differences and similarities between them on different aspects of the use of the Internet. Indeed these differences are mainly due to political opportunity structures in the six countries.

Chapter 5 looks at the degree and forms of the recent evolution of the right-wing mobilization out of the Web and its characteristics. Indeed, if the Internet, and the online activities that it allows, has potentially increased the ability of such groups to address their activists, engage them in the organization's life, and spread their message to as many people as possible, the question must be posed about how much this is mirrored in an increase of right-wing mobilization outside the Net. With the help of the protest event analysis of extreme right actions, we will explore the intensity and the use of different strategies by these groups, relating them to the issue fields around which mobilization occurs, the types of actors, the scope, their targets and victims.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter 6), we synthesize the characteristics of the (political) usage of the Internet by right-wing groups, highlighting both their capacities and their difficulties in the use of the new medium. We will interpret the results in the light of political opportunities and actors' resources, as well as of relational networks. At a more general level, we will refer to the main theories of ICTs and politics (online) and social movement studies outlined in the first chapter, discussing to what extent they help us to understand the relationship between contemporary right-wing organizations and the Internet and the contribute this study may offer to them.



## Chapter 2

# ‘Technological’, Political and Cultural Opportunities for the Extreme Right in the United States and the European Countries

The concept of political opportunity structure, used in social movement studies to explain their mobilization, has been only recently applied to the investigation of the extreme right (e.g. see della Porta 2012; Minkenberg 1998; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2005b). It refers to “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives [or constraints] for people to undertake collective action, by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow 1994: 85). Some characteristics of the context opportunities are stable, like the institutional framework of a country, the functional and territorial distribution of powers, the party system or form of government; other are dynamics and contingent, such as the shift in the configuration of allies and opposition, new laws, government decisions or changes in power relations.

In the six countries of our research the extreme right is surrounded by a variety of different (institutional, political and cultural and technological) opportunities, which might have a direct or indirect impact on its political mobilization, also online (Caiani et al. 2012). In the following sections of this chapter we look at them in the selected countries, discussing their potential impact on right-wing activism online and offline.

### **‘Technological’ Opportunities (and Laws Regulating the Web)**

Nowadays extreme right groups rely heavily on the Internet in order to diffuse their discourse, however it is clear that this new technology offers greater perspectives and a wider audience for the extreme right in contexts with higher levels of Internet penetration. The *digital divide*, as mentioned, can be interpreted as the gap between different countries with regard to the opportunities to access the Internet (Norris 2001). It is therefore an important element of how favorable a national context is for the online activities of, *inter alia*, extreme right groups. Our six selected countries differ quite significantly on this respect. In Italy, the digital divide is manifested in the exclusion of millions of citizens from a fast Internet connection, also called ‘broadband.’ Indeed, despite the growth in the number of Internet users in recent years (from 22 percent of the population in 2000 to 51.7 percent in 2010), Italy has the lowest Internet penetration rate in Europe, arising

from the absence of cable infrastructures (52 percent in 2010).<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, we can say that the Italian technological opportunities are not particularly favorable to extreme right organizations wishing to reach a wider public through the Net. Also in Spain the level of broadband penetration is slightly lower than the EU average and the rate of Internet users in the country reached 62.6 percent of the population in 2010.

The situation in Germany is very different than that in the two Southern European countries: the Internet penetration rate is considerably higher compared to other European countries (79.1 percent of the total population in 2010). Similarly the technological opportunities regarding the activities of the French extreme right on the Internet are favored by a rate of Internet penetration that has constantly been growing during the last decade, reaching 68.9 percent of the population in 2010. Even more favorable opportunities for the diffusion of extreme right organizations' discourse and practices on the Web are available in the United Kingdom, where the excellent broadband infrastructure determines one of the highest rates of Internet diffusion in Europe (82.5 percent). Finally, as regards the United States, the context seems particularly conducive to online activities as a result of a very high level of Internet access amongst the population (77.3 percent of the total population in 2010). Table 2.1 presents an overview of the various measures of Internet diffusion illustrated so far.

**Table 2.1 Measures of Internet penetration in our six selected countries**

	Internet users			User growth 2000–2010	User growth 2004–2010
	2008	2009	2010		
Italy	0.49	-	0.52	+0.29	+0.03
Germany	-	0.75	0.79	+0.50	+0.30
France	0.58	-	0.69	+0.55	+0.28
UK	-	0.80	0.82	+0.52	+0.20
ES	0.67	-	0.63	+0.50	+0.30
USA	0.73	0.74	0.77	+0.33	+0.08

Source: [www.internetworldstat.com](http://www.internetworldstat.com).

<sup>1</sup> These percentages refer to the portion of population with access to the Internet (for a similar measure of 'digital divide' see also della Porta and Mosca 2005b: 12). For this and the following data we relied on: [www.internetworldstat.com](http://www.internetworldstat.com).

Also, according to the Digital Opportunity Index (DOI)<sup>2</sup> (measured at a global level), our selected countries offer a mixed picture of opportunities and constraints as for the use of the Web. If in 2005 all six countries scored a good rank on the index (being among the first 20 positions), in recent years they have been overtaken by new technologically emergent countries (such as Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, etc.), lowering their DOI rank (in 2010). The only exception is the United Kingdom (which obtained 10th position).

Although the Net can represent an excellent opportunity for the extreme right to make its claims visible and to attract a big audience, there is, however, on the other hand, an increasing regulation on the Internet in all our countries (Castells 2009). In fact, the very same nature of the Internet renders effective monitoring difficult, and sometimes even impossible (ECRI 2006, 2011). For example there is the practical obstacle of identifying the owner of a website that can be located abroad. Furthermore, posing constraints on Internet activities in some countries can be interpreted as a limitation upon the democratic right of free speech (Leets 2001: 249). As we observe, the measures taken by state authorities to regulate online content greatly vary from country to country, with some countries adopting very restrictive *legislation and policies concerning the use of fascist and racist discourses online* (Wetzel 2009: 359), while others are instead more oriented toward protecting the freedom of speech and private right of association and therefore opt for a 'softer' approach.

In Italy, although laws prohibiting racial hatred and discrimination on the Internet do exist, they are not particularly strict and it is difficult for them to be applied (ECRI 2006: 21). For example the so-called 'Mancino Law' (and subsequent modifications) was applied in some instances to the Internet, in cases of racial discrimination and incitement to racial hatred (e.g. under the Mancino Law a criminal proceeding was opened against the extreme right website Stormfront, which posted a list of Jewish Italian families<sup>3</sup>). However, this norm, established in a particular historical, political and cultural moment, today shows its objective limits, resulting in the proliferation of websites and Internet activities.<sup>4</sup> This is why the inadequacy of the Italian legislative framework regarding the dissemination of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet has been mentioned as matter of concern by many supranational monitoring organizations, which repeatedly called on Italian authorities to strengthen their efforts to counter these types of crimes on the Web (ECRI 2006: 21; Human Rights Watch 2011: 66).

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2 The DOI is based on 11 ICT indicators, grouped in three clusters: opportunity, infrastructure and utilization (ITU 2005). The United States was classified at position 11, United Kingdom at 13, Germany at position 16, Spain, Italy and France respectively at positions 18, 19 and 20 (ibid.). See <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/doi/index.html>.

3 [http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/21/0249\\_Fiano\\_On\\_n\\_5-04045\\_e\\_n\\_5-04326.pdf](http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/21/0249_Fiano_On_n_5-04045_e_n_5-04326.pdf).

4 [http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/21/0249\\_Fiano\\_On\\_n\\_5-04045\\_e\\_n\\_5-04326.pdf](http://www.interno.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/21/0249_Fiano_On_n_5-04045_e_n_5-04326.pdf).

Unlike in Italy, the Internet activities of extremist groups in Germany are constrained by strict legal provisions and they are subject to a severe monitoring by the authorities. The norm of the German Penal Code (art. 130) forbidding the production and diffusion of material inciting hatred against parts of the population or against a national, racial, religious or ethnic group, has been recently extended to the Internet. In particular, official bodies do exist, such as the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz<sup>5</sup>), which, together with many non-governmental watchdog organizations (e.g. the ‘Network for the Fight Against Racism and Equal Right’<sup>6</sup> or ‘Antifascist Action’<sup>7</sup>), constantly control the activities of the extreme right on the Internet (see also Schellenberg 2009: 194–199). The efforts of the German authorities to promote such initiatives is strong and quite successful (ECRI 2010b: 26). Similarly, the French legal framework appears to be particularly restrictive when it comes to the propagation of extremist discourse on the Web. For instance, the scope of the Law on Freedom of the Press of 1881, which criminalizes “insults and incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence on the basis of ethnic group, nation, race or religion,” is also applied to Internet content. Moreover, the Perben Law of 2004 (defining ‘racism’ as an aggravating circumstance for any offense) contains provisions against racial discrimination on the Internet and authorizes Internet providers to delete any webpage containing racist material. In addition to this the government set up in 2003 an Internet contact point allowing people to report illegal messages and behavior on the Web, especially those with anti-Semitic or racist content.<sup>8</sup>

In the United Kingdom there is instead a lack of specific Internet legal constraints and jurisdiction. In fact, Section 19 of the Public Order Act of 1986 prohibits publishing or distributing written material instigating racial hatred. However, even though it is likely that the Courts would extend this provision to the Internet (e.g. as they did in the judgment *R. v. Sheppard* in 2010) there are considerable limitations with regard to the application of this law to websites.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, to what happens in the English context, also in Spain anti-racist and anti-discriminatory legislation does exist outside the sphere of the Internet, but is difficult to transpose and to apply to the Internet, and still leaves spaces not covered by sanctions (ECRI 2011: 23). In 2006 in Spain there was the first case of a conviction of an extreme right website (Movimiento contra la Intolerancia 2007: 23) and in the recent local elections the right-wing party ‘Platform for Catalonia’ strongly relied on the Internet for its electoral campaign (Hernández 2010). Observers argue that on Spanish websites (likewise the Italian sites but higher than English and German ones) there is a prevalence of racist content, mainly “related to a lack of regulation and control” (Wetzel 2009: 365). However, a step

5 [http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/en\\_fields\\_of\\_work/rightwing\\_extremism/](http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/en_fields_of_work/rightwing_extremism/).

6 [http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/pdf/Germany\\_EN.pdf](http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/pdf/Germany_EN.pdf).

7 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antifaschistische\\_Aktion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antifaschistische_Aktion).

8 <http://s170032534.websitehome.co.uk/extremismthenet.html#UK>.

9 <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Combating-racism-and-anti-Semitism>.

forward has recently been made with the appointment of a prosecutor specializing in issues related to cybercrime in every prosecution office throughout the country (ECRI 2011: 23).

Finally, the American legal framework does not offer any effective constraints against racist violence and crimes online. On the basis of the First Amendment of the Constitution indeed both the federal government and state governments are forbidden from restricting speech. For example, in 1992, the US Supreme Court judgment in *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul, Minnesota*, upheld that even restricting or prohibiting hate speech was an unconstitutional infringement of the freedom of speech under the First Amendment (Capitanchik and Whine 1996). This applies to the Internet also in cases of hate speech and statements expressing racial, ethnic or religious discrimination (ADL).<sup>10</sup>

### **Political Opportunities for the Extreme Right: Electoral System, Potential Allies and 'Offline' Legal Constraints**

An increasing number of studies are focusing on the effects of the institutional framework on the development of the extreme right. As observed, 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, quoted in Mudde 2007: 233). If during recent decades the extreme right have been surging in popularity in many West European democracies, "enjoying the legitimacy of ministerial offices" (Norris 2005: 1), our selected countries vary a lot in this regard, with some posing serious electoral obstacles toward minor political parties, as usually those of radical right are, others less so.

In terms of *electoral rules and the strength of the extreme right*, it has been underlined that institutional positions held by right-wing political parties can constitute a channel access to the political system also for other more informal organizations, as suggested for instance for Italy where "the MSI/AN provides an important link between a number of (extreme right) organizations large and small, in particular, organizations for students and young people, but also including a party-affiliated trade union as well as veterans' associations" (Wetzel 2009: 337).

In Italy, in contrast to what happened in other European countries, where right-wing extremist parties remained a fringe phenomenon with little electoral potential until the mid-1960s, the extreme right was soon, not long after the end of World War II, re-integrated into the political system (with the legitimization of the rightist party Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI) (Wetzel 2009: 327). However mixed and unstable electoral fortunes characterized Italian right-wing parties. Some of them, such as the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN), the Social

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10 Anti Defamation League (ADL): [http://www.adl.org/issue\\_combating\\_hate/10faq\\_extremist\\_online.asp](http://www.adl.org/issue_combating_hate/10faq_extremist_online.asp).

Movement Tricolor Flame (Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore, MSFT) and the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) (Baldini 2001: 1)<sup>11</sup> have gained important electoral positions in the last few years. AN, for instance, which is considered the direct heir of the MSI,<sup>12</sup> experienced significant success, also gaining ministerial positions.<sup>13</sup> Other smaller extreme right parties, like New Force (Forza Nuova) or the National Front (Fronte Nazionale), have not, however, been particularly successful at the elections in the last 10 years compared to similar forces in other European countries. Forza Nuova received less than 0.5 percent of the vote in the 2001 national elections, 0.7 percent in 2006 and 0.3 percent in 2008 elections for chamber of deputies (as well as less than 0.7 percent in the 2010 regional elections). The MSFT performed worse than AN at the national level (it gained only 0.6 percent of the vote in 2006 general elections and 2.4 percent in 2008). However in the 2004 European vote it obtained a seat in the European Parliament,<sup>14</sup> and reached an agreement with the center-right coalition House of Freedom in 2005 (regional) and 2006 (national) elections.

Although the Northern League's inclusion in the extreme right family is still controversial (Ignazi 2006), this party, with its xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigration policies, has represented an 'ideal' point of reference (especially at the local level, EUMC 2004) for many extreme right activists and sympathizers (Wetzel 2009: 323) and it experienced relevant electoral successes over the decade (from 3.9 percent of vote in 2001, to 4.1 percent in 2006, to 8.3 percent in 2008, *ibid.*: 323). In the 2010 European parliamentary elections, the Northern League gained 10.2 percent of the vote.

Unlike Italy, in Germany extreme right parties did not obtain significant successes during elections in the last decades. This is mainly due to the 5 percent threshold fixed by the federal electoral law, which prevents extreme right parties from entering parliament (for more details on electoral systems and the extreme right see Carter 2005; Norris 2005). However, in spite of these constraints at the national level, extreme right forces could gain relevant results in local and regional elections—especially in East German states (ECRI 2009: 8). For instance, the National Democratic Party (NPD)—labeled as 'racist anti-Semitic and revisionist' in 2006 by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*ibid.*)—received 7.1 percent of vote in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania state elections in 2006,

11 [http://www.essex.ac.uk/ECPR/publications/eps/onlineissues/autumn2001/research\\_extreme.htm](http://www.essex.ac.uk/ECPR/publications/eps/onlineissues/autumn2001/research_extreme.htm).

12 The party formed in 1995 from the dissolution of the MSI and the split of MSFT.

13 In the 2001 parliamentary election, with the victory of Berlusconi's right-wing alliance ('The House of Liberties'), AN received several cabinet posts (with 12 percent of vote) and in the 2006 general elections it gained 12.3 percent of vote. After the victory of the list 'Popolo della Libertà (PdL)' (formed by Berlusconi's Go Italy!, AN and the Northern League) AN was merged into the PdL (2009).

14 For these and the following electoral data we relied on the Italian Ministry of Interior: [www.elezionistorico.interno.it](http://www.elezionistorico.interno.it).

achieving representation. In 2008 it quadrupled (from 41,000 to 160,000) its votes in Saxony gaining 5.1 percent and representation in all 10 county councils in the state.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the German People's Union (DVU)—considered as a fascist/autocratic party (Minkenberg 2005)—gained significant successes at the local level in Brandenburg elections in 2004, with 6.1 percent of the total vote and six seats in the legislature (ECRI 2009: 25); losing them, however, in the following 2009 state election. However, an electoral alliance has been announced in 2010 between the NPD and DVU which could reinforce these parties.

A different picture emerges when looking at the institutional context of the extreme right in France, where since 2002 these forces have acquired an undeniably relevant position within the political system (Evans and Ivaldi 2005). In 2005 the main far right political party, Le Pen's National Front (NF), gained an astonishing 17 percent of the total vote (second in the presidential elections) and 10.4 percent at the following 2007 presidential election.<sup>16</sup> In 2012, its electoral fortune was confirmed with 17.9 percent of the vote. Moreover, considerable success was also achieved by this party in the 2009 European (6 percent of the vote and three seats assigned)<sup>17</sup> and 2010 regional elections (17.5 percent of the vote and 118 seats in French councils). In fact, observers say that currently the National Front is in the process of recovering from its losses, "given that many of those extreme right sympathizers who voted for Sarkozy, disillusioned by his policies, are returning to support the extreme right" (Movimiento contra la Intolerancia 2009).<sup>18</sup>

For what concerns the United Kingdom, the British 'first past the post' electoral system has proved to be a relevant obstacle to any achievements by the extreme right at the national level, even though sporadic success at the local level has been possible also in this country (Mudde 2007: 233). Between 1979 and 2003 extreme right parties have never received more than 1 percent of the vote at the national level (Carter 2005). The same poor electoral performances are repeating in the current decade. Both the British National Front (NF)—"formed in 1967 as an amalgamation of fascists and more conservative racists" (Eatwell 2000: 407)—and the British National Party (BNP)—formed in 1982 from a split from the National Front—failed to gain any seat in either the 2005 or 2010 general elections. However, both parties experienced occasional electoral successes at the local level (Tetteh 2009).<sup>19</sup>

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15 *Der Spiegel*, September 6, 2008: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,558508,00.html>.

16 Data from the French Ministry of Interior: [http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a\\_votre\\_service/elections/resultats/](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_votre_service/elections/resultats/).

17 European election database: [http://www.nsd.uib.no/european\\_election\\_database/country/france/](http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/country/france/).

18 <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2009/france.html>.

19 Overall, the British National Party currently has about 50 local authority seats (all of them in England), a far more impressive achievement than that by any previous extreme right party in UK but a minuscule fraction of all such seats (Husbands 2009).

One of the main features of the Spanish extreme right is its organizational weakness, either in terms of electoral results and social penetration (Chhibber and Torcal 1997). The extreme right party spectrum is composed of three main political parties (the Falangistas (Falangists), the Frente Nacional (National Front) and the Fuerza Nueva (New Force)), and many other tiny parties which are active only at sub-national levels (Carter 2005: 3–5; Casals 2001). Moreover, these parties, unlike the situation in other European countries, have attracted minimal popular support in the last decade (Norris 2005: 65), thus offering very few institutional channels of access to the political system for the Spanish extreme right. Between 2000 and 2004, for example, the Spanish extreme right achieved 1 percent of votes in the national elections (versus the 13.2 percent of votes in France or the 16.3 percent in Italy in the same period), performing even worse in the most recent years (in the 2008 and 2011 national elections, none of the extreme right parties were able to reach 1 percent of votes. The same holds true for the European elections of 2009). However, even in this case, if the Spanish extreme right has not been able to access the institutions at the national level, new radical right-wing formations have recently recorded successes at local and regional levels. For example, the Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC)—a regionalist anti-immigration populist radical right party formed in 2001—gained about 12,000 votes in the region of Cataluña in the state elections of 2007, and 17 councilors were elected.

In the United States, contrary to Europe, due to the nature of the electoral system and probably because of the “enduring imprint upon racial politics and discourse” (Norris 2005: 72), extreme right movements never gained electoral success (Michael 2004: 172)<sup>20</sup>—therefore not offering to far right organizations and activists present in the society an institutional point of access for the representation of their demands. However more recently the emergence of the ‘Tea Party movement’ (which emerged in 2009), a populist<sup>21</sup> right-wing political movement, very conservative and libertarian, provided a link between institutions and the American far right on the basis of some common demands such as the withdrawal of all American troops from around the world, less restrictions from government on personal freedom, the fight against abortion, etc.

Indeed the presence of *political allies* in power for right-wing organizations (such as the mainstream right) might signify, as stressed by social movement scholars, an effective channel for gaining resources for these groups (della Porta and Diani 2006: 210)—as for example a higher level of legitimization for issues close to the extreme right discourse. However this aspect can vary a lot over time, also within the same country.

As for institutional allies, in Italy the extreme right, differently than in the other European countries, has been accepted as coalitional partner (with a stable presence in successive center-right governments after 1994) and, thus, as a

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20 Few exceptions are to be mentioned as, during the postwar period, with the American Independent Party that in 1968 gained 12.9 percent of votes (Norris 2005).

21 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123137382>.

legitimate 'member' of the political system (Koopmans and Statham 1999: 227). Both AN and LN occupied important ministerial positions in the Berlusconi governments of the last 15 years (e.g. since 2008 the Minister of Interior is a LN politician and the AN leader Gianfranco Fini is the President of the Chamber of Deputies). According to some scholars this setting has also provided some support to right-wing extremist groups and activists, "closely associated with the MSI/AN, despite contrary affirmation from party leaders" (Wetzel 2009: 327). Moreover, the center-right coalition House of Freedom also accepted the support of the post-fascist MSFT in the general elections of 2006. This means that extreme right extraparliamentary groups can call upon potentially powerful political allies.

The situation is different in Germany, where even when in power (during the 2005–2009 grand coalition; and since the 2009 center-right in government), no political party (including the conservatives of the CDU/CSU) has ever seriously considered an alliance with right-wing extremists. Although therefore the ostracism against the extreme right by mainstream parties has been the rule, some scholars consider that the extreme right in Germany benefits from the convergence of the mainstream parties and the resulting disaffection in the people (Mudde 2007: 233).

In France, like in Germany, the political opportunities given by the presence of potential allies in institutions seem scarce. At the national level mainstream parties have always rejected any kind of alliance or electoral agreement with the extreme right. In addition they have adopted a policy of *cordon sanitaire* in order to prevent the election of any representative of far right parties (Hainsworth 2000), reluctant to accept politicians coming from the Front National or other extreme right organizations (Camus 2009: 160). However, these opposition attitudes toward the far right have been looser at local levels, where mainstream conservative parties accepted agreements with extreme right actors in the past (above all with the Front National). The effect of these local alliances was to enable extreme right parties to spread their ideas and to acquire a more legitimate role within society (*ibid.*).

Similarly, in the case of Spain and the United Kingdom, the extreme right have always suffered an explicit hostility from the main center-right parties (the Conservative Party in the UK and the Spanish Popular Party), which determined the substantial isolation of this political area. In particular, in the Spanish case, moderate right parties have always rejected alliances with extreme right political parties (for example, the Falangists) too tied to the political programs and ideals of the Franco regime. It has been argued that the institutional isolation of the Spanish extreme right has to be related to the inability of these political forces to create a stable organizational structure and ideology, and to develop a clear anti-democratic and anti-parliamentary program (Casals 1999).

In the United States, the electoral system has always strongly penalized minor political parties and therefore the chance for the far right to have representation in institutions. Indeed many third-party and independent candidates contest American elections but they have little success, mainly because of the

complex legal procedures for gaining ballot access in American states ... designed as protectionist cartel arrangements to deter challengers, coupled with the exceptionally high costs of campaigning, and the vote threshold required in the majoritarian electoral college. The permeability of the primary nomination process in the major parties also deters candidates from pursuing more independent paths. (Norris 2005: 240–241)

In fact, more than in the European countries, the American extreme right is especially active in the social sphere (more than in the political one), and it is strictly linked especially in more recent decades to religious and conservative values. Here, the Christian Identity—a conservative, anti-Semitic and racist ideology emerged by the 1960s—has “penetrated most of the major extreme right movements, from neonazis to some racist skinheads (e.g. the Hammerskins). Christian Identity also found a welcome home in extreme anti-government activism, notably the tax protest movement, the sovereign citizen movement and the militia movement.”<sup>22</sup>

However, it has been argued that the US People’s Party today has deep roots in mainstream politics, being associated with both Democratic and Republican politicians (Ware 2002).

### Legislation and Policies Offline Concerning Racist Violence and Crimes

At the same time also legal *anti-racist/anti-fascist provisions and policies offline* are relevant for the political mobilization of the extreme right, and this is something these groups have to deal with in their strategic choices of political activation.

In Italy, there are criminal laws and specific legal provisions against discrimination. Since the 1990s, legislation has been enacted to regulate growing violent episodes against immigrants and not Europeans citizens. However, as it has been noted, beginning with the first law on immigration in 1990, Italy continued to alternate restrictive laws on immigration and soft sanctions on racist and violent attitudes towards foreigners without a coherent policy direction (Wetzel 2009). In particular, the Italian Constitution condemns all forms of racism (art. 3) and the so-called Scelba Law (law 645/1957) bans the “reorganization of any form of the dissolved fascist party” (art. 4). Any behavior which directly or indirectly implies a distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, descent, origin or religious conviction is considered discriminatory (law 286/98). In addition, according to law 654 of 1975, those who spread ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, or incite (or commit) acts of discrimination on racial, ethnic, national or religious grounds, shall be punished with imprisonment. There are also rules that punish more severely those who promote or organize associations or groups that pursue anti-democratic and fascist goals, threatening or

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/Christian\\_Identity.asp?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=4&item=Christian\\_ID](http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Christian_Identity.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=Christian_ID).

using violence as a method of political struggle or propaganda. Even though anti-racist legislation does exist in Italy, it is scarcely implemented and rarely applied. Moreover, an effective monitoring of racist and extreme right groups is not performed by the authorities (ECRI 2006; Human Rights Watch 2011). The main piece of legislation is the already mentioned Mancino Law (205/1993), that punishes with imprisonment any discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or race, and instigation to racist acts of violence. It also punishes those who openly show symbols of organizations that aim to incite discrimination and racist violence (EUMC 2004: 20). On the other hand, due to a reform introduced in 2006, the penal sanctions provided by the Mancino Law have been made more lenient, being now provided the alternative sanctions of a monetary fine (up to 6,000 euro) or 18-months imprisonment against the only sanction of three years' imprisonment previously provided by law (ECRI 2006). The new version of the law punishes the 'instigation' instead of 'incitement' to racist acts of violence. Supranational monitoring organizations such as the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe and the international watchdog organizations often complain about this 'soft' Italian interpretation of racist crimes (ibid.: 8).

Unlike the Italian case, in Germany, a large number of state measures have been taken against right-wing extremist propaganda and acts of violence (Minkenberg 2006). Among them is the constitutional law providing for a prohibition on 'undemocratic parties.' Even though successfully applied only once (in 1952 against the national socialist Sozialistische Reichspartei) and despite the failure to implement the ban against the NPD (in 2002) this approach is considered as testifying of "the firm will of the German authorities in the fight against right wing extremism" (ibid.). German state repression also includes the 'association ban,'<sup>23</sup> legal dispositions punishing the use of unconstitutional organizational symbols (art. 8a Penal Code) and incitement to racial hatred (sections 130 and 131 of the Criminal Code). In this respect, contrary to what has been done in Italy, section 130 of the Criminal Code, concerning punishment of the expression of racist views at public gatherings, was strengthened in 2006. The most important legal regulation is the Volksverhetzung Law (1985), which punishes with imprisonment the denial of acts committed under the rule of National Socialism and an explicit Holocaust denial clause was added to this law in 1994. Moreover, in Germany there is a close synergy between police and specific institutional bodies for controlling extreme right groups and activities, such as, for example, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz). This organization publishes annual reports on right-wing violent incidents, aiming at providing information and educational material to the citizens.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, since 1992, 24 right-wing extremist organizations have been banned by the Federal Minister of the Interior, see [http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/en\\_fields\\_of\\_work/rightwing\\_extremism/](http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/en_fields_of_work/rightwing_extremism/).

In France there are no specific laws against extreme right activities<sup>24</sup> and no specific state agency tackling political extremism. However, various laws that forbid religious, ethnic and racial discrimination exist (such as the Pleven Law of 1972, the Toubon Law of 1996 and the Perben Law of 2004, defining racism as an aggravating circumstance for any offense). These legal provisions also include laws against Holocaust denial (Camus 2009). Moreover, the Constitution (art. 4) allows for the banning of ‘anti-democratic parties and associations.’ In recent years, however, French authorities are adopting stronger measures against racism, anti-Semitism and discrimination. For instance, the Joint Ministerial Committee for Combating Racism and Anti-Semitism was set up in 2003 with the aims of defining the government policy and a joint ministerial program of action, ensuring its implementation and the coherence preventive and repressive actions adopted by different ministries (ECRI 2010a: 12). In addition, an independent authority to combat discrimination and promote equality was established in 2005 and its mandate was subsequently reinforced by law the following year (ibid.: 13).

In the United Kingdom, legal constraints concerning racist violence and crimes are few. In 2005, a major piece of legislation on anti-discrimination was published (the Equality Bill Great Britain), punishing incitement to racial hatred and, since 2007, also hatred based on religious beliefs. It also establishes the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. However, these provisions are scarcely implemented against extremist organizations and are mostly applied to individual actions (Husbands 2009).

In Spain the legislative context, in terms of legislation and policies concerning racist violence and crimes, seems to pose few constraints on right-wing mobilization (Wetzel 2009: 265–267). In 1995 the country introduced sanctions against racist, anti-Semitic behavior and discrimination concerning ideology, religion, ethnic group, race or nationality (art. 22-4 of the *Código Penal*). The Spanish Penal Code also punishes incitement to hate and violence, diffusion of ideas of genocide and illegal association (art. 510). However, in practice, these legal provisions are not very strict and still leave spaces not covered by sanctions. In this respect, watchdog organizations highlight the fact that both articles (22-24 and 510) are rarely applied and claim “the lack of awareness of the provisions and appropriate training” on the side of the competent state authorities (ECRI 2010: 10). Moreover, for a 2007 decision of the Spanish Constitutional Court, Holocaust denial has been removed from the Criminal Code and it is now legal in Spain.

In comparison to European countries, the US context offers more open opportunities in terms of legal constraints and laws against political extremism (Michael 2004: 171). Hate speech is widely protected as a civil right. For example, on the grounds of the First Amendment of the Constitution which guarantees freedom

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24 Banning a party even if extreme is the exception and not the rule. In fact, so far, there have been no parties of the extreme right that have been banned on these grounds even though some associations have been prosecuted in the past, such as *Ordre Nouveaux* in 1969 and *Fane* in 1980 (Minkenberg 2006).

of speech, the government has no authority to dissolve political organizations or, as we have seen in the case of the Internet activities of the far right, ban extremist speeches even though they may be expressing racist or undemocratic ideas (ibid.). Also in cases where speech encourages illegal violence, instances of incitement qualify as criminal only if the threat of violence is 'imminent.' This strict standard leads to difficulties in prosecution of many cases of incitement, including those where violence against racial, ethnic or gender minorities is exhorted.<sup>25</sup>

It was only in the aftermath of the tragic events of the Oklahoma city bombing in 1995 that the government started to adopt more severe measures against far right extremism and to perform a strict monitoring of extreme right organizations (ibid.: 180). Furthermore, after the 9/11 attacks, in order to fight the terrorist threat, Congress approved the Patriot Act (2001) allowing investigators to perform an effective surveillance of people or groups suspected of terrorist activity. These provisions proved quite effective even with regard to far right activities as they allowed the authorities to arrest several right-wing extremists in the country (ibid.: 181).

### **Cultural and Discursive Opportunities for the Extreme Right**

The analysis of political opportunities available for extreme right activism has to take into account another important aspect of the context: the political culture. Political culture refers "to the pattern of beliefs and assumptions ordinary people have towards the world, as these pertain to politics" (Tepperman and Bell 1979). The concept, introduced for the first time by Almond and Verba in late 1950s to address the values (i.e. the 'civic culture') which are at the basis of a stable and wealthy democratic regime (Almond and Verba 1963), is made up of cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations toward the political system. If the political culture of a country is relatively stable over time and reproduced by political socialization, influenced by this aspect are the more contingent *cultural and discursive opportunities* that determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be "legitimate by the audience" (Kriesi 2004: 72). A favorable political culture (e.g. discursive opportunities created by the political elites in defining migrants and asylum seekers as a social problem) is recognized as a fundamental factor for the success of the extreme right both in terms of electoral outcomes and persistence (Koopmans 2005; Mudde 2007). We also consider this element important for the mobilization of the extreme right in offline and online activities, since it can affect the degree of acceptability or stigmatization of extreme right actors. As we see, as an effect of diverse historical, political and social backgrounds and traditions, the political culture in which extreme right organizations are embedded in the six selected countries is very different, some more favorable toward them, others more hostile.

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<sup>25</sup> See for example *Terminiello v. Chicago* (1949), *Yates v. United States* (1957) and *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969).

The Italian far right for example seems to benefit from both favorable cultural and discursive opportunities. First of all, a consistent part of the Italian extreme right has maintained a clear legacy with the fascist past (Milesi et al. 2006: 67) with heirs of the postwar and post-fascist parties still present on the political scene (e.g. MSFT). Second, in this respect, it has been noted that, especially in the last decade, the social acceptance of the far right has also increased and “the far right has now become more visible ... more tolerated than before” (Padovani 2008: 754). In particular the extreme right in Italy have the chance to exploit the high resonance of certain issues within the population, such as security, immigration and unemployment as well distrust toward democratic institutions which appear well spread among Italian citizens (see next section).

Unlike Italy, a high level of social stigmatization toward the far right past characterizes, as mentioned, the German context (Mudde 2007: 245). Here, despite some social issues (anti-immigration, deficit of democracy, social justice, etc.) taking root in some segments of the German population and giving a chance to extremist right groups to develop, “right wing movement and parties maintain a scarce credibility among public opinion” (Schellenberg 2009: 191).

On the contrary, in France, there is a potentially favorable cultural climate toward the extreme right, favored according to Mudde (2007) and Eatwell (2000) by the assimilative conception of citizenship and the Jacobin tradition. Indeed, “in countries where nativist issues are at the core of the political agenda, various subcultural organizations function as bridges between the political mainstream and the populist radical right” (Mudde 2007: 248). Organizations of this kind might favor the extreme right, heightening the salience of the nativist discourse, facilitating contacts between the extreme right and mainstream political actors and providing a recruiting base to extreme right parties (ibid.).

Open cultural opportunities for extreme right discourses and actions cannot be found instead in the UK case. In this country, “even in pre-war period, British fascism was never more than an irritant” (Husbands 2009: 252). Moreover, although some British extreme right organizations, and above all the BNP, interpret religion as a means of recuperating a lost cultural heritage, the church in the United Kingdom has always firmly condemned these parties (Peace 2010: 6). However, others commentators stress that among British voters the number of extremist “latent voters” is growing (John and Margetts 2009: 503). The number of anti-Semitic and hate crimes is on the rise<sup>26</sup> and the concern over immigration and hostility toward multiculturalism are growing (IPSOS 2009).

With regard to Spain, observers repeatedly underline the ideological weaknesses of the extreme right, which “has been not able to renovate itself by welcoming into its framework the ideological values of the so-called New Right which were spreading in Europe” (Rodríguez 2006). Indeed, according to Rodríguez (1991, 1999), Spanish extreme right elites did not understand the needs of a modernizing

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26 The United Kingdom registered 924 anti-Semitic incidents in 2009, the highest ever reported (Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Racism and Antisemitism 2008/2009).

society and were not able to adapt the traditional values of Franco's regime to a new democratic country and to the new challenges of modernity. Lacking a modern political program, the Spanish extreme right has progressively lost contact with the social and electoral base (Casals 1999; Rodríguez 1991, 1999) and it has ended up isolated and socially stigmatized.

Finally, in the United States, in spite of the poor electoral results of the extreme right, there is a tradition of populism (as in the case of the American People's Party of the late 1800s), which goes back to the agrarian movements of the nineteenth century. Here, right-wing populist appeals might rely on the traditional defense of individual liberties vis-à-vis the state (Michael 2003), also borrowing from several other well-established American 'values' such as producerism (i.e. the idea that the true Americans are hard-working people, "fighting against parasites at the top and bottom of society"), anti-elitism/intellectualism, majoritarianism (i.e. "the will of the majority of people has absolute primacy in matters of governance"), moralism and Americanism (Berlet 2009: 26). Issues such as immigration and the announced loss of majority by the American whites, the rise of neo-pagan religions, globalization and the economic situation highly resonate within American society, and this is creating more favorable conditions for the rise of the extreme right. In addition to this, especially after September 11, the conspiratorial discourse of the American extreme right is increasingly spreading within the society (for example linking Islamic terrorism against the United States to the government's support for Israel). More recently, the United States is facing a surge in anti-government extremist groups and armed militias, driven by deepening hostility from the right to Barack Obama, anger over the economy, and the increasing propagation of conspiracy theories by parts of the mass media;<sup>27</sup> as observed by governmental sources, "right wing extremists have capitalized on the election of the first African American president, and are focusing their efforts to recruit new members, mobilize existing supporters, and broaden their scope and appeal through propaganda" (DHS 2009).

Also, the appeals by the national political elites on relevant issues for the extreme right might be considered another important element deeply affecting the discursive opportunities available to its mobilization and propaganda (also via the Internet). For example, as observed, *anti-immigrant appeals by political elites* might legitimize 'negative framings' within the population and, in turn, favor the diffusion of extreme right anti-immigrant rhetoric (ECRI 2006).

On this regard, in Italy, the use of racist and xenophobic discourse—criminalizing immigration and constantly linking it to security issues—has often been attributed to the exponents of certain parties such as the Northern League, as well as more moderate center-right parties (ibid.: 25–26). In addition, the way the Italian media 'frame' immigration issues has been considered as favoring a climate of intolerance from which the far right can profit (ibid.: 27).

27 *Guardian*, "US Facing Surge in Right Wing Extremists and Militias," March 4, 2010.

Similarly, also for the case of France, commentators stress the role played in more recent years by mainstream politics in creating a cultural background favorable to the extreme right. According to various scholars (e.g. Hainsworth 2000; Mudde 2007) the moderate right might copy specific themes of the far right in order to gain electoral success (e.g. issues such as law and order, immigration control and patriotic values) (Camus 2009: 160). However, this strategy might also prove counterproductive, ending up legitimizing the themes of extreme right within the society and favoring its success (Mudde 2007: 241). Conversely, in Germany, most mainstream parties generally avoid racist or xenophobic discourses (ECRI 2010b) because of a widespread common agreement toward the refusal of the Nazi period. In the United Kingdom, an emerging tendency has been noted “on the fringes of the political debate” that strongly discredits or even discriminates against migrants (ECRI 2009: 38). The debate on the topic is in fact becoming more and more salient and it is approached by political elites with increasing concern on the grounds of the potential economic effects of migrant inflows (ibid.). As for Spain, its relatively recent transformation from a country of emigration to a country of immigration has enhanced the saliency of the immigration issue within both the political and social discourse. In this regard, even though racism and xenophobia are largely condemned in political elites’ public discourses, immigration is increasingly pictured in relation with security and public order issues and depicted as a threat to society (ECRI 2011: 21–22). Finally, in the United States, although extreme right movements have always been relegated to the margins of American society and politics, according to some commentators, the cultural climate is changing toward an opening to the extreme right (Potok 2004: 137). The way political elites (above all the G.W. Bush administration) framed the discourse on ‘the war on terror’ is sometimes quoted to explain the rise of a widespread anti-Muslim discourse, Islamophobia and hate crimes within the American society (Kahn 2006).

### **Demand Side: A ‘Fertile Breeding Ground’?**

The academic literature also suggests other aspects which are considered as a fertile breeding ground (Mudde 2007) for the extreme right political mobilization. One is a diffuse *mistrust in representative institutions* within the population (Morlino and Tarchi 1996; Norris 2005), which the extreme right can benefit from by instrumentally exploiting the main themes of social dissatisfaction (e.g. toward democracy and its functioning) (Mudde 2007). Indeed, one common explanation, on the demand side, for the success of right-wing forces is that many people hold radical right views (ibid.: 219).

Public opinion surveys conducted in Europe and in the United States show varying levels of trust in parliamentary institutions and political parties across our six countries. For example, according to the Eurobarometer 2011, only 21 percent of the Spanish and 26 percent of the Italians declare that they trust (‘tend to trust’)

in their national parliaments. While a slightly higher level of trust can be found in the United Kingdom (29 percent) and France (31 percent), and a noticeably higher level of trust in parliament is expressed by the German public opinion (46 percent). Anyway, these data indicate that in all countries under analysis more than the half of the population has expressed relatively little confidence in their main representative institutions.

An even worse picture emerges when looking at the degree of confidence in political parties ('declared to trust' in national political parties, Eurobarometer 2010): only 16 percent of the Italians, 15 percent of the Germans, 10 percent of the French, 13 percent of the British and 11 percent of the Spanish 'declared to trust' in national political parties. Also the American society shows moderate levels of trust in institutions (Newport 2009).<sup>28</sup>

In terms of *anti-immigrant and/or nationalistic attitudes* of the population, a recent survey of some European countries and the United States has emphasized that there is a slight trend (from 2008 to 2011) toward more respondents (52 percent in Europe and 53 percent in the United States) describing immigration as 'more of a problem' than an opportunity.<sup>29</sup> In particular, the majority of Italians have a negative attitude toward immigration and "believe immigrants cause insecurity, are a threat to employment and a burden on the social security system" (Eurobarometer 2009: 6). This negative climate has become a matter of concern for official observers, stressing in Italy "a trend of xenophobia and the development of manifestations of racism, primarily affecting the Sinti and Roma community, immigrants and asylum-seekers ... but also from Eastern Europeans, and the Muslim community."<sup>30</sup>

Also in Germany a resurgence of anti-Zionism and/or extreme anti-Israel attitudes between 2002 and 2009 has been noticed and a recent survey study (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2010)<sup>31</sup> revealed that right-wing attitudes are widely diffuse within the population.

Similarly, in France, a 2006 survey<sup>32</sup> of citizens' attitudes toward racism and immigration showed 30 percent of respondents declaring 'to be racist' and 48 percent that 'there are too many immigrants.' They also expressed a negative orientation toward 'immigrants' behavior and culture' and high level of intolerance against the 'Muslim religion and Islamic immigrants.' By contrast, the British

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28 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122897/Americans-Trust-Legislative-Branch-Record-Low.aspx>.

29 Source: Transatlantic Trends Immigration (2011). Available at: [http://trends.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/TTI2011\\_Topline\\_final.pdf](http://trends.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/TTI2011_Topline_final.pdf).

30 See also Human Rights Watch (2011: 13).

31 The study asked questions about the support for a right-wing dictatorship, the superiority of the German nation, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, social Darwinism and the trivialization of National Socialism.

32 Survey conducted by the Commission Nationale Consultative des droits de l'homme.

context, strongly rooted in multiculturalism, does not offer a favorable cultural background to right-wing extremist groups. For instance, a survey conducted one month after the bombings by Islamic terrorists in London in 2005, revealed that 62 percent of respondents agreed that “multiculturalism makes Britain a better place to live” (EUMC 2006: 20). With regard to Spain, the anthropologist Calvo Buezas found that the country “romantic imaginary of a mixed multicultural society” is disappearing (Movimiento contra la Intolerancia 2009), and according to a survey conducted by the CIS (Center of Sociological Investigation) almost half of the population (44 percent) would rather live in a society in which most share the same culture and believes (ibid.). As for the United States, the recent waves of immigration, together with the economic crisis, have contributed to create an increasing degree of anxiety about immigration within the population, which can also fuel far right extremism (DHS 2009).

Finally, the presence within a country of the so-called ‘*watchdog*’ *civil society organizations*, whose aim is to counter racism or, in general, the diffusion of extreme right rhetoric by monitoring and denouncing the most evident expressions of racial hatred and anti-democratic attitudes and behavior, can affect both the chances of success and the strategies of mobilization of extreme right actors (della Porta and Diani 2006: 211). Our selected countries once again are different in this regard. Italy has several non-governmental organizations (e.g. SOS Racism) actively operating against racism and discrimination “through prevention, information, complaint,”<sup>33</sup> which are, however, hampered by the lack of effective measures and official data from state authorities (ECRI 2006). This is similar to the situation in France, where “public institutions have been fearful of building lasting relationships with the anti-far right NGOs” (Camus 2009: 174).<sup>34</sup>

In Germany, by contrast, we see a vast array of active and well organized civil society groups, particularly focusing on the fight against extreme right undemocratic activities—supported and helped, in this case, by state agencies (above all the Office for the Protection of the Constitution).

In the United Kingdom, the number of civil society organizations against racial discrimination is higher compared to the other European countries and they are particularly committed to the monitoring and recording of racist incidents (EUMC 2006: 105–106; Husbands 2009: 250–275).

In the United States, the lack of a strict legal framework against the activities of extremist racist groups is to some extent balanced by a very strong commitment on these themes on the side of private NGOs (e.g. Anti Racism and Hate, Anti Racist Action and Internet-based watchdogs such as the Nizkor Project and Hate

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33 [www.sosrazzismo.it](http://www.sosrazzismo.it). Other associations of this type are the CDEC ([www.cdcc.it](http://www.cdcc.it)), seeking to counter all forms of racism and anti-Semitism, and the Osservatorio Democratico-Democratic Observatory ([www.osservatoriodemocratico.org](http://www.osservatoriodemocratico.org)).

34 One of the main non-governmental organizations in Spain is the Movement Against Intolerance, which is also subsidized by the state. It is active to sensitize public awareness on themes related to racism, racial hatred and violence.

Watch, Michael 2004: 173). Indeed, according to Michael, “what is often ignored is that private non-governmental organizations have interjected themselves into this area of public policy and have done much to fill the void” (ibid.: 171).

### **The Extreme Right Sector in the United States and the European Countries: Organizational Resources and Characteristics**

Looking at the internal features of the extreme right milieu within each single country, a different picture, with also some commonalities, emerges in our six contexts in terms of the main types of extreme right organizations which inhabit the sector and their organizational and ideological features. As regards Italy, the main political parties usually associated with the extreme right are the Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore, plus several small formations, such as Fronte Sociale Nazionale (founded in 1997, following a split within the MSFT), Forza Nuova (originating from the MSI diaspora in the transition to AN), Libertà di Azione (led by Benito Mussolini's granddaughter, Alessandra), and some very recent groups such as Rinascita Nazionale. The classification of the Alleanza Nazionale as an extremist right party is still under debate (Ignazi 2006). Close to right-wing political organizations, there are a series of youth organizations (as well as a number of political journals). Italian extreme right activism found a particularly fertile ground in the soccer stadium, where extreme right hooliganism is especially diffuse and violent.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the Italian far right constellation also counts on the presence of ethno-regionalist parties such as the Northern League, identitarian movements and parties (close to third position movements of the 1970s—e.g. New Force, Italian National Front—and French Lepenism), and the so-called “communitarianists” which, refusing the extreme right label, define themselves as “left-wing fascists” (Ferrari 2003). Also the German extreme right milieu is composed of different types of right-wing movements and parties characterized by fascist, racist and ethno-centrist ideological variants (Minkenberg 2006: 29). Beyond the two main extreme right parties, the NPD and the DVU, the German extreme right sector is highly developed regarding the subcultural area (ibid.). Traditional organizations are quite weak and nostalgic and revisionist groups are strongly undeveloped due to the legislative context and social stigmatization. By contrast, youth subcultural and skinhead groups are more present and active: in 2009, 195 extreme right organizations (counting around 30,000 members) were operative in Germany (Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Racism and Antisemitism 2009). The same can be said for the neo-Nazi groups, which are especially diffuse in the area of the former East Germany (Backes and Mudde 2000) and strictly linked to the high-developed extreme right music scene, appealing to skinhead youth from all over Europe (Husbands 2000). In addition to these groups, the German extreme

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35 On Italian extreme right hooliganism, see *La Repubblica*, February 27, 2008 and October 14, 2008.

right milieu also includes the so-called Anarchist Nationalist (anti-capitalist neo-fascist groups) and the hooligan scene surrounding local football clubs.<sup>36</sup>

In France, even though the extreme right milieu proves to be quite varied there are “strong centripetal tendencies towards the clustering of various groups and organizations around the Front National” (Minkenberg 2006: 31).

A single party (the FN) has established itself offline as the hegemonic among the radical right, thereby absorbing numerous smaller groups (ibid.: 31).<sup>37</sup> Here, ‘traditional’ organizations take precedence over the informal and youth groups, which are, in comparison to Germany, much weaker. Other political parties besides the FN exist, but they are mainly developed at the local levels and even skinheads are most of all developed locally. Similarly to France, the British far right milieu offline is mostly concentrated around two main extreme right parties—the British National Party and (to a lesser extent) the National Front. The Nazi right area is slightly weaker than in other European countries: the membership of fascist and Nazi organizations only amounts to few hundred throughout the country.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the British extremist right sector is mainly characterized by the presence of nationalistic and patriotic groups (anti-immigrant and anti-European Union) many of them closely related at the political level to the BNP.

A characteristic of the Spanish far right sector is the weakness and fragmentation of traditional organizations, especially political parties. The area of nostalgic and neo-fascist organizations counts a multiplicity of small Falangist parties (e.g. Falange de las JONS, Falange Auténtica, Falange Española) and groups (e.g. the Confederación de Ex Combatientes, an organization which includes several associations of veterans nostalgic for the Falangist past) in constant conflict with each other (Ellwood 1992: 379). The neo-Nazi scene includes neighborhood groups and the skinhead movement, which is mainly composed of young or very young members,<sup>39</sup> often linked with football fan clubs (Ibarra 2006: 3).

The right-wing extremist family in the United States is commonly divided into three categories: religious, political and youth cultural (Berlet and Vysotsky 2006). Among them we find movements and groups that are mainly hate oriented, against particular religious, racial or ethnic groups; and those that are primarily anti-government oriented, refusing government authority as a whole or federal authority in favor of state or local levels (DHS 2009: 2). More specifically, they range from paramilitary groups, conspiracist movements, white supremacist

36 Stefan Berg, Markus Deggerich and Sven Röbel, “Neo-Nazi Scene in Germany: Extremist Violence the Norm in Parts of the Country,” *Der Spiegel*, March 6, 2008.

37 These subgroups that gravitate around the FN include a great variety of organizational forms, such as interest groups, youth associations, ultra-catholic movements, and even housewives’ associations (Minkenberg 2006), with different ideological background embracing collaborationists, Holocaust revisionists, neo-fascists, French Algeria ultras and neo-Nazis (Hainsworth 2008: 14).

38 Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Racism and Antisemitism 2008/2009.

39 Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Racism and Antisemitism 2006.

groups and religious fundamentalist organizations to ultra-nationalist racist organizations (DHS 2009; Durham 2003). In addition, the American extremist context is characterized by some peculiar organizations rooted in its traditional history and culture such as white supremacists, KKK groups and Christian Identity organizations. Official sources (DHS 2009) emphasize the prominence and diffusion of white supremacist organizations and militia paramilitary movements, whose growth is often related to current American environmental conditions, like the negative economic climate and the return of military veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Table 2.2 offers a synthesis of the technological, political and cultural opportunities illustrated so far of the extreme right in our six countries, that we will use in the next chapters to understand (and try to explain) the development of its online mobilization and offline mobilization. In Table 2.A in the Appendix more details are provided.<sup>40</sup>

**Table 2.2 Technological, political and cultural opportunities: a summary**

	Italy	Germany	France	United Kingdom	Spain	United States
TOS	Intermediate (nearly open)	Intermediate (nearly closed)	Intermediate (nearly closed)	Open	Intermediate (nearly closed)	Open
POS	Open	Intermediate (nearly closed)	Intermediate (nearly open)	Intermediate (nearly closed)	Intermediate (nearly closed)	Intermediate (nearly open)
COS	Open	Closed	Open	Closed	Closed	Open

Source: For Italy, Germany and the USA see also Caiani et al. (2012).

### Technological, Political and Cultural Opportunities: Conclusions

Comparing the six selected countries in terms of the different institutional, cultural and also technological opportunities that may potentially affect the extreme right, we see that the *technological opportunity structure* appears particularly favorable in the United Kingdom and the United States, with, in both countries, weak legal constraints and law enforcement against online acts of racism or xenophobia and a very high percentage of citizens using the Internet. Conversely, a closer context

<sup>40</sup> In the Appendix the reader can find the measurements and operationalization of each single dimension of the technological, political and cultural opportunities illustrated in this chapter, which will be used for the following analyses.

emerges with regard to Germany and France. Here, despite the good rate of Internet penetration, very strict legal provisions can constitute an obstacle to the diffusion of extreme right-wing discourses and actions on the Web. This dimension is also not favorable in Spain but for opposite reasons: due to a medium level presence of legal regulation of the Net and low rates of Internet diffusion into the society. However, in Italy, if the digital divide can hamper in some way the broad diffusion of the far right discourse, the legislative context seems to pose fewer constraints to the activity of the extremist organizations of the right.

With regard to the *political opportunities* available to extreme right formations some specifications are in order for our six countries. As far the degree of *electoral strength* of extreme right parties, the most favorable context seems to be Italy (as well as France), with the long-lasting presence of right-wing extremist formations in governments and potential allies in power. Conversely, the worst scenario can be noted for both the British and Spanish far right, which are electorally weak and lack potential allies in institutions. Comparing legal regulations across countries, the picture is different and we see: very open opportunities for the extreme right in the United States and in the United Kingdom, intermediate opportunities in France (where, in spite of the lack of specific legislation, strict policies had been adopted), Spain (where there are not specific legal provisions against the extreme right) and Italy. The closest context is in Germany, which is characterized by rigid and effective laws against right-wing groups and activities.

Also *cultural opportunities* offer a variegated picture of the six countries. The diffusion of far right discourse through the Web can find a favorable context in the United States, deeply rooted in the defense of freedom of speech (but also in France and Italy although for different reasons), and where “even if electoral impact or open adhesion to extremist American groups are not so evident, there is a latent cultural and discursive agreement on many issues belonging to the American extreme” (Potok 2004: 59). By contrast, in Spain and Germany the extreme right are confronted with a very closed context, where its cultural opportunities are tightly restricted. In the former case because of the ideological backwardness of the radical right organizations, in the latter because right-wing extremism is marginalized and strongly opposed. In particular, considering the presence of a *fascist past* in a country as a profitable cultural opportunity for the extreme right (Mudde 2007: 245; Norris 2005) we observed a favorable context in Italy, France, Germany and Spain. The situation of the discursive opportunities seems also particularly open in France and Italy for these types of groups, since both countries show diffuse *anti-immigration attitudes* both at the elite and population levels, high degrees of public acceptance of the extreme right as a legitimate political actor, and a weak anti-racist and anti-fascist organizational context. To the contrary, in Germany and (to a lesser extent) the United Kingdom, the extreme right has to deal with a closer context in this respect, being a strong civil society fighting against right-wing extremism present and a scarcity of anti-immigrant public statements diffused.





## Chapter 3

# The Organizational Structure of the (Online) Galaxy of the European and American Extreme Right

### Introduction

Despite the growing importance of the linking practices of extremists and other groups on the Web (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 1), to date, the mapping of these online networks has been very limited. Yet hyperlink data constitutes a rich source of insight into the online networking behavior of any political organization (ibid.). In this chapter, we aim to demonstrate that, as it has been noted, the analysis of how (right-wing) extremist groups use the infrastructure of the Internet can help us to better understand the groups themselves (Zhou et al. 2005). By applying a social network analysis<sup>1</sup> to the online contacts between organizations, our goal is to explore the organizational structure of the extreme right, reflecting on specific actors' visibility, configurations of power, as well as alliances and potential conflicts between these groups. In this sense, in this study, we treat the Web links between organizations as "potential means of coordination" (Burriss et al. 2000: 215). Certainly, the analysis of virtual links between these organizations does not mirror the 'real' relations they might have outside the Net. Nevertheless, this kind of study can shed light on an area of virtual activity and of social exchange between right-wing groups which use the Internet as an additional channel in order to construct their common identity (Tateo 2005). Indeed, frames, as well as norms and values, are diffused through 'acts of communication,' and the Internet is among the strongest communication tools available today. The online links can therefore be considered as good indicators of common objectives, ideological closeness, or shared interests between the groups (Burriss et al. 2000; Tateo 2005).

Social movement research has underlined the importance of inter-organizational ties (Diani 2003) and the usefulness of social network analysis to study them (Snow et al. 1986) for a long time. Networks, as well as their formal characteristics, have been used to develop theories of collective behavior (Fernandez and McAdam 1988; Gould 1991, 1993, 1996; Kim and Bearman 1997; Marwell and Oliver 1988; McAdam 1986, 1988; Rosenthal et al. 1985). In fact, individual and organizational social networks are important elements in the processes of collective mobilization, increasing the communication and the coordination flows among groups (Diani

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1 We have used the UCINET 6 software for this analysis (Borgatti et al. 2002).

2003). They are also considered to influence individual behavior and readiness to take part in collective action (della Porta and Diani 2006), as for example in the case of friendship and family ties which have been found to favor political participation, even in radical groups (della Porta 1995). Further, 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, vice versa, more moderate within densely connected networks (Hadden 2008).

In this chapter, we look at networks as both resources and opportunities for right-wing actors (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). This means that we will look at each sector of the extreme right in each country in terms of a set of actors who, through their mutual interactions, produce their own value orientations, have access to specific resources, and contribute to the shaping of the context of opportunities and constraints into which they are embedded (*ibid.*: 9). Focusing at the level of individual organizations, we will examine which types of right-wing actors occupy a central (and therefore potentially ‘influential’) position in the network and which are more peripheral. Indeed, following social capital scholars (e.g. Lin 2001)<sup>2</sup> we argue that social links (i.e. networks) are relational resources of actors (e.g. in order to increase the probability of success of their own actions). We will then explore the formation of specific coalitions (of communication) between the various extremist groups, looking at their composition (e.g. their homogeneity or heterogeneity) and at the relations between them. In this regard, in line with scholars emphasizing a ‘political opportunity structures’ approach, networks can be interpreted as configurations of a context (environment) of both opportunities and constraints to collective action (Broadbent 2003; Diani 2003). In this sense networks are seen as “intermediaries” between resources and mobilization (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008: 8). Finally, we try to characterize the overall configuration of these six extreme right sectors, looking at how dense, how conflictual or consensual, how segmented or centralized they are (for specific social network measures used to characterize these notions, see the next section). We expect that collective action will be easier in the presence of dense social ties, which facilitate the exchange of resources and the construction of a common identity; whereas weak links can lead to processes of pacification or laziness (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). We also hypothesize that the overall configuration of the extreme right network will vary across the six countries under study, offering a different mobilization potential to the far right movement. An advantage of social network analysis is that it enables the researcher to emphasize the ‘meso’ level of social analysis, filling the gap between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ (Hayes 2001) and focusing attention on the connection between the micro and macro dimensions (Emirbayer and Sheller 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> These studies range from works on participation and social mobility (Van Deth 1997) to those on migration chains (Piselli 1999) or those on the entry to the labor market (Bagnasco 1999).

In what follows, we will first present an overview of the different types of organizations identified that compose the extreme right (online) galaxy in each country, discussing their structural properties at a macro level. We will then demonstrate (at a micro-level analysis) the characteristics and relational resources of the single right-wing groups and organizations, as well as the coalitional dynamics among them (meso-level analysis of blocks). The final comments will link our results with our more general research question on the European and American extremist right and their mobilizational potential built through the Web.

### The Structure of Right-Wing Network(s)

In this section, we will investigate to what extent the online constellation of the extreme right in the countries under study can be characterized as a cohesive field or, on the contrary, how far it is possible to identify possible lines of cleavages within it. In order to address these important issues we will rely on some of the most common measurements in social network analysis. First of all, the 'density of the network', whose values can vary between 0 and 1, where 0 and 1 represent the two ideal situations, namely a network without any links and a network where every actor is linked to every other. Another one is the 'average distance' between the organizations (i.e. 'nodes'), which refers to the distance, on average, of the shortest way to connect any two actors in a network.<sup>3</sup> The smaller the average distance, the more cohesive a network. Another is the 'average degree', which shows the average number of contacts which the organizations have. We expect that groups being part of networks with a high average degree are more likely to collaborate, surmounting the distances by which they are separated (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). This measure can be also considered as indicating the degree of 'activism' in actors' networking within one sector. Finally, the 'degree of centralization' that indicates the extent to which a network is organized around one (or more) central actor (or to use more technical terminology, the degree of variance around a mean value).

The galaxy of websites related to the extreme right is a complex sector, including different categories of groups (Figure 3.1).<sup>4</sup> The network for France is composed of 58 organizations with a total of 242 links, the Spanish one of

3 For this and the following measures, see Wasserman and Faust (1994) and Scott (2000).

4 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the classification of the extreme right organizations has been based on the self-definition of the group and the predominant nature of the message conveyed through the website (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003: 32; Tateo 2005). Some common topics and issues of 'extreme right' websites are: *white supremacism*; *explicit racism*; *racialism*; *negationism*; *conspiracy theory*; *xenophobia*; *nostalgia for a past prior to immigration*; *anti-Semitism* and *anti-Zionism*; *anti-Americanism*; *ethno-nationalism* (Mudde 2007; Tateo 2005).

87, connected through 350 links, the English one of 129 and 460 links. The American extreme right community online is definitely the largest, including 134 organizations, connected with only 173 links. Finally the German network is formed by 69 organizations and 389 links, and the Italian one of 79 groups and 417 links. These six virtual communities ('networks') (Figure 3.1a, b, c, d, e, f) include various types of organizations ('nodes'), characterized by different ideological tendencies and mobilizing around different issues. Some of them are characterized by neo-fascist or even neo-Nazi positions, while others have reduced their neo-fascist aspects to a sort of 'right-wing socialism' with anti-globalist and anti-liberalist traits (EUMC 2004). They vary from extreme right political parties and movement<sup>5</sup> (as the French Front National, the English BNP, the Italian MSI, and, among political movements, the American National Alliance, or the French Bloc Identitaire), to neo-Nazi groups<sup>6</sup> (such as the English Blood and Honour); from revisionist/negationist and nostalgic<sup>7</sup> groups (as the Italian Reduci della Repubblica Sociale Italiana) to cultural right-wing associations,<sup>8</sup> from publishers and commercial sites ('militaria'), to subcultural youth organizations such as skinheads, music and sports groups.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, 'single-issue extremists,' namely groups active on a specific subject (e.g. anti-abortion or animal- or

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5 In this class we inserted the main important extreme right parties in our selected countries (e.g. see Norris 2005) and in general those groups defining themselves as political parties or movements and that openly partake in political activities (such as elections, political debates, policy issues, Tateo 2005). In this category are also included youth organizations related to parties, political journals, magazines and reviews.

6 These organizations refer to the Third Reich and are apologists for Hitler and the German National Socialist ideology. Their sites contain Nazi symbols, references to the purity of the Aryan race and racial hatred (Tateo 2005: 12).

7 The main characteristics of the revisionist and 'negationist' groups are historical revisionism and the denial of the Holocaust; the proposal to rewrite history; and the documentation of the crimes of communism (Tateo 2005). These groups refer to the 20 years of fascist regime in Italy and the Salò Republic, and are apologists for Benito Mussolini. The main difference from neo-fascist/neo-Nazi groups is that these websites do not refer to contemporary political events (Tateo 2005: 14). Holocaust denial groups are particularly present in the US case (Burris et al. 2000: 221).

8 These extreme right organizations can be divided into two subgroups: traditional cultural associations on the one hand, and 'New Age' and 'neo-mystic' groups, as for example the Italian group Sodalizio del Cerchio Antico, on the other (Tateo 2005: 15). Above all the latter ones are characterized by their frequent reference to Celtic mythology or a kind of new spiritualism which challenges the official Christian religion (ibid.). Catholic ultra-traditionalist organizations are also included in this category, as for example the American Aryan Nation or the World Church of the Creator (Freilich et al. 2009).

9 These groups are characterized by music (which they define as 'antagonistic,' Tateo 2005) 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, Gnosis 2006). In Germany, there is the specific category of the so-called 'Kameradschaften,' organizations

environmental- rights extremists, Freilich et al. 2009), and groups not included in the above-mentioned categories have been classified as *other* (examples of single-issue organizations are the English Campaign for a Referendum on Immigration, and the Stop the Islamification of Europe<sup>10</sup>).

Furthermore, beyond these types of groups which are 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 argumentations);<sup>11</sup> Ku Klux Klan groups (whose main characteristics are supporting racial segregation, ADL);<sup>12</sup> and militia and patriot organizations (such as, for instance, the American Oklahoma Constitutional Militia), which are often armed paramilitary groups with anti-government and conspiracy theory as their core ideology (Freilich et al. 2009).<sup>13</sup> Finally, right-wing nationalists are also present (especially in France, the UK and Spain).<sup>14</sup> As we can see, in the selected European countries, as well as in the United States, the extreme right area is far from being homogeneous (Durham 2003).

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with a flexible structure whose classification between neo-Nazi and skinhead groups is controversial (Wagemann 2005).

10 <http://www.referendum.1hwy.com/> and <http://sioengland.wordpress.com/>.

11 See [http://www.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/Christian\\_Identity.asp?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=4&item=Christian\\_ID](http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/Christian_Identity.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=Christian_ID).

12 These websites are racist and anti-Semitic, advocating violence as a strategy to achieve their goals; see [http://www.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/kkk/default.asp?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=4&item=kkk](http://www.adl.org/learn/ext_us/kkk/default.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=kkk).

13 In order to make the categories of extreme right organizations comparable across our countries, in the following analyses we have grouped KKK and Christian Identity groups in the category 'cultural organizations'; militia and patriots in the category 'nationalists' and, finally, white supremacists in 'Political movements.'

14 These websites advocate nationalist and patriotic sentiments against European integration or immigration (Husbands 2009).







Note to Figure 3.1:

Organizational Type	Symbol
Political Parties	Grey circle
Political Movements (& White Supremacists in the US case)	Grey square
Nostalgic, Revisionist, Negationist groups	Grey Triangle
Neonazis	Grey Box with cross
Cultural, new age, neo-mystical, traditional Catholic orgs. (& Christian Identity and KKK in the US case)	Grey down triangle
Commercials and publishers	Grey circle in black box
Subcultural organizations	Grey diamond
Nationalistic and patriotic organizations	Cross

Alongside this heterogeneity of the far right sector may be added the fact that the same types of extreme right organizations have not the same (relative) weight in the different contexts. In particular, in the US network (see Figure 3.1d), cultural, New Age and neo-mystical far right groups constitute a large part (accounting for 35 percent of all nodes). Christian Identity and KKK groups are the second most frequent organizations in the milieu (with 22 percent of nodes), while political movements are much better represented (16.4 percent) than political parties (which account for less than 1 percent of nodes). Another important component of the sector is however represented by neo-Nazi and youth subcultural organizations (11 percent each). In France, the majority of right-wing nodes correspond to websites of political movements (36.2 percent), followed by nationalistic and patriotic organizations (20.7 percent). On the contrary, other organizational types are less present within the right-wing network structure: political parties (12.1 percent), subcultural organizations (8.6 percent) and mixed organizations (6.9 percent). The presence of nostalgic, revisionist and negationist groups, as well as of commercial organizations and publishers, is finally residual (1.7 percent both). In Germany there is a predominance online of neo-Nazi groups (26 percent) and political movements (24 percent), but also of subcultural organizations (19 percent).<sup>15</sup>

The Italian extreme right landscape is instead mainly populated by nostalgic, revisionist and negationist groups (37 percent) – a signal of the strong legacy of the fascist past – and by subcultural organizations (24 percent). All other organizational types are present in the online community but with more limited relevance: political movements (13 percent), political parties and publishers (both 6.3 percent), neo-Nazi and cultural/New Age types (each 5 percent), and nationalistic and patriotic organizations (less than 4 percent). In Spain it seems that

<sup>15</sup> They are followed by nationalistic and patriotic groups (13 percent). The other types of groups are present, but less important: political parties (3 percent) and nostalgic and revisionists (7 percent).

there is a special migration toward the Web of the extreme right subcultural youth organizations (almost 30 percent), which are the majority of the online sector, followed by cultural and traditional Catholic groups (12 percent) and by neo-Nazis (11 percent). The presence of commercial actors and publishers reaches 10 percent of nodes. The extreme right organizations which compose the British far right sector are, most of all, composed of nationalistic and patriotic organizations (17 percent), immediately followed by political parties (16 percent). Nostalgic, revisionist and negationist groups are also rather present online (13 percent), together with political movements (10 percent) and cultural groups (10 percent).

In order to analyze in more detail the overall configuration of the actors in our six countries, we can interpret the graphs of the networks (Figure 3.1a, b, c, d, e, f) in terms of centrality and distance between the organizations. First, when looking at right-wing extremism, political parties are usually of considerable importance, since they often play a role as the institutional point of reference that unifies the sector, maintaining various links to its different areas (Minkenberg 1998: 50). The situation in the majority of our cases is different: the 'virtual communities' of the extreme right appear rather fragmented (especially in the United States, UK, Italy and Spain) and not focused around a few 'central' organizations that are able to monopolize the communicative exchanges within the sector. Furthermore, none of the networks examined is particularly dense (for the 'overall density', see Table 3.1). Indeed, in all cases, less than 10 percent of possible ties amongst right-wing organizations are actually activated: 7 percent within the French network, about 7 percent in the Italian one, 5 percent within the Spanish and almost 3 percent within the English one. The German network is the densest (8 percent of all possible ties are present) while, at the opposite extreme, the American one is the sparsest (less than 1 percent of ties activated), and is characterized by an extremely loose chain. Indeed, there is a strong variation across the six networks in the extent to which right-wing organizations engage in building contacts among each other. 'Online networking' between organizations is particularly lively in Germany and Italy, where every German and Italian organization has on average over five links with other organizations (on average, respectively, 5.6 and 5.3). For instance, in Italy, in spite of the rather marginal position of some specific organizations (such as the subcultural youth area), most of the groups of the extreme right participate actively in exchanges within the sector, as is evident from the significant presence of horizontal links between semi-peripheral organizations. Therefore no organization is completely isolated from the main part of the network. On the contrary, in the American network, the majority of websites (56 percent) have no external links to other extreme right organizations; around 10 percent of the groups are linked only with another one organization; while less than one-third (24 percent) with two or more. Moreover, many organizations on the periphery of the network are neither directly connected with the central ones nor, very much, between themselves (on average, 1.3). This confirms the impression of a segmented network. This is a bit surprising, since a geographically dispersed extremist community such as the American right could try to overcome this weakness by reinforcing the sense of

solidarity within the milieu through (online) social ties. Between the two opposite cases of Germany and United States are, on the one hand, France and Spain, which show a quite relevant and similar degree of networking activity of extreme right organizations within the sector (both with an average of more than 4); and, on the other, United Kingdom, where, instead, communication is not all that frequent (3.6), indicating for this online community a certain degree of fragmentation.

Third, in fact, in some of our right-wing networks many actors can only communicate with each other via long paths. The average distance between the organizations in the United States is 3.2, which means that – on average – the organizations of this network are more than three nodes (actors) away from each other. Conversely, in France it is 2.9 and in Italy more than 2.9, suggesting that in spite of the frequent exchanges (where the overall network density is amongst the highest), there is some need for intermediation. It is the British network where the path to connect two actors is the longest (3.4) and such lack of intermediation also occurs in Spain (2.9). Also this measure suggests a certain amount of cohesion in the German extreme right, where organizations are very close to each other (average distance 2.4). Furthermore, as the average degree has showed, in this latter network each organization is connected to a higher number of organizations compared with the other networks. At the opposite end, we see that not many communication flows are innervating the American network, which also suffers in terms of cohesion with the presence of many isolated nodes—namely organizations that are not connected to any other organization (48 percent of all groups of the network).

Finally, in terms of centralization of the network, the French one shows the highest values of out-degree centralization (50 percent), which suggest a situation with strong inequalities between the organizations of the milieu related to the degree of activity of organizations (i.e. how much organizations in the network tend to activate online conversations linking to other websites). Italy and Germany show a much lower value (27 and 26 percent in both cases). In the other cases, differences amongst organizations in terms of their out-degree are lower (the lowest being the United States with 6 percent), confirming the extremely ‘decentralized’ structure of the milieu of the US extreme right. As for the extent to which the extreme right networks are organized internally according to a hierarchical or a horizontal structure (i.e. inequalities between organizations for what concerns receiving ties from the others), we see that the Spanish network is the most polarized one (centralization in-degree 42 percent): some actors receive in this case many contacts within the milieu (very high in-degree levels) while others have low or residual prestige. The most horizontal network is the American one. Quite interestingly, despite its inequalities in terms of connection-building, the French network appears the most horizontal after the United States, followed by the Italian one. Somewhat more unbalanced but still to a medium level, are the German and the English extreme right networks on the Web.

Table 3.1 offers a synthesis of the measures of cohesion illustrated so far.

**Table 3.1 Measures of cohesion of the European and American (online) right-wing networks**

	France	Spain	United Kingdom	United States	Germany	Italy
Number of organizations	58	87	129	134	69	79
Density	0.073	0.047	0.028	0.009	0.083	0.068
Average distance	2.908	2.925	3.422	3.225	2.413	2.932
Average degree	4.172	4.023	3.566	1.261	5.638	5.278
Degree of centralization (out-degree)	49.677%	11.736%	16.876%	5.862%	25.908%	26.907%
Degree of centralization (in-degree)	17.5445%	42.320%	27.899%	11.923%	22.924%	19.116%

To summarize, looking at the overall *internal characteristics of the extreme right milieu* that can favor or hinder collective action (also online), we see that the German (and French) ones emerge as the ‘strongest’ far right sectors, having the possibility to profit from a cohesive and quite homogenous (especially in the case of France)—in terms of types of different groups present—milieu, mainly concentrated around few extreme right parties. On the other hand, the extreme right area in all the other countries appears to be more fragmented, showing a great variety of heterogeneous organizations that act (more or less) independently from each other. This situation is extreme in the United States with a segmented structure of the network cut by many cleavages within.

### The Features of the Organizations

Looking at what types of organizations play an important role today in the (online) public sphere of the extreme right, it is worth asking if they are political party organizations, or on the contrary, whether they are other types of organizations that are less institutionalized and resourceful. Are they the ‘traditional’ organizations characterized by the classical ideology of inter-war fascism or are they the new and youth right-wing organizations (Wetzel 2009: 341–342)?

There are many ways of measuring the centrality of an actor in a network and, therefore, its potential ‘influence.’ The most simple measure of centrality is the number of contacts which an actor receives from the others (in-degree). Those

actors who receive information from many sources are considered “prestigious” (Diani 2003: 307).<sup>16</sup> Another measure is ‘betweenness,’ measuring where a particular actor lies between other organizations in a network. Actors with high ‘betweenness’ scores often serve as gatekeepers and brokers between different parts of the community. They function as important communication channels through which information, goods and other resources can be transmitted or exchanged (Wasserman and Faust 1994), and they are considered as having a particular influence on the flows of communication (Hanneman 2001: 68). Finally the out-degree of one organization, which counts how many contacts depart from a certain actor, is considered an indicator of a group’s activism in a network, of its willingness to build contacts with other partners. These are important dimensions across which extreme right organizations in the different countries examined can be compared (for a detailed description of the in-degree, out-degree and betweenness values for the single organizations in each countries, see Table 3.A in the Appendix).

Looking at the characteristics of political parties in the six extreme right communities (Table 3.2), the German network appears the more ‘institutional’ one: here political parties stand for their high centrality (with an in-degree more than the double that in the other five contexts, 17). As noted, the NPD (in-degree 20) maintains numerous organizational and personal links with non-party organizations, above all through its youth wing, Junge Nationalisten (JN) (Young National Democrats) (Backes and Moreau 1994: 23). Also within the Italian network political parties are quite popular (in-degree 7), however, since they are dispersed across the network (split in several clusters), they are not able to sum their respective relational resources, playing at best a role of “local heroes” (Diani 2003: 311).<sup>17</sup> Political parties in all the other country networks are even less prestigious (with, in France and the United Kingdom, in-degree values of 4.8 and 4.5 respectively; and in Spain and the United States, lower than 2). In the Spanish case, they are rather detached from the overall network (in the right bottom part of the graph), and, as for France, evidently the offline prominence of the French Front National (FN), which is the unrivalled major force of the French far right (Shields 2007), is only partially reflected online. The marginal position occupied in the (offline) American political system by the extreme right-wing political parties<sup>18</sup> is similar on the Web (in-degree 0.5).

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16 The in-degree counts how many contacts a certain actor receives from the other actors of the network, whereas the out-degree counts how many contacts depart from a certain actor.

17 We can however mention the significant centrality of the political parties MSFT (with 15 incoming links) and Forza Nuova (14). The other party actors only reach an intermediate level, such as Fronte Sociale Nazionale (with an in-degree of 8) and Azione Sociale and Rinascita (both with an in-degree of 2).

18 See for example the American Nazi Party (a combination of fascists, Aryan Nations-type folks, racist skinheads and others on the ultra-radical political fringe) and

Indeed, in most of the examined online communities, extreme right political parties are not the actors of the network who receive the highest number of contacts from the other organizations, but rather other types of groups are prominent. In particular, political movements (together with cultural groups) are the most popular organizations in the French online extreme right community (mean in-degree, respectively, 11 and 7),<sup>19</sup> although also in the German and Italian cases, they show a high visibility (in-degree 8.8 and 7.9, respectively). The popularity of political movements is instead very much lower in the United Kingdom, Spain and the United States (in all cases mean in-degree less than 4). In Italy, neo-fascist/neo-Nazi organizations are very central and prominent (in-degree 7.7), similarly to the state of affairs in the UK, the United States and Spain, where these types of organizations are the most visible in the network (in-degree respectively 5, 1.6 and 10.5). Nostalgic and revisionist groups enjoy in absolute terms their maximum popularity in Italy (7.2) and Germany (6.8)<sup>20</sup> (values which are twice as high as in the other networks), suggesting that the political antecedents of these two countries matter also on the extreme right activities on the Web. As for the neo-Nazis, they are more popular in Spain<sup>21</sup> than anywhere else (in-degree 10.5). In particular, the low prominence of neo-Nazi groups in the German right-wing online community (in-degree 5.7, similar to that in UK), if read in conjunction with the predominance of political parties and movements, can suggest that although the German extreme right is oriented toward nostalgia and historical revisionism, it is also looking for new kinds of institutional representation, away from more radical forms of the Nazi ideology.

Cultural and traditional right-wing groups are the less prestigious categories across all countries (with the partial exception of France, in-degree 7<sup>22</sup>), even being totally absent from the German network. In the United States, in particular, we find the cluster of religious Christian Identity groups—represented by organizations such as Bible Gateway, National Christian Church, Restoration Bible Ministries, and Gospel of the Kingdom Mission—which are not densely connected to one another (and the most separate from the rest of the network), showing very low levels of in-degree.

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the National Socialist Movement (which claims to be the largest Nazi party in the United States), both with an in-degree of zero.

19 Particular prominent political movements in the French network are Polemia (14), Rivarol (11), Bloc Identitaire (11), EuMaxima (9), Front National (8) and Present Quotidien (7).

20 As for example, in Italy, organizations such as Kommando Fascista, with an in-degree of 20, and Omaggio al Duce and Italia Volontaria, with an in-degree of 11 and 10.

21 As for instance the neo-Nazi group Nuevo Orden (in-degree 40), and the nationalistic group Jaen Nacional-Revolucionaria (36).

22 Particularly visible within the French network are conservative cultural groups such as Terre et Peuple (in-degree 9), Racines et Traditions en Pays d'Europe (in-degree 5).

Commercial organizations and publishers are extremely popular in the Italian context (in-degree 8.2), whereas they are the less important categories in other networks.<sup>23</sup> In fact they are here more important than any other cultural, institutional or revisionist component of the network. This suggests that also in Italy new forms of consolidation of an extreme right discourse are taking place, aiming at reaching a broader public (Caldiron 2001).

Paralleling the offline importance that they have within the German extreme right context (see Chapter 2), youth subcultural organizations are more prestigious in this online sector than elsewhere (8.5). It is worth noticing that here this subcultural area, that also shows a notable intermediation power in the sector (see below the values of betweenness), also includes the Kameradschaften (whose classification between youth skinhead and neo-Nazi groups is still under debate), which are very flexible structures of “comradships,” even considered as “organization without organization” (Merkl 1993: 35; Wagemann 2005). Interestingly, the relevance of subcultural organizations is low outside Europe. However, within the US network, skinheads and youth subcultural organizations (such as, for example, Keystone State Skinheads, Final Solution, Resistance Records, White Aryan Youth) are, in relative terms (in-degree 1.6), the most prestigious type of the organizations of the sector and this youth subcultural cluster is better connected with the rest of the network compared to the other types of groups.<sup>24</sup> As far as nationalistic groups are concerned, these are very popular in Spain (mean in-degree 14) and in Germany (10.3). In the former case, this can be linked to the specific political antecedents of the country (since they are organizations that have a strong nationalistic identity such as *Talavera por España* and *Nacional Socialistas Castellanos*)<sup>25</sup> and seems to suggest (together with the finding about the high popularity of the neo-Nazi component) that the Spanish extreme right milieu can be characterized as a radical and authoritarian one. On the other hand, the popularity reached by nationalists in Germany reinforces the idea that this country is progressively detaching from radical and traditional extreme right features (i.e. Nazism) toward the formation (at least in the arena of the Internet) of more modern and complex extreme right coalitions.

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23 As for instance in Italy organizations such as *Il Presidio* (8) and *Orion Libri* (10).

24 The two subcultural organizations *Keystone State Skinheads* (a white supremacist neo-Nazi organization based in Pennsylvania, with chapters in many US states) and *Final Solution* (a hard core, neo-Nazi, revisionist and negationist organization) receive a considerable number of incoming links (both in-degree of 10).

25 In-degree values, 10 and 7 respectively.

**Table 3.2 In-degree of different types of organizations, across countries (mean normalized values)**

	France	Spain	United Kingdom	United States	Germany	Italy
PP	4.76	1.66	4.46	0.45	16.91	6.92
PM	10.78	2.13	3.35	1.23	8.82	7.94
NR	3.51	2.49	1.47	1.00	6.76	7.16
NAZI	-	10.46	5.00	1.55	5.72	7.69
CUL	7.02	0.42	1.28	0.67	-	3.85
COMM	1.75	0.65	1.09	0.32	-	8.20
SUB	6.67	6.57	1.17	1.60	8.48	4.72
NAT	4.53	13.95	3.67	0.80	10.29	5.98
OTH	5.7	1.55	1.52	0.43	9.70	-

*Note:* PP = political parties; PM = political movements (including white supremacists); NR = nostalgic, revisionist, negationist groups; NAZI = neo-Nazi groups; CUL = cultural, New Age, neo-mystical, traditional Catholic groups (including Christian Identity and KKK groups); COMM = commercial and publishers; SUB = subcultural organizations; NAT = nationalistic and patriotic organizations (including MIL = militia, patriot); OTH = single-issue organizations, other groups.

When looking at the intermediation power of extreme right organizations in their respective online environments (Table 3.3, see also Table 3.A in the Appendix for details), we notice that, in first place, in some networks some types of organizations (e.g. political parties in the United States and in Germany) do not play any role of brokerage within the sector (betweenness 0). In other cases, on the contrary, the most powerful organizations in terms of in-degree centrality are also those that play an important role as brokers within the network (i.e. have the highest values of betweenness), indicating an absolute power in the extreme right community. This is, for instance, the case of political movements and cultural organizations in the French network (betweenness 3.9 and 2.5 respectively), and to a partial extent, of neo-Nazi and revisionists in the Italian case (betweenness 3.4 and 2.6 respectively). Finally, in other extreme right online milieus, we observe

a sort of division of labor among organizations, between those who play a role as gatekeeper and those who are prominent points of reference to whom all the others refer. This is for instance the case of the German network, where subcultural youth groups, although not central, are very important ‘brokers’ (betweenness value 2.9).

Political parties have higher betweenness in the United Kingdom than elsewhere (1.2), where instead they appear as lacking intermediation power. Although recognized to different extents, they therefore do not occupy strategic positions, and so cannot advance any further bargaining power on other actors in the network. It seems like groups that are characterized by higher structural organizational constraints are penalized in terms of intermediation power, as their level of formalization might prevent their flexible adjustment to (online) network dynamics.

Looking at political movements we notice that they work as brokers more in France than anywhere else (3.9), while nostalgic and revisionists play a role as gatekeepers especially in Italy (2.5). This confirms the crucial role of this category in the extreme right milieu of this country. Elsewhere, intermediation played by nostalgic organizations is residual, as for example in the United States, the United Kingdom and France (betweenness values about 1 in all cases). However, looking at the American case in relative terms, revisionist-negationist groups play a brokerage role to some extent in this dispersed network (0.2). In particular, a number of such groups (as for example, Issues and Views) act as a sort of ‘bridge’ between the KKK and militia group clusters on the one hand, and the organizations located in the center of the network on the other. This might reflect their visibility and diffusion in the offline reality, since Holocaust denial groups are particularly strong in the US case (Burris et al. 2000: 221).

Neo-Nazi organizations are particularly strategic within the Italian environment (3.4) and, partly, also in Spain (almost 2). This confirms not only that these groups have reached countries where more open political opportunities favor their consolidation, they have also become crucial in the construction of a modern extreme right discourse, mediating content and controlling communication flows on the Web. Neo-Nazis also constitute the third most strategic group in the German context (1.2), indicating that even if their prestige has been overshadowed by other types of new (youth) groups, nevertheless their role remains crucial. It remains a matter of empirical research to detect if they continue to provide issues and main elements that ground the extreme right political activities.

Cultural groups play a relevant brokerage role in France (2.5), consistently with their prestige within the network. In this country also subcultural groups show a notable intermediation power (2.7).<sup>26</sup> Rather, there seems to be a cleavage between continental Europe, on the one hand, and the United Kingdom and United States, on the other, according to which the strategic relevance of subcultural organizations

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<sup>26</sup> Specifically, it is the political movement Freier Widerstand that shows the highest value of betweenness in the network (553.26). It is followed by the subcultural group HolsteinerWS (382.23) and by the neo-Nazi KsBerg (315.82).

is limited outside the continent (mean betweenness values approaching zero in the United Kingdom and United States). However, in Spain, youth organizations, far from the past Francoist regime, have, however, also weak connections with anti-Semitism and racism typical of other European youth skinhead (and New Right) organizations (Rodríguez 1999). Here, nationalistic and patriotic groups, instead, are particularly relevant in terms of intermediation (2.7), in line with the prestige they enjoy in this milieu.

**Table 3.3 Betweenness of different types of organizations, across countries (mean normalized values)**

	France	Spain	Great Britain	United States	Germany	Italy
PP	0.73	0.24	1.25	-	-	0.11
PM	3.86	0.60	0.73	0.02	1.32	1.87
NR	0.71	0.04	0.68	0.83	0.18	2.45
NAZI	-	1.97	1.03	0.08	1.20	3.39
CUL	2.47	-	1.06	0.02	-	1.93
COMM	-	0.03	0.29	-	-	0.86
SUB	2.70	1.09	0.15	0.15	1.89	1.29
NAT	0.66	2.75	1.25	-	0.99	0.81
OTH	0.59	0.40	0.66	-	0.12	-

Note: see Table for 3.2 for explanation of abbreviations.

### The Sub-groups of Extreme Right Organizations

In order to examine the characteristics of the configuration of the six (online) networks in more detail, we focus our attention on specific patterns of exchanges between and within different ‘subgroups’ of organizations. This analysis will help us to observe in further detail the specific shape of network patterns across different ‘sub-nets’ of the extreme right area. In fact, behind similar measures of cohesion of the whole network, there might be important differences in terms of the concentration of exchanges within and across main subgroups (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). In order to identify the main online coalitions that are built within the six extreme right milieus, we have conducted a *block model analysis* which helps to group together “structurally equivalent” actors (Breiger et al. 1975).

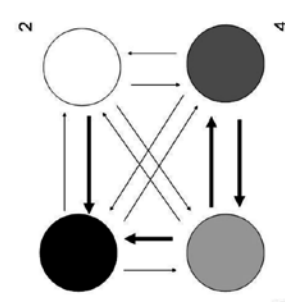
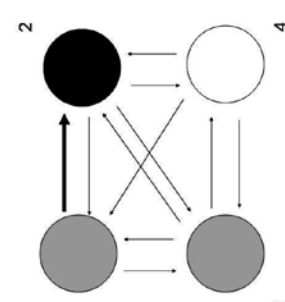
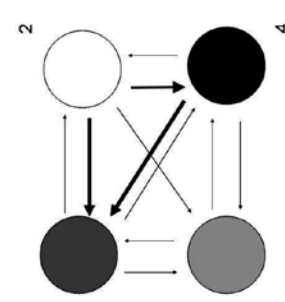
This analysis divides the actors of the network into discrete subsets called ‘blocks,’ placing actors within the same block if they have similar relations to all the other actors. Therefore, a group (or block) which is identified in such a way can unify actors who are very different from each other in typological terms (e.g. neo-Nazi groups and right-wing political parties), but which are grouped together by virtue of being similar because of the structure of relations into which they are inserted (i.e. using the words of social capital scholars, if they hold the same relational resources). This is important since it is considered as influencing the behavior of actors (Diani 2003).

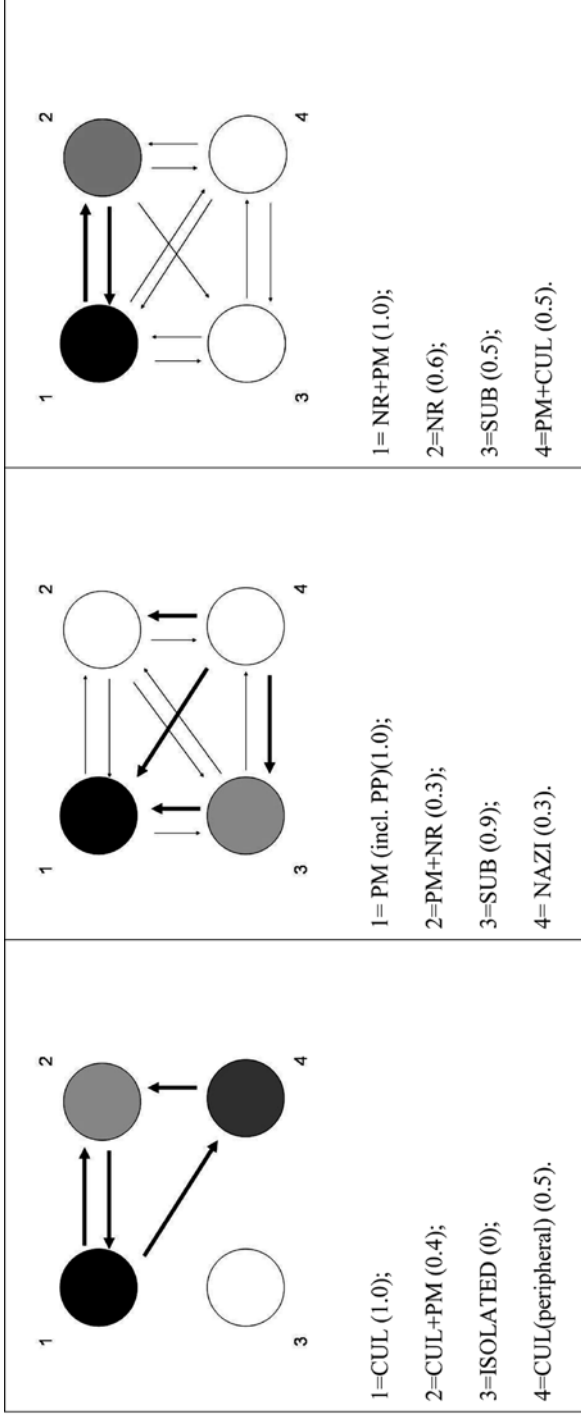
For each right-wing network in each country, four blocks have been identified. A ‘block model’ represents the pattern of ties between and within these blocks. In this sense, a block corresponds precisely to a set of structurally equivalent actors which may or may not be a “coalition” (as defined by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), depending on its internal density. Usually, scholars classify extreme right organizations using ‘a priori’ categories, namely ‘logic’ types into which they group organizations that are similar in terms of ideology (e.g. the ‘revisionist’ organizations) or organizational resources (e.g. political parties vs. more informal groups). The advantage of block-model analysis is that it can allow for the classification of the extreme right organizations under study through (their) ‘social relations/networks.’

In order to interpret the configuration of coalitions, we must look at the *composition of the different blocks* (Table 3.B in the Appendix) and their *patterns of exchanges* through the density matrices, which allow us to evaluate the density of relations within and between the blocks of actors (see Table 3.C in the Appendix). For each country, the density matrix containing the values of exchanges between blocks has been converted into a simple graph (an image matrix, see Figure 3.2), according to the following: exchanges between blocks that are less dense than the overall density (cut-off values) = 1; exchanges whose density exceeded (or equal) this threshold = 2; the absence of exchanges between blocks is indicated in the image matrix with value = 0. The nodes in these graphs correspond to the four blocks identified within each network. In addition we have calculated the average power of the actors for each block and colored nodes consistently with their mean power – the darker the color, the higher the power of a block.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the thickness of the ties mirrors the intensity of exchanges between the blocks: the bolder the ties, the stronger the relation (for a similar representation see Kriesi et al. 2006).

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<sup>27</sup> For each block the power (mean values) is calculated drawing on the mean in-degree values of the organizations belonging to the group (i.e. block) (see Table 3.C in the Appendix). In Figure 3.2 the normalized value for each block in each country (which allows the comparison across countries) is shown between brackets beside each block composition.

France	Spain	United Kingdom
 <p>1 = PM+PP (0.9);  2 = NAT+SUB (0.7);  3 = PM+NAT (0.8);  4 = PM+CUL (1.0).</p>	 <p>1 = SUB (0.4);  2 = SUB+CUL (1.0);  3 = SUB+NAZI (0.4);  4 = PP (0.3).</p>	 <p>1 = NAT+NAZI (1.0);  2 = NR (0.2);  3 = PP (0.4);  4 = NAT+OTH (0.5).</p>
USA	Germany	Italy



**Figure 3.2 Relationships between blocks, per country (representation of image matrices; blocks composition and power)**

*Note:* PP= Political Parties; PM= Political Movements (including White Supremacists); NR= Nostalgic, revisionist, negationist groups; NAZI= Neonazi groups; CUL= Cultural, new age, neo mystical, traditional Catholic groups (including Christian Identity and KKK groups); COMM= Commercial and Publishers; SUB= Subcultural organizations; NAT= nationalistic and patriotic organizations (including MIL= Militia, Patriot); OTH= Single issues organizations, other groups. The normalized power (mean values) for each block are in brackets. Bolder ties correspond to ties= 2 in the image matrix.

The first element that emerges from the analysis is that in all right-wing milieus, with the exception of Unites States, all four blocks of organizations are equally involved in extensive contacts and exchanges (i.e. ties) among themselves, which also tend to be reciprocal. However, different configurations (i.e. coalitions and cleavages between organizations) develop in the different country contexts. In some extreme right networks, some blocks are joined by non-reciprocal ties (which suggests that whereas one block is actively seeking allies, the other which receive the ties is indifferent or not interested in this alliance). In other online extreme right milieus, blocks are joined by systematic exchanges (which suggests a close affinity and potential for collaboration), or vice versa, by particularly weak or absent ties. In addition, different subgroups of right-wing actors (blocks) emerge as the most powerful and 'dominant' in the different networks. In particular, looking at the French network (Table 3.B in the Appendix) the first block of actors that emerge from the analysis is quite homogeneous, and includes mostly political movements (41 percent) and political parties (23 percent). We can label it as the *political parties and movements block*.<sup>28</sup> This is the most powerful block of the French extreme right milieu (mean power 4.36),<sup>29</sup> together with block 4, which includes a majority of political movements (40 percent) and cultural organizations (27 percent) and for this reason can be labeled the *cultural movements block* (mean power 4.67). Although block 1 is not characterized by a significant internal density (0.041), it nevertheless exhibits some characteristics of a 'dominant' position within the sector, since it is the block that receives most contacts from all the others (especially from blocks 2 and 4), a sign of its affirmed prestige within the network. Block 2, formed for the large majority by nationalistic (40 percent) and subcultural (30 percent) organizations (i.e. *subcultural block*) is instead the least powerful (mean power 3.40). Block 3 could be labeled the *nationalistic political movements block*, since it is composed of political movements (36 percent) and nationalistic organizations (27 percent). However, in the French network, in general, the power distribution within the four blocks is quite balanced as the differences between the four blocks are not very high. There is an extensive network of inter-block ties through which movement organizations can potentially access, contribute to and produce a wide range of material (e.g. information), identity and symbolic resources (Cinalli 2006). The subcultural block, although marginal, is nevertheless linked to the overall network through the numerous ties it sends to the other blocks (above all 1 and 4), actively seeking allies. The various souls of the French far

28 Organizations falling under the category of political movements are quite numerous in France and tend to be over-represented in comparison to other organizational types. For this reason, political movement groups tend to be very present in all blocks of structural equivalent nodes in this network. What makes the difference, then, is the secondary component of blocks where the presence of political movements is determinant.

29 The data concerning the power of the blocks, per country (mean values and normalized mean values) are not shown. They are available on request.

right sector seem in this way ‘unified.’ Only the ‘nationalistic’ block 3 is the most decoupled from the whole network.

In the English case a high density of reciprocal contacts exists above all between blocks 3 composed mainly of political parties (31 percent) (i.e. *political parties block*) and 4, composed by nationalistic (26 percent) and single-issue organizations (17 percent) (i.e. *nationalistic single-issues block*), suggesting the presence of an ‘alliance’ among them. This draws attention to how many nationalistic and patriotic groups have potential for collaborations with the British political parties, as well as to the interest shown by the latter ones toward nationalistic values. In this sector, however, a clear ‘dominant’ role is played by block 1, (composed of nationalistic groups, 21 percent; and by neo-Nazi, 18 percent—i.e. the *neo-Nazi and nationalistic block*).<sup>30</sup> Indeed, although being rather heterogeneous, block 1 is the most powerful in the network (mean power 6.38), it is characterized by a significant internal density (0.103) and it is, at the same time, the block that receives most contacts from all the others. Instead block 2 (of the *nostalgic/revisionist organizations*, 35 percent in the block), for its weak power (mean power 1.52), scarce internal density (0.026) and for being rather decoupled from the overall network, except for the links it sends to block 1, appears as a block ‘associated’ (or “satellite”) (Kriesi et al. 2006) to block 1. It is worthy of note that in this network the block of political parties play a sort of brokerage role linking block 4 to block 1. On the contrary, they seem scarcely interested in contacts with the block of nostalgic groups, as indicated by a weak communication flow going from block 3 to block 2. The indifference, however, is reciprocal.

In the Italian case, the most evident block of actors that emerges from the analysis (block 1) is rather heterogeneous, containing some of the main revisionist groups (53.6 percent) and political movements (14.3 percent) of the extreme right. Although being rather heterogeneous, these actors are however united by the reference to the fascist period and to fascist ideology, therefore it can be denominated the *block of (traditional) neo-fascist organizations*. Block 2, more internally homogeneous, is composed of nostalgic and revisionist organizations (63 percent), clearly characterized by the historical reference and the attempt to paint Italian fascism in a positive light. We can label them as the block of *nostalgic and revisionist organizations*. Block 3 can be characterized as the block of *youth subculture*, since it includes different music groups and record labels, soccer (89 percent) and some cultural associations of the so-called ‘antagonist information’ (6 percent). This block is characterized by a dense structure of internal ties (0.147), constituting a sort of “advocacy coalition” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Block 1 (being the most powerful and densely connected internally) (mean power 7.54) shows a dominant position within the network, but it receives only few contacts from blocks 3 and 4 (denominated the *political movement and cultural block*, for the balanced participation of political movements and cultural

<sup>30</sup> It is worth to notice that, beside these two components, political parties are also quite important (15 percent of nodes in the group).

organizations). Moreover, the indifference between the blocks is reciprocal. The 'traditional neo-fascist organizations' group could play the role of a broker in any attempt to unify the sector, since it receives and sends numerous links to the various organizations of the network, however, it does not succeed in connecting the area of the youth subculture of today's extreme right. This latter sector itself does not seem to be interested in maintaining any contact with the area of the neo-fascist organizations. The political parties, interestingly split into three different blocks (see again Table 3.B in the Appendix) remain the big 'absentees' of the Italian extreme right field. Divided by disagreements among them, they cannot succeed in uniting into a coalition the respective contacts that they could individually enjoy within the network.

In comparison with the Italian network, the German one shows quite the opposite attitude. First, the composition of blocks identified within this network is more neatly defined than that of all other networks examined so far. Block 1 is the *political movements and parties block* (32 percent and 5 percent); block 2 gathers political movements (31 percent) and revisionist groups (25 percent) (*nostalgic block*); block 3 is mainly composed of subcultural organizations (42 percent), including the Kameradschaften (hence, it will be the *subcultural block*); while block 4 is mainly made up of neo-Nazi groups (67 percent) (i.e. the *Nazi block*). As interesting features of this configuration, we see a dense web of strong (and reciprocal) exchanges between almost all blocks. It is not by chance that block 1 (which shows a clear dominant position thanks to the many links it receives from the other blocks) consists of various non-party groups, as the Widerstand sites and the Aktionsbüros, which are political movement organizations that coordinate the activities of the more dispersed and more locally organized and smaller groups. In instrumental terms this extensive web of contacts between blocks is useful to increase the flow of information, allocate responsibility and increase the flexibility of collective action (Cinalli 2006). In addition, while blocks characterized by a more subcultural nature are far more relevant (i.e. block 3 for its internal density constitutes a proper 'coalition'), block 4 mainly made up of neo-Nazi groups (hence, it will be the *Nazi block*) is less powerful (mean power 2.33). This could suggest that the extreme right environment in Germany is structuring around new types of discourses and organizational forms. However the Nazi block is extremely active in seeking alliances with all the other actors, in a non-selective way.

Turning to Spain, blocks 1 and 3 are built in the far right virtual sector mainly by subcultural and neo-Nazi groups.<sup>31</sup> Block 2 mixes heterogeneous organizations, including commercial (17 percent), subcultural (36 percent) and cultural/new age/neo-mystical groups (22 percent) and, therefore, could be labeled the *cultural block mixed block*. Finally, block 4 is composed mainly of *political parties* (45

31 Still, the weight of the two categories in the two cases is different: within block 1 subcultural organizations account for 35 percent of all nodes, while within block 3 they gather the same number of nodes as the neo-Nazis (25 percent each). To mirror this situation, we can label block 1 as the *subcultural block* and block 3 as the *subcultural Nazi block*.

percent). The Spanish configuration shows no dominant positions (the most similar to a dominant block is that one composed by subcultural and cultural groups but with few received ties) and no collaboration and strictly relations among groups in and between blocks. Indeed, in this network, there is only one very dense communication flow that goes between blocks: blocks 1 and 2, which is actually not surprising given the ideological closeness of them. In addition, there are some selective relations, such as that between block 1 and block 4: while political parties do acknowledge the presence of the subcultural groups, the reverse is not true, a signal of conflict or indifference between these two areas. In sum, the block of parties emerges as the weakest of the network (mean power 1.82) and the most marginal in the exchanges with the other blocks (receiving few links only from blocks 2 and 3).

Finally, in the United States, the high level of fragmentation is reflected also in the composition and relations between blocks. The 'isolated nodes' gather all in one block, detached from the overall network (block 3) and dense (and reciprocal) relations are only present in this virtual community between blocks 1 (the *cultural block*, including 30 percent of cultural/New Age/Catholic integralist groups), and 2 (i.e. the *political movements and neo-Nazi block*), that are the biggest and the most internally homogeneous. Indeed, as many commentators stress, the American radical right is deeply rooted in, and influenced by, religious values such as those promoted by the Christian identity movement, and its "beliefs are often a commonality shared between the different organizations of the radical right, with members of other organizations such as the KKK and neonazis adhering to [them]" (Bowman-Grieve 2009: 992). Instead, the Christian patriot and racialist right are really two different and separated movements, although there are some commonalities (ibid.: 991), as confirmed in our analysis by the clearly decoupled position of block 4 in the network (composed by *peripheral militia block*).

To summarize, the configurations of power and the main 'coalitions' that are built within the six extreme right online milieus are very different in the countries, with varying degrees and forms of mobilization.

## Conclusion

The main goal of this chapter has been to analyze the organizational (and potential mobilizational) structure of the online communities of the European and American extreme right, delving into the structural properties of connections among these extreme right groups. Our results confirm that extreme right organizations are aware of the importance of social networking online, "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). This is also attested by the notable presence of these organizations on the Net and the high number of right-wing organizational websites found in all countries.

However, beyond this general trend, common to our cases, we found important country specificities. First, our data reveal that not all types of extreme right organizations seem to manage equally well the inherent challenges of the Internet in order to become “*legionari* (legionnaires) of the space” (Caldiron 2001: 337–338). Whereas in some countries (such as in France for example, but also partly in Germany) the right-wing online sector emerges as an arena where the actors endorsed with more institutional resources offline, such as political parties, are those most able to succeed; in contrast, in other countries (such as in Spain or Italy) they are clearly the ‘losers’ in term of visibility—at least in the virtual public sphere. Vice versa, in other countries, subcultural youth and cultural movements emerge as particularly prominent in the extreme right milieu, often entering into alliances and exchanges (such as in the United States, Germany, etc.) with the various ‘souls’ of the right radical area. In general (but not in Italy), the more traditional right (represented by the nostalgic and revisionist groups) emerge as the more marginal actor in right-wing networks and less engaged in online inter-organizational networking.

Second, our analysis also confirms that networks matter both as resources and opportunities for mobilization. In those countries where the participation of specific right-wing actors in the milieu is limited, they try to compensate for their marginal role with a dense network of linkages among themselves (as for example the case of subcultural groups in France, nostalgic revisionists in UK and Nazi organizations in Germany), which potentially support mobilization and favor the emergence of shared goals and collective identities (Diani 2003).

Finally, and most importantly, the overall configuration of the extreme right virtual communities is different (embodying a different potential mobilizational structure) in the six countries.

The Italian and British extreme right networks appear to be very fragmented, highly diversified and difficult to coordinate, whereas the German (and partly the French) network is denser and much more concentrated on a few central actors.<sup>32</sup> 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. Aiming at linking these different configurations to some ideal-types elaborated in social network theory and considered as endorsing a different impact on the potential for mobilization, we see the following. Bringing together the various features that have emerged in our (micro, meso and macro) analysis, we can characterize the Italian and British extreme right structures on the Web as *policephalous*, i.e. a structure that is both

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32 The French network shows, compared to the others, the highest levels of exchanges between organizations (indicated by the high values of out-degree), and some types of French extreme right groups have the highest levels of unifying capacity (betweenness). Similarly the German extreme right network is the densest compared to the others, the most connected internally (average degree), and most centralized around some few types of right-wing groups which enjoy the highest levels of in-degree values.

centralized and segmented. The German (and French) extreme right more closely resembles the *star* model, that is, a highly centralized structure (Diani 2003). The Spanish resembles what in social network analysis is called a *latent network*. Finally, the American one—which shows the lowest levels of centralization of power, cohesion and coordination among the various parts of the sector—can be characterized as a *segmented-decentralized* structure (ibid.: 312). In this latter case, we are dealing with such an extremely loose chain that it is therefore difficult to speak of a unified right-wing sector on the Internet.

In the network analysis, the star structure reflects a situation in which high levels of centralization coincide with low levels of segmentation. To be precise, some central actors organize exchanges within the network and act as coordination points between the peripheral elements, which are rarely directly linked with one another. In the marginal areas of the network, we find some sites that are barely connected with each other, but most refer “instrumentally” (ibid.: 310) to the central actors of the network. Compared to other types of structures, a policephalous network is partially segmented, as the distance between some actors is rather high, and the presence of horizontal links between the peripheral actors<sup>33</sup> demonstrates a desire to participate actively in the political life of the milieu without relying exclusively on a small number of central actors. However, the network is also relatively centralized, since some actors engage in contacts more frequently than others and are, thus, in a better position to control the exchanges (relational, cognitive, etc.) within the network. It is worth noting that the level of segmentation of a network reflects the level of the limits imposed on communication among the actors. It can be ideological whenever the relational distance between the actors increases with the differences in their respective (ideological) positions. This is, for instance, the case for Italy, where a variety of labels, political parties, groups and movements exist within the extreme right area (some of them belonging to the so-called New Right, Wetzel 2009: 341), characterized by long-standing ideological battles among them (Scaliati 2005). Alternatively, it can be based on issues, whenever the factor that divides them is simply represented by differences in the level of interest for specific topics (Diani 2003: 306), as in the American case, where some right-wing movements have strong links to the Nazi past and others unite populist claims (nationalism, localism, fiscal protests) with anti-immigration platforms characterized by para-fascist features (EUMC 2004). In both case (ideological vs. instrumental fragmentation), what is certain is that this structural arrangement of the extreme right does not seem to be conducive to close cooperation among different parts of the sector (e.g. between the party-political side of the extreme right field and the new right youth subcultural part, or between the youth area and the traditional neo-fascist one). In the star structure, instead, fast and efficient diffusion of communication and information among the various actors is guaranteed (Cinalli 2006). Nevertheless, on the other hand in such a hierarchical

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33 As seen for example in the case of the dense linkages between blocks 3 and 4 in the United Kingdom.

structure it is unlikely that the actors occupying the peripheral positions can exert substantial influence over the entire network (Diani 2003: 311). Finally, while a segmented-decentralized structure might not favor collective mobilization, it could however be functional to new forms of organization, matching with the reticular characteristics of the Web and the communication allowed by it.

Although we acknowledge the limits of the use of Internet links as empirical indicators of broader patterns of offline affinity and ideological proximity between organizations, such a study focused on Web links seems to be particularly appropriate for an analysis of extremist organizations. Websites can indeed become an alternative arena in which to locate the basis of these organizations (as a substitute for real offices and headquarters), which, as stressed in Chapter 2, are very often constrained by laws and regulation in the real world. Indeed, as it has been stressed

centrality scores are not simply an academics way to assess visibility on the Web. Such scores have practical consequences. Users navigating the Web are more likely to come across a site if they can click on a link that points to it ... More incoming links increase the probability that search engines ... will find a site to place in their directories. (Vedres et al. 2005: 186)

The 'virtuality' of the Web can help these organizations to appear and disappear, decreasing the risk of prosecution. Therefore, an analysis of the Web links and virtual dynamics between groups can really increase knowledge about the life of these extreme right organizations. However, to what extent this structural segmentation (versus cohesion) is reflected in different (levels and forms of) mobilization of the extreme right both offline and online, is something that will be examined in the following chapters.

## Chapter 4

# Extreme Right Groups and the Internet: Construction of Identity and Source of Mobilization

### Introduction

To what extent and in which ways do right-wing extremist groups in the European countries examined and the United States use the Internet for the construction of their collective identity and propaganda, for building international communities, to 'politically' educate potential new members and for organizing their mobilization? Do different types of extreme right organizations use the Internet for different functions?

While institutions are expressing an increasing interest (and concern) for the phenomenon (e.g. the TE-SAT European Reports), and in response, "some member states have recently established platforms by Internet user groups, service providers and other concerned bodies, that set out to identify and report hate material on the web" (FRA Report 2008: 38), in this chapter we will try to answer these questions via a content analysis of extreme right websites reflecting on the relationship between Internet use and political engagement of these groups.

Specifically, we will investigate the use of the websites by right-wing organizations for diffusing propaganda and information directed toward 'outsiders' and 'insiders' and communicating with the public;<sup>1</sup> portraying the ideology and mission of the group and the promotion of virtual communities of debate; and, finally, the activation of members in political mobilization. Particular attention will be paid to the question as to whether extreme right organizations try to appeal to an international audience through the Web, building transnational contacts with other extremist groups in other countries. In the conclusion cross-country differences and similarities will be underlined and linked to the offline opportunities (and organizational resources) of the political, cultural and technological context of the extreme right in the six democracies.

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1 For the specific website characteristics investigated for each aspect, see Chapter 1, pp. 000–000.

### Websites as Tool for Information and Propaganda?

Texts and works listed below are, in our opinion, fundamental for the internal formation of those who wish to move closer to a traditional view of life, to its religious, political and cultural aspects, but in a multitude of ways and paths. (From the website of the Italian organization Sodalizio del Cerchio Antico<sup>2</sup>)

As the quote above shows, extreme right propaganda via the Internet may assume various forms. For example, the Internet makes it easier for extremist conservative groups (e.g. far right militia organizations in the United States) to combine cultural and political ideas on their websites and for other types of groups to present themselves on the Web as counter-cultural movements appealing to disaffected youngsters (Chroust 2000: 116). Indeed, for such radical organizations, the Internet offers the same set of advantages as it does to any kind of civil society groups (namely, interconnectivity, low cost, the possibility to bypassing a hostile mainstream media)—but it also adds others, such as relative anonymity and covert communication (Chadwick 2006: 138). Recent European investigation on the diffusion of extremism on the Net report that in 2009, six people were arrested in France on charges of racist online propaganda (TE-SAT 2010: 37), and two in England, under the ‘Terrorism Act 2000,’ for their involvement with websites propagating right-wing views (ibid.). The issue of the Internet use by right-wing groups for disseminating their ideology and their cause is therefore even more salient, also because it is related to the ‘societal support’ for extremist groups, considered as a precondition for action (Weimann 2004).

A first important aspect which is strictly related to the use of the Internet as a tool for information and political education of the public is the usability of a website, or more particularly, the possibility for users to easily find the information they seek. From our data we see that extreme right organizations seem to pay attention to this: about one-third (36.9 percent) of websites investigated have a ‘search engine’ and 5.4 percent offer a ‘help function’ to navigate. What is surprising however, especially for such extremist organizations constantly in danger of being banned, is the notable presence on their websites of means of *communication* with the users. More than half of them contain information about the offline ‘reachability’ of the organization (54.2 percent), such as a street address or a phone and fax number, and almost all groups (81.7 percent) provide an email address. The websites of the more institutionalized extreme right organizations appear more sophisticated on this respect, and political parties, for instance, are the most likely to provide tools for communication with the public (77.5 percent).<sup>3</sup> The use of feedback forms is, in general, rarer. Furthermore, extreme right groups

<sup>2</sup> <http://utenti.lycos.it/sodalizio/indice.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> For example a ‘search engine’ is above all present among political movements and parties (in about 55 percent of them); and a ‘help function’ especially among cultural extreme right organizations (16.7 percent).

appear oriented to demonstrate their popularity to the users: 25 percent of them have a hit counter, which keeps track of the number of visitors. Obviously, the hit count may be artificially inflated by an organization (some of the sites analyzed, for instance, claim to have had several million hits). One thing that is certain is that the real organizational strength of a site, and of the group behind it, is always difficult to gauge. Further, we have to take into account that extreme right websites includes a wide range of personal webpages, providing far right ideology with bigger visibility than the size of the groups themselves (Tateo 2005).<sup>4</sup>

Second, our data indicates that the European and American extreme right organizations analyzed make strong use of their websites for disseminating and collecting *information*, which can be considered an important cognitive aspect related to propaganda (Caiani and Parenti 2009: 280). Two-thirds of the extremist right-wing websites (62.4 percent) contain a section in which they publish ‘articles, papers and dossiers’ and half of them (49.8 percent) have a ‘news section’ in which they make reference to media coverage and display newspaper articles, or carry out news coverage, taking information from other newspapers or TV programs.<sup>5</sup> The presence of documents from conferences and seminars is instead rarer (11.8 percent). However, more than one-third (37.3 percent) of organizations offer bibliographical references on their websites. This informative material includes documents that refer to a wide array of issues, such as: biographies of soldier and leaders of the Nazi-fascist period (e.g. biographies of Mussolini and Hitler),<sup>6</sup> classic texts (quotations from or entire downloadable books) from the extreme right literature (e.g. *The Protocol of the Elders of Zion*);<sup>7</sup> books by fascist or neo-fascist intellectuals (e.g. Evola); documents concerning various social and political issues (e.g. bioethics, abortion, bilingual and regionalism,<sup>8</sup> race and immigration,<sup>9</sup>

4 In a cross-country comparison some differences emerge (as confirmed by the high and significant values of the Cramer’s V coefficient: 0.42\*\*\* for the correlation between country and hit counter; 0.21\* search engine; 0.33\*\*\* reachability; 0.18\* email; and 0.27\* the help function). Italian extreme right groups are particularly interested in showing their popularity (about 61 percent of them have an ‘hit counter’), whereas the German and English ones are those more attentive in facilitating the usability of their websites (e.g. through search engines, in 50 percent of both countries). American extreme right groups (but also, among the European organizations, the French ones) emerge as the more equipped with tools of communication (such as addresses, etc.) with the public (in 75 percent of cases).

5 In addition, 13 percent of the analyzed right-wing websites also have an archive of the group’s press releases. This figure increases to 27.5 percent in the case of political parties. In a cross-country perspective, German extreme right groups are the more likely to offer an archive of their press releases on their websites (in 25 percent of cases), followed by the Italian and French ones (in about 19 percent of cases each).

6 E.g. the website of the Italian Il Duce (<http://www.ilduce.altervista.org/home.htm>).

7 See for example the website of Aryan Unity (<http://www.aryanunity.com/page1.html>).

8 See the website of the French Alsace d’Abord ([www.alsacedabord.org](http://www.alsacedabord.org)).

9 E.g. Historical Review Press (<http://ety.com/HRP/index.htm>).

the Free Masons, the Italian Social Republic,<sup>10</sup> as well as philosophy, religion and spirituality<sup>11</sup>); Holocaust revisionist and negationist titles;<sup>12</sup> collections of tales on the Nazi/fascist and Francoist period;<sup>13</sup> and even political manifestos of extreme right political parties.<sup>14</sup>

For example, on the website of the nostalgic right-wing Italian organization Il Foro Mussolini,<sup>15</sup> one finds documents with detailed descriptions of the fascist architecture and, on the website of the Spanish group Inmigracionmasiva.com,<sup>16</sup> reports and statistical data on immigration in Spain are present. Similarly, the American Nazi group Stormfront<sup>17</sup> makes use of its website to offer to the visitors several excerpts of Hitler's speeches, as well as written works concerning eugenics. Our data do not show significant differences between the types of right-wing organizations in the orientation to use the websites for this function, suggesting that information is an important aspect of Internet usage for the entirety of the extreme right sector. However, in a cross-country perspective, American extreme right organizations are the most likely to provide materials for the information and the political education of the public through the Web. This may include bibliographical references (in 65 percent of cases), which are however also present amongst the websites of the European organizations, especially the Italian ones (in 43.5 percent of cases).<sup>18</sup> English websites are those which most frequently offer articles, papers and dossiers (in about 80 percent of cases).<sup>19</sup> If, in general, only a minority of the extreme right organizations (10.2 percent) have a section in which they cite 'documents from conferences' that the group itself organizes or attends, French websites are especially active in this respect (in 27.8 percent of cases).<sup>20</sup> Political parties and movements are those with the richest opportunities for finding information material on their websites (offering 'articles and dossiers' in 80 percent of cases, documents from 'seminar and conferences' in 37 percent and a 'news section' in 67.5 percent of cases). Cultural right-wing organizations most commonly offer 'bibliographical references' (63.6 percent of them), whereas

10 E.g. RSI. Repubblica Sociale Italiana (<http://www.italia-rsi.org/>).

11 See for example the website of the American group National Socialist Movement (<http://www.nsm88.org/>).

12 See the website of the revisionist group The Zundelsite (<http://www.zundelsite.org/>).

13 E.g. the website of the Spanish group Fundación División Azul (<http://www.fundaciondivisionazul.org/>).

14 E.g. the group England First Party (<http://efp.org.uk/>).

15 <http://foroitalico.altervista.org/secondapagina.htm>.

16 <http://www.inmigracionmasiva.com/>.

17 <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t811175/>.

18 The Cramer's V coefficient indicating the strength of the relation between country and the presence of 'bibliographical reference' on the website is 0.35\*\*\*.

19 The Cramer's V coefficient between country and the offer of 'paper and dossiers' is strong and significant at 0.40\*\*\*.

20 Cramer's V, 0.23\*\*\*.

subcultural skinhead groups seem the least oriented toward using the Web for these functions.

In order to insert our data on the extreme right into a comparative perspective, we can refer to a similar study on left-wing organizations belonging to the so-called ‘new global movement.’<sup>21</sup> This analysis demonstrated that, among 261 left-wing organizational websites analyzed across Europe, almost all the organizations publish articles, papers and dossiers (90 percent) and have a section for news (78 percent). This is also the case regarding the offering of bibliographical references, as well as documents from conferences and seminars, which is more frequent on the websites of the left (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 537).

Our data highlights that European and American right-wing groups are particularly oriented toward a user who is an actual or potential member: their websites are especially used for *propaganda* toward insiders or outsiders,<sup>22</sup> offering a rich and variegated anthology of documents, photos and propaganda material explicitly recalling the fascist and Nazi iconography and rhetoric. Almost half of the websites analyzed in all countries (40 percent) contain ‘hate symbols’ such as swastikas or burning crosses, eagles, *fasci littori* and *gladio* (the traditional fascist symbols),<sup>23</sup> photos of Mussolini and Hitler, images related to the German Reich, flags from the fascist past.<sup>24</sup> For example, on the website of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan<sup>25</sup> the visitor is welcomed by an image of a hooded man with a Bible in one hand, a wooden cross in the other and a black background with a Celtic cross on fire; and on the Italian website *Omaggio al Duce*,<sup>26</sup> we find Mussolini’s images in various poses (profile, front, talking, etc.) together with *fasci littori* and eagles around. In addition, 30 percent of the websites of extreme right organizations contain banners<sup>27</sup> (depicting representative figures), and graphic symbols or seals intended to incite hatred against social and/or political adversaries—as in the case of the Italian site *Spedizione Punitiva*, where one enters the homepage to see an Italian flag waving, a ‘no entry’ road

21 This study (Demos project) is based on an investigation of political communication, mobilization and democracy on the websites of left-wing organizations in six European countries (France, Italy, Germany, UK, Spain and Switzerland). See <http://demos.iue.it/>.

22 In our analysis we have distinguished between propaganda directed toward the insiders, namely members and/or sympathizers and propaganda directed toward a larger public (outsiders) (see also Zhou et al. 2005).

23 See for example the website *Brigata Nera* (<http://it.geocities.com/brigatanera88/>) or the symbol of the American Nazi Party consisting of an eagle posed on a swastika (<http://www.americannaziparty.com/>).

24 But also more violent images such as fire and flames, swords, guns, escutcheons, fists and armed soldiers. See the website *Nuovo MSI* (<http://members.xoom.alice.it/nuovomsi/>).

25 For a vision of these hates symbols, see <http://www.kkkk.net/>.

26 See, <http://spazioinwind.libero.it/mussolini/index2.htm>.

27 Banners are images (GIF, flash) usually in a high-aspect ratio shape, often employing animation, sound or video.

sign for Che Guevara and a skull close to the communist symbol of hammer and sickle,<sup>28</sup> or the site Il Duce.net, where we find a child who urinates on communist images. Similarly, on the website of the organization Fascismo in Rete<sup>29</sup> there is an American flag burning and on that of the group Aryan Nations<sup>30</sup> a banner representing Ariel Sharon breathing out flames and words ('The Jew is a parasite, an enemy of our Western Civilization')<sup>31</sup> is shown. What is important to notice here is that, beyond having an instrumental effect, the new digital media, and the messages they can transmit, imply changes in the formation of opinions and in the forms of civic and political engagement, especially with respect to young generations, playing therefore a role in the shaping of the broader political culture and its transformations (Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 91). Indeed, among the various novelties introduced by new technologies, there is increasing resonance given to images and audiovisual content and this can have strong political relevance. This can contribute greatly to modify the ways in which citizens get informed and 'participate' politically within the Net, since the audiovisual messages can express and address the emotional and informal aspects of politics, beyond rationality (ibid.: 24). In addition, the structure of the Internet, and above all its lack of legal surveillance, makes it less dangerous to diffuse extremist or even forbidden views through the Web.

Quite common in extreme right websites are also symbols representing animals (e.g. eagles, wolves, lions, etc.) and Celtic images (runes, Celtic crosses, etc.). For example, on the first page of the website of the English KKK<sup>32</sup> the visitor is welcomed by burning crosses, swords, eagles and Celtic crosses, as well as images of men dressed in KKK hoods. Similarly, on the website of the German group Nationaler Widerstand Berlin Brandenburg we find iron crosses, imperial eagles, black flags and images of the Anglo-American bombings of German cities in 1945. Some of the symbols, however, simply represent the logo of the organization. Especially on subcultural youth extreme right websites, traditional 'hate symbols' related to the social-nationalist past are less present and there is instead a cross-fertilization with symbols borrowed from the left (on this point see also Di Tullio 2006). The aesthetic character of (historical) fascism has been widely underlined, stressing the power of its discourse, including the nonlinguistic

28 Similarly on the Italian website Il Ras there is a banner depicting a skull with the communist symbol in front, and on the German website of the Freie Nationalisten Altmark West there is a prominent image saying 'against anarchists' and showing a fist punching the letter 'A.'

29 <http://digilander.libero.it/fascismoinrete1/>.

30 <http://www.aryan-nations.org>.

31 Similarly, on the site of the German organization Aktionsbüro Rhein Necka we find a banner showing a man and a woman as 'the Germanic ideal' calling on 'fight, resistance and action' and on the German subcultural site Nationaler Widerstand Berlin Brandenburg there is a banner depicting Uncle Sam indicating the 'Axes of evil: Nato, UN, IMF, USA.'

32 <http://www.whiteknights-kkk.co.uk/>.

forms (rituals, myths and images), as an essential element in the formation of the regime's self-identity, the construction of its goals and ends and, in sum, the making of its success (Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 1). Indeed, as it has been argued, more than mere means of political legitimation, rituals, myths, cults and speeches are fundamental to the construction of power, its specific physiognomy, its political vision (ibid.: 4). The fascist regime's symbolic aspects (i.e. cultural elements) has been therefore related to its ability to 'sacralize politics' (Gentile 1990), to the creative impact on its power evolution (with rituals and myths used to help establish an orderly social world against the anarchy of mass democracy), to the transformation of politics as a cultic experience with the production of ritual values, and ultimately to the aesthetic disposition present in Mussolini's regime leading to the identification of the statesman with the artist and his idea of the state as a work of art (Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 5–8). If this is true for historical fascism, we do not have to underestimate the role of cultural forms of politics for current extreme right movements as well. They are indeed further enhanced by new technologies, which, as cinematic resources of propaganda of past fascist groups, allow with their audiovisual communication to dynamically formulate groups' self-identity, ideology and power.

However, as our analysis shows, something is changing, compared to the 'traditional' aesthetics of fascism, in the symbols of right-wing websites. First of all, as suggested by many sources, there is an increasing presence of women used as decoys to make visible claims which would be not accepted otherwise if screamed by a 'threatening' skinhead. Second, a transformation in the way these groups present themselves to the public is evident, with the abandonment of the obsolete skinhead classic style and the preference instead for clothes or brand-name goods of young fashion in which it is less evident that they belong to the extreme right 'scene,' as for example the 'Autonomous Nationalists,' who borrow clothing and action forms from movements of the left.<sup>33</sup> A new generational step is currently visible, as our analysis shows especially in right-wing subcultural websites, in right-wing symbology: symbols from the past are left behind and new images are elaborated/created from artistic sections of various movements, often in line, however, with traditional and spiritual principles (see for example the websites of the Italian groups belonging to the network of extreme right alternative-cultural organizations, Di Tullio 2006). It is worth underlining anyway that the new media are powerful agents for transmission of knowledge and meanings, therefore in the process of political socialization (Mosca and Vaccari 2012).

Beyond that it goes without saying that propaganda on right-wing websites also helps to reinforce internal solidarity within the 'virtual' peer groups which is very important for such types of organizations widely recognized as prone to splits (EUMC 2004). Indeed as shown by a study conducted through (online) interviews to extreme right activists also internal morale is enhanced through the

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33 *La Stampa*, "I Neonazisti traslocano su Internet" ("Neonazis Move into the Internet"), July 24, 2011.

Internet. It emerged that, since members of the group “largely share each other’s views [online], they can express themselves freely, and generally feel accepted by the others” (De Koster and Houtman 2008: 1160), almost all respondents who experience offline stigmatization experience online solidarity and comradeship, “a feeling of connectedness that confers a sense of belonging” (Nieckarz 2005). In general, such organizations “given their cellular and porous nature” are greatly assisted by the scattered and immediate nature of Internet communication to coordinate and sustain their internal solidity and existence (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 8).

Comparing different types of extreme right organizations, hate symbols are particularly present on the websites of neo-Nazi and nostalgic and revisionist groups (in 61–75 percent of cases). These latter ones are also the most likely to have banners and seals (46.4 percent). As for national differences, hate symbols and banners are most likely to be diffused among Italian extreme right organizations (in 52.2 percent of cases), whereas German right-wing websites are the least likely to have them.<sup>34</sup> This can be related to the context of stricter laws against the Nazi-fascist past and its diffusion in the country. Often, banners are grouped together with ‘slogans’ (present in 28 percent of the websites analyzed), another tool of propaganda toward insiders.<sup>35</sup>

Concerning propaganda toward outsiders, one main objective is *recruitment*, and, as noted, the Web is becoming a crucial device for that (Street 2011: 263). Neo-Nazis mainly use Internet and music to attract youths. Indeed the multimedia approach allowed by the Internet is particularly appealing for young people who are usually the preferred target of right-wing groups (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003: 38). According to our analysis, ‘multimedia materials’ are present in the majority of right-wing sites (50.2 percent). In particular, video and music downloads characterized by political content are especially frequent (such as fascist and Nazi songs,<sup>36</sup> as well as songs from far right bands<sup>37</sup>), in addition to audio files of sermons and speeches (e.g. by leaders of the fascist/Nazi regimes<sup>38</sup>). Some right-wing organizations (often political parties) also provide more advanced multimedia materials, as the British National Party proposing on its website

34 The relation between country and the presence of ‘hate symbols’ and ‘banners’ on websites seem quite strong and significant (Cramer’s V coefficient, 0.30\*\*\* and 0.24\*\* respectively).

35 These are slogans for example taken from the text *Protocols of Zion*, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, and the work of David Irving, David Lane, Julius Evola, etc. (e.g. see <http://www.thulean.org/>; <http://www.rvfonline.com/>).

36 As for example on the website Benito Mussolini (<http://spazioinwind.libero.it/mussolini/index2.htm>).

37 See for example the site <http://www.freies-netz-sued.net/>.

38 For example on the German website of the Nationaler Widerstand Berlin Brandenburg it is possible to download the last words of Rudolf Hess at the Nuremberg trial.

the ‘BNP television’ and the French association Nissa Rebela<sup>39</sup> that offer the possibility to link to an online radio streaming. In some (fewer) cases, multimedia materials are game or cartoons, often against those considered social and political adversaries, as for example shown on the website of the Italian Forza Nuova in the game ‘Crush the Gypsy,’ where a contest among drivers ensues, with the goal of tracking down and crushing Roma people.<sup>40</sup> Also very common are ringtones and computer screensavers, as well as videos of demonstrations.<sup>41</sup> The latter seem to play an important role, not only in transmitting a message concerning the group’s ideology, but also in emphasizing the existence (whether true or false) of a numerically significant organization behind the website (see also Tateo 2005). In this way, they try to overcome one of the main limitations of ‘online politics,’ namely its “elusive and ephemeral nature” (Coleman and Blumler 2009: 136). The far right themselves have commented on the Internet’s usefulness in this regard, with Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the French Front National, commenting that the Web was an ideal tool to promote his ideas since it allowed him to counter the ‘censorship and media boycott’ the he encountered in the mainstream press (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 8). There are some variations between different types of extreme right groups, with youth subcultural and neo-Nazi organizations most frequently using multimedia material (in 77.1 and 62.5 percent of cases<sup>42</sup>).

### Extreme Right Websites and Identity Building

The force that animates us and that connects us directly with our historical roots was born with the Italian Social Movement ... Our values are based on anti-communism, militancy and freedom, freedom now denied to Italian youth. (From the section ‘about us’ on the website of the Italian Fronte della Nova Gioventù<sup>43</sup>)

How many opportunities for online conversations and discussions with other activists are there amongst the sites of European and American extreme right organizations? Research on extremist organizations suggests that the construction of the peer group is an important element, in that it contributes to increased involvement in an organization (della Porta 1992). In this respect, it is argued that virtual communities “where people interact on a regular basis to disseminate their

39 [www.nissarebela.com](http://www.nissarebela.com).

40 <http://www.pianetatech.it/internet/social-network/facebook-sulla-pagina-di-forza-nuova-roma-sud-acciacca-lo-zingaro.html>.

41 For example see the website of the British First Party (<http://www.britishfirstparty.org/>).

42 Across countries, multimedia materials are mainly used by English extreme right organizations (in 60 percent of cases, Cramer’s V, 0.20\*\*\*).

43 <http://www.fdng.org/>.

views, share their knowledge, and encourage each other to become increasingly supportive of the movements ... can be seen as important social arenas for the formation of interpersonal bonds” (Bowman-Grieve 2009: 989 and 1003).

In this section, it is not just the practical and communicative use of the Internet by extremists which is studied, but instead its use—as the quote above indicates—as a tool with which an identity may be constructed. Some commentators are skeptical that websites and blogs, due to their vagueness and the absence of ‘real people’ behind them (e.g. Gillan et al. 2008: 35–36), can generate new identities and social communities (Calhoun 2004). However, others have demonstrated that arenas of discussion, such as online forums, chat rooms and mailing lists, play an important role in the construction of the collective identity of a group, by defining who are the ‘enemies’ and the ‘allies,’ who are the ‘us’ and the ‘them,’ and what are the main goals of the group itself (see the study on religious extremist groups by Benard 2005, see also Gerstenfeld et al. 2003: 40; Whine 2000).

According to our data we find that, although the Internet is used less for this function than for propaganda and diffusion of information, many efforts are made by extreme right organizations to *create cyber communities of debate*. However, our analysis also shows that these groups are still facing some difficulties in exploiting all the tools available for Web-based interactivity offered by the Internet: spaces of asynchronous discussion (namely of indirect interactivity among the users) are more widely used than spaces of synchronous discussion (such as for instance forums and chat rooms).<sup>44</sup> One-fifth of the organizations have on their site a ‘newsletter’ (to which it is possible to subscribe) of ongoing activities, providing information for the participation in upcoming offline events or reporting on events that have already taken place<sup>45</sup> and 10.5 percent of them contain ‘online surveys’ and ‘questionnaires’<sup>46</sup> (see Table 4.1). Online surveys and their results generally concern current issues on which the organization is active (as for examples the surveys on the withdrawing of crucifixes from schools, the future of the Zapatero government and the past Francoist regime, posted on the website of the Spanish party España 2000<sup>47</sup>) or on political and social events like local and national elections, political party programs, etc. (see for instance the surveys on the website of Democracia Nacional,<sup>48</sup> or those on the Italian site Benito Mussolini asking the

44 The aforementioned research on the use of the Internet by left-wing organizations belonging to the anti-globalization movement indicates that groups from the left are a bit more active on this use of the Web than the extreme right: about one-third of their websites (36 percent) contain forums and/or mailing lists and the majority of them (51 percent) a newsletter, but only 3 percent of sites offer chat lines and online surveys are also rare (10 percent) (della Porta and Mosca 2006).

45 Political parties (42.5 percent of cases) and nostalgic and revisionist groups (32.1 percent) are those among the most likely to have a newsletter, whereas youth subcultural organizations are the least likely.

46 Again, mostly political parties (in 17.5 percent of cases).

47 <http://www.esp2000.org/>.

48 <http://www.democracianacional.org/dn/>.

public on the preferred form of state for the country, monarchy vs. republic; the return to Italy of King Savoia's family; immigration policies, etc.).

**Table 4.1 An example of surveys on extremist right-wing websites**

<b>Do you agree with fingerprints for all foreigners?</b>	<b>Do you agree with the abrogation of transitory law that forbids the reconstitution of the fascist party?</b>
Yes: 93% No: 6% Don't know: 1%	Yes: 59% No: 41%
Numbers of votes: 101	Numbers of votes: 87

Source: <http://spazioinwind.libero.it/mussolini/> (our translation).

The majority of surveys are however on one of the most important elements of right-wing ideology, namely immigration (Mudde 2007) (Table 4.2). The fact that these issues are given a significant space in online discussions is relevant as it reflects the impact of ideological support on some of the decisions made in everyday life (Bowman-Grieve 2009: 1004).

**Table 4.2 Surveys on immigration on extreme right websites**

<b>What do you think is the most important element within the large multicultural contribution of immigration?</b>	
Increasing crime and offences	14.80%
Anti-Spanish racism (positive discrimination)	5.56%
Cuts in wages and rights	4.58%
Failure of Social Security	4.57%
Ethnic and cultural national destruction	6.59%
All is negative for our survival	63.90%
Total votes: 755	

Source: <http://nubp.blogia.com/> (our translation).

As said, spaces of synchronous debates are rarer, such as forums of discussion and mailing lists (present in 24.1 percent of cases) and chat-lines (in 9.2 percent of all cases). Nostalgic and revisionist groups (and, second, neo-Nazis) are the most likely to have *fora* of discussion (35.7 percent) and online chat rooms (17.9 percent). Again, there is a variation among countries. German organizations are the most likely to offer a newsletter on their websites (in 37.5 percent of cases) and the Spanish ones surveys and questionnaires (in 19 percent of cases),<sup>49</sup> whereas the presence of online chat rooms is particularly diffuse among Italian organizations (17.4 percent).

More typical amongst extreme right organizations analyzed is however the presence of published 'policies or rules' that govern the participation within forum and mailing lists (in 12.5 percent of cases). In this regard, extreme right organizations appear willing to be on the Internet 'mainstream' and to align to the increasing regulation of the Net emanating from state authorities (see Castells 2009; Street 2011). The websites are indeed used by these groups for a function of 'image control' (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003: 40) or 'content management' (Preece 2000). They propose a 'cleaned' image of the organization and frequently contain assertions that the group is non-violent and not hate-oriented. For example, on the forum of the site Il Foro Mussolini pluralism and freedom of speech, as opposed to violence and racism, are underlined; and in the forum of the site Militaria, the use of vulgar language, blasphemy, violent and racist words is prohibited.<sup>50</sup> Similar rules of 'netiquette' can be found in many websites analyzed.<sup>51</sup> In fact, in general (not only as far as rules managing participation in the forums and arenas of debate), extreme right organizations only rarely present on their websites *claims* that *explicitly incite to violence* (in 4.1 percent of cases). When it happens, this is more typical of subcultural youth organizations (in 12.5 percent of cases), and, in a cross-country comparison, on German extreme right websites (15 percent of them), which appear as the most violent and racist.<sup>52</sup> For example, on the site

49 The Cramer's V between country and 'newsletter' is 0.22\*; 'surveys' 0.20\*.

50 For other examples see the forum of the site <http://www.militaria.com/>, where at the entrance it is clearly stressed that the organization "does NOT tolerate any form of discrimination. Any posts violating this provision are subject to immediate deletion ... We do NOT tolerate any members making inappropriate communications (including posts and private messages) disparaging any race"; or the forum of the organization Aime et Sers, where it is stated that "it is absolutely denied to public on this forum messages inciting to armed fight, to martyrs, to terrorism, etc." Similarly on the site American Front we can read at the forum entrance that it is prohibited to "advocate or suggest any activity which is illegal under U.S law. Keep discussion civil and productive ... Make an effort to use proper spelling, grammar and capitalization (no ALL-CAPS posts)" (our translations).

51 See for example the following sites: <http://www.aime-et-sers.com/>; <http://www.present.fr>; <http://logr.org/leerostfriesland/> and <http://www.ab-rhein-neckar.de/index2.html>.

52 The correlation between country and the presence of 'violent claims' is quite strong and significant (Cramer's V, 0.23\*\*).

of the German group *Autonome Nationalisten Ostfriesland*<sup>53</sup> the use of violence is justified, explaining that “autonomous antifascists are a symbol for senseless violence and destruction, mostly with influence of alcohol and drugs. On the contrary [our organization] stand exclusively for ‘sensible’ violence, which means when we get attacked, we will defend ourselves with all certainty, as well against repression of the state and the police. But we will not call for violence without a reason”<sup>54</sup> (our translation).

Other times (the justification of) violence is related to the decadence of the democratic political system, as explained on the site of the organization *AG Schwaben*<sup>55</sup> which explains to the users that: “the question every fighter has to pose himself/herself, is: Do we let ourselves be blinded and watch inactively how our country is being abolished? ... There is only one exit: to attack and destroy the system and so leading Germany in its way to a resurrection and a new national height” (our translation).

Nevertheless, we found other examples of ‘rules’ about discussions online in which the desire to distinguish between relevant ‘out-groups’ and ‘in-groups’ is prevalent on right-wing websites and the participation is allowed only by those ‘who share the group ideology.’ For instance, on the site *National Socialist Punk*,<sup>56</sup> it is stressed that “N.S.P. accepts people who follow racist political ideologies other than National Socialism on our forum”; and on the site of the Italian group *Movimento Fascismo e Libertà*<sup>57</sup> the rules of participation to the forum are related to the group’s ideology and policies: “*Avè* (Hail), this is the forum of *Movimento Fascismo e Libertà*, before becoming a member of the forum, read the ideological rules the *Movimento* is pursuing, read what the *Movimento* thinks about National-socialism, about Islam, Zionism, the servile USA. If the ideas that the M.F.L. is pursuing disturbs you, don’t enter and go elsewhere!!! We do not admit efforts in undermining movement’s stability” (our translation). This is an important aspect that might have a great influence, as argued, on the identity of group (Gaßebner et al. 2003: 40). Ideological control and rule-governed behavior can be manifested and encouraged within these particular online communities (Bowman-Grieve 2009: 1004).

In addition to virtual discussions, the capacity of the Internet to generate new identities is also related, according to social movement scholars (see della Porta and Mosca 2006: 538), to the use of the websites as places for the presentation of the group *mission and goals* to the public. Our data show that, in general,

53 <http://logr.org/leerostfriesland/>.

54 Another example comes from the American website *Supreme White Alliance* (<http://swa43.com/>), that explicitly states that the organization is in fact “Racist. We want our people to be safe in their home’s and be able to walk the streets without worrying about being harmed.”

55 <http://www.ag-schwaben.net/>.

56 <http://www.nazipunk.8k.com/index.html>.

57 <http://www.fascismoeliberata.it/>.

almost all extreme right websites (80 percent) provide a section containing basic information on the group (such as ‘about us,’ ‘who we are,’ etc.)<sup>58</sup> and the majority of them (57 percent of cases) have sections in which they illustrate the group’s goals (e.g. ‘mission statement,’ ‘statute,’ ‘constitution,’ ‘manifesto,’ ‘what we want,’ etc.).<sup>59</sup> In this regard, some websites sum up the goal of the group in a few sentences by highlighting special key words (as for example on the site of the French *Le Coq Gaulois*<sup>60</sup> that simply auto-define the organization as ‘politically alternative’), others offer a detailed description of the core value and the history of the group in those sections (see for example the site of the Spanish organization *Tierra y Pueblo*<sup>61</sup> which explains that the group “is primarily an European and Pro-Europe organization ... born with the main objective of defending European identity, reaffirming all values and principles common to all Indo-European religions.” On the BNP website, for example, a section is devoted to explaining that “the group exists to secure a future for the indigenous peoples of these islands in the North Atlantic which have been our homeland for millennia”; and on the site of the American organization *Militia of Montana*<sup>62</sup> the mission of the group is described as “to be the national focal point for assisting Americans in forming their own grass roots organization dedicated to America’s sovereignty and status as an independent nation in the world.” Finally on the website of the German NPD<sup>63</sup> we can read a manifesto calling for “Work, family, patria ... Jobs for Germans, local oriented national economy against globalization, national democracy, healthy homeland and environment.”

As another important aspect in the process of group identity building it is also quite common among extreme right organizations to show on their webpages the name of the group’s leader as well as the members (‘martyrs’) who ‘died’ or have been ‘ill treated’ for their (fascist/Nazi) ‘faith’ (e.g. denounced, imprisoned, persecuted, etc.) (53 percent).<sup>64</sup> This brings us to the issue of the use of the Web for a mobilization function, which will be treated in the next section.

58 Cultural organizations are prominent on this respect (93.9 percent of cases), as well as neo-Nazi and nationalistic/patriotic groups (both about 87 percent of cases). Italian and French extreme right organizations are those most likely to contain identity information of the groups (in about 84 percent of both cases), whereas the German ones are more reluctant to do that (only half of them). Cramer’s V, 0.23\*\*.

59 Moreover, approximately one-third of the organizations analyzed has an archive of the group annual reports or the chronology of the history of the organization (27.8 percent). This is typical especially of political parties (52.5 percent), but also of other types of less formalized right-wing groups such as subcultural skinhead and neo-Nazi organizations (33–37 percent each).

60 <http://www.coqgaulois.com/>.

61 <http://www.tierraypueblo.com/>.

62 <http://www.militiaofmontana.com/>.

63 [www.npd.de](http://www.npd.de).

64 Especially attentive on this aspect are the American far right groups (56 percent), while, among the European ones, the more formalized organizations (as political parties)

## The Internet and the Potential for Mobilization and Internationalization

According to our data extreme right organizations make use, although still moderately when compared to other functions, of the Internet for *mobilizing*, and, most interestingly, this mobilization effort takes several forms on their websites. Almost one-fifth of the organizations (23.7 percent) offers on their websites an ‘event calendar/agenda’<sup>65</sup> of the group, providing information on meetings, demonstrations and concerts among activists and even simple sympathizers. Additionally, 10.8 percent of them offer the event calendar of another right-wing organization suggesting that the Internet can be used to “provide tacit, and at times explicit, endorsement for another organizations’ message, helping a site to underline and reinforce its message” (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 2).

Moreover, another 23.1 percent of far right organizations utilize the Internet in order to publicize their own ongoing political campaigns.<sup>66</sup> In 2010, for example, the English First Party launched on the Internet a campaign for the electoral reform (‘Cast Your Vote for Real Electoral Reform’), aiming at promoting an English Parliament and an end to non-white immigration. Within this campaign on the Web, a survey was publicized in order to identify the five most popular ideas on policies desired by the people and to politicians to make a public commitment on them. The British First Party launched an online campaign to promote jobs for British workers.<sup>67</sup>

Another example is the campaign for the ‘Mutuo Sociale’ (Social Mortgage), which has been launched on the Internet in 2006 by a network of Italian right-wing organizations with the goal of providing home ownership for Italians—but not for immigrants—who cannot afford to buy a property at market rates (in the name of the so-called ‘right to property’). Within this online campaign, several different types of offline actions have been staged, from demonstrations to information initiatives. Other examples of campaigns launched and sustained by extreme right organizations through the Web are: those to boycott Chinese and American products,<sup>68</sup> against the accession of Turkey to the European Union,<sup>69</sup> against the

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often diffuse such information through direct links to the personal webpages (such as blogs, Facebook) of the leaders (e.g. see Nick Griffin’s blog: <http://www.nickgriffinmep.eu/>).

65 This happens more likely among subcultural youth groups (in 41.7 percent of cases) (which are also the most likely groups to publicize on their websites the event calendar of other organizations—35.4 percent of cases), and, secondly, political parties (35 percent). However these latter are among the least likely types of groups to publicize on their websites the event calendars of other extreme right organizations.

66 They are above all political parties (in 42.5 percent of cases).

67 <http://www.britishfirstparty.org/>.

68 E.g. GipuzkoA88 (<http://www.libreopinion.com/members/aberriadohil/>).

69 E.g. Turquia no gracias (<http://www.turquianogracias.tk/>).

euro,<sup>70</sup> against drugs, abortion<sup>71</sup> and homosexuals,<sup>72</sup> against immigrants,<sup>73</sup> against American imperialism<sup>74</sup> and to protect ‘white’ people.

Further, more than one-quarter of the right-wing extremist websites (25.4 percent) has an archive where past or present leaflets of the political initiatives of the organization are stored, as we can see for instance on the site of the French party Front National showing leaflets on several issues around which the party is mobilized (e.g. against Islam, immigration, globalization and economic crisis and the European integration, i.e. “Go out from the crisis! Go out from Europe of Brussels!”).<sup>75</sup> This, beyond increasing the salience of far right issues within the public debate, can also play a role as a ‘call for action’ and mobilization for supporters (Chadwick 2006; Lilleker 2006) (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3 Examples of leaflets published on extreme right websites**

“When she will marry. White Europeans will be a minority. Wake up Europe!”
“Green Card/Papers for all? Yes! Paper for deportation!! Save your race, your culture and your community”
“Beware! We want your jobs! We want your homes! We want your country! And they’re going to get it ... Don’t let this happen to our country! Stop the invasion and desecration of America!

Source: <http://www.nuevorden.net/>; [www.nsm88.org](http://www.nsm88.org) (our translation).

The Internet is thus periodically used by right-wing organizations to help mobilization around local and national (offline) political campaigns. Rarer is the organization (only in 4.7 percent of cases) by these groups of protest actions directly on the Web, such as ‘e-petitions’, ‘mail-bombings’ (Coleman and Blumler 2009) and ‘netstrikes’ (see Chapter 1) (della Porta and Mosca 2005b,

70 See for example <http://www.bppmanchester.blogspot.com/>.

71 See the website of the Italian group Forza Nuova, and the British People’s Party Women Division that on its website considers abortion as ‘child murder’ (<http://www.bppwomen.org.uk/>).

72 <http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=e419fb40e21cef00VgnVCM100001f5e340aRCRD>.

73 Some sites have been created specifically with the goal of supporting anti-immigrant campaigns (see for example the site Inmigración Masiva in Spain and Campaign for a Referendum on Immigration in the United Kingdom).

74 <http://www.nwbb.org/index1.html>.

75 For other similar examples see the sites of the German party NPD and the American National Socialist Movement.

for an overview see Axford and Huggins 2001: 177).<sup>76</sup> When it happens, these types of online actions are usually petitions,<sup>77</sup> such as those on the website of the Aryan Racial Loyalist Party which asks for signatures against the proposal of the American Congress to teach the Koran in schools; or on the websites of the Italian RAS and the American Redwatch, both collecting signatures for a petition against pedophilia to be submitted to the respective parliaments; or, finally, on the website ‘Stop the Islamification of Europe’ which proposes a petition to be sent to the United Nations to stop the ‘kuffarphobia’, namely the Islamic racism perpetrated toward non-religious persons.<sup>78</sup>

However, despite the paucity of online mobilization actions by extreme right organizations, they consider their websites a sort of ‘bulletin board,’ via which actions that are going to be staged in the real world may be organized or coordinated, or, more often, where actions that already happened offline may be advertised and promoted (for more details on this, see also Chapter 5). For example, it is common to find on extreme right websites launches of threats and offences between them and their antagonists (such as other civil society organizations from the left, the police, etc.), which subsequently develop into offline clashes; or the other way around (i.e. clashes offline which continue with reciprocal menaces between the extreme right and its enemies on the Web).<sup>79</sup>

Finally, it is worth observing that more than one-third of the groups (38.6 percent) use the Internet to sell some kind of merchandise such as clothes, *militaria* and souvenirs from World War II (caps, helmets, medals, weapons, uniforms, flags, T-shirts with Mussolini images, SS uniforms), books, magazines, CDs and videos, but also stickers, posters and calendars.<sup>80</sup> Not surprisingly, commercial organizations and publishers are those most likely to offer items for sale on their

76 Some of the few examples are the online actions promoted by the American Knights of the KKK, which provides on its website pre-written mails (and addresses) to be sent to deputies and senators on different policies in order to create a ‘mail-bombing’ protest. Similarly, on the site ‘Campaign for a Referendum on Immigration’, a mail model is offered to the visitors to be sent to the Labour Party in order to appeal for a referendum on immigration.

77 As shown, protests staged directly on the Web are much more used by left-wing movements (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 543).

78 Often right-wing sites also give instructions to the users on how to diffuse their online petitions to other websites.

79 An example are videos posted on the Web in order to show violent clashes between the police and the right-wing Ultras groups (see also La Repubblica, “L’odio unisce le curve”, 4 February 2007).

80 German right-wing organizations often sell online also subscriptions to newspapers and far right magazines. See the websites of the group Junge Nationaldemokraten (<http://www.jn-buvo.de/index.php/ueber-uns>) and National Zeitung. Deutsche Wochenzeitung ([https://www.national-zeitung.de/shop/page/1?shop\\_param=](https://www.national-zeitung.de/shop/page/1?shop_param=)). Other e-commerce items frequently found on right-wing websites are: flags, pins, patches, laces and braces, jewelry, vinyl records, miscellaneous, auction block.

websites (in 88 percent of cases), but also neo-Nazi (41.7 percent) and political parties (40 percent) often do *e-commerce*. We can assume that such e-commerce plays a double function for right-wing organizations: on the one hand, it helps in advertising the group and spreading its message around; on the other hand it provides financial resources for the organization (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003: 36).<sup>81</sup>

But what about the use of the Internet to build a *cyber community transcending national boundaries*? In addition to recording the various extreme right website features we also studied patterns of hyperlinks pointing from these sites to other transnational sites. Looking at the number of ties with organizations in other countries or international organizations (Table 4.4), we see that American and European extreme right groups have an ‘international approach’ in their use of the Internet: one-third of them have such transnational links, with an average of 15 cross-national and/or international links per group.<sup>82</sup>

**Table 4.4 International and cross-national links by types of organization/site**

Type of organization/website	International and cross-national links (%)
Political parties	12.5
Political movements	32.1
Nostalgic, revisionist and negationist organizations	17.9
Neo-Nazi organizations	54.2
Cultural, traditionalist Catholic groups	36.4
Youth area, skinheads and sport and music organizations	37.5
Commercial organizations and publishers	20
Nationalistic and patriotic organizations	27.6
Other	25
Total (all types of groups)	29.5

81 American and German extreme right organizations are the most likely to use the Internet for this function (in 55.5 per cent and 51.7 per cent of cases respectively). The Cramer’s V between country and use of the Web for e-commerce is quite relevant (0.21\*).

82 In order not to over represent the degree of transnationalization of the right-wing sector, we have excluded from this calculation ‘outliers’ organizations (such as for instance Alsace d’Abord, containing 257 cross-national and international links).

In particular, neo-Nazi organizations (together with youth skinhead and cultural groups) are those among the most likely to have transnational links, whereas political parties and nostalgic and revisionist groups are the least likely to do so. The American (30 percent) and (in Europe) the Italian and English right-wing organizations are those amongst the most internationally oriented (accounting for 30, 41.3 and 36 percent of transnational links respectively), while the German right-wing groups emerge as the most domestically oriented (only 10 percent of transnational ties).<sup>83</sup> As regards the nature of these international links, we have to stress that on the websites of extreme right organizations there are mainly links to similar groups in other countries (i.e. political parties are linked to other political parties in Europe; subcultural skinhead groups to other youth groups, etc.).<sup>84</sup> However, there are also organizations that have links to supranational right-wing ‘federations,’ such as, for example, the Italian site Forza Nuova<sup>85</sup> linked with the European National Front, and the political movement Fascismo e Libertà<sup>86</sup> linked with the Unione Mondiale dei Nazionalsocialisti.

In addition to the transnational ‘networking’ through the Web, extreme right organizations try also to appeal to an international audience by offering on their sites content in languages other than the language of their own country (in 9.8 percent of cases).<sup>87</sup> Most importantly, this happens specifically in those sections that contain important information about the identity of the group (such as ‘about us’, ‘who we are’), its mission and its constitution, showing the orientation of these organizations to promote their group and their cause worldwide. For example, the Italian political magazine Uomo Libero<sup>88</sup> offers its homepage translated into English, French, German and even Japanese. Similarly, the music and cultural association Lorien<sup>89</sup> presents some sections translated in English, Spanish, French and German; and the music information site Perimetro<sup>90</sup> has many sections in English and French and contains links to the most important European music band websites.

In parallel with this online international orientation of the American and European extreme right, we also found online various appeals to “unite the forces of

83 The relation between country and ‘transnational embeddedness’ is quite strong (Cramer’s V, 0.20\*\*).

84 For example the Italian right-wing music group Perimetro (<http://www.perimetro.com/index.php>) has links to the most important European music radical right bands. On the site of the Italian political party Forza Nuova we find links to various Spanish, Romanian, German and Dutch right-wing parties (e.g. the Falange, the NPD, etc.). Neo-Nazi organizations are generally connected with other European groups related to Third Reich and German history (e.g. see the site Parole dal Terzo Reich).

85 <http://www.forzanuova.org/>.

86 <http://www.fascismoeliberta.it/>.

87 This figure increases to 15 percent in the Italian case.

88 <http://www.uomo-libero.com/>.

89 <http://www.lorien.it/>.

90 <http://www.perimetro.com/index.php>.

the nationalistic movement in Europe,” of “the European patriotic movements” (as they often define themselves), asking for an increase of “contacts and coordination between the European nationalistic oppositions,” and even launching concrete political initiatives and transnational campaigns (for more details, see Chapter 5).

### **Between (Offline) Opportunities, Organizational Characteristics and Online Activism**

To summarize, what factors influence the extent and the forms of Internet usage by right-wing extremist groups? Figure 4.1, which offers a summary of the six aspects of political activism online explored so far (expressing the intensity of activity by right-wing groups on each index),<sup>91</sup> shows that some *country patterns* do emerge. In general, as we can see, American extreme right organizations are more active in the use of the Internet than their European counterparts on most of the functions analyzed (showing the first or second highest values on almost all the indexes).<sup>92</sup> Among the European cases, the Italian context seems particularly conducive to an active use of the Internet by extreme right organizations,<sup>93</sup> whereas the Spanish case is the least favorable concerning the online political activism of these groups.<sup>94</sup> The German, English and French contexts occupy an intermediate position, showing high values of Internet use by right-wing groups only regarding some specific functions linked to specific opportunities.<sup>95</sup>

However, our data also highlight that, in spite of the different contexts, there are *similarities among types of extreme right organizations across countries* in their strategic choices related to the political usage of the Internet, suggesting that the offline organizational characteristics (i.e. belonging to the same sector of the extreme right milieu) might have an impact.

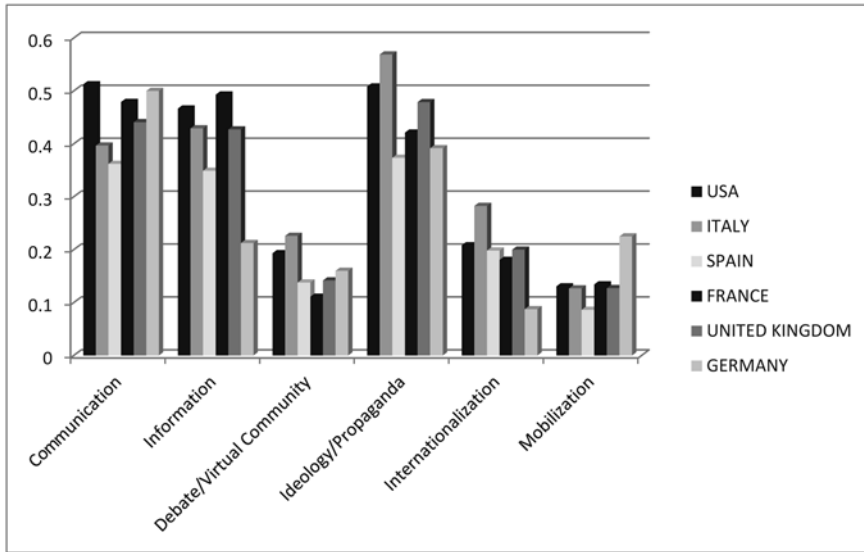
91 Each of these six additional indexes of the forms of Internet usage derive from the sum of the lower lever indicators used for each dimension (see Chapter 1 and the codebook in the Appendix). Each index has been normalized, in order to vary between 0 and 1, and standardized to the 0 to 1 range by dividing the resulting score by the maximum possible value.

92 They are the following values: propaganda/ideology (0.510), communication (0.51), information (0.47), debate (0.19) and transnationalization (0.21).

93 The Italian organizations show the first or second highest value on four out of six indexes, in particular: ideology/propaganda (0.57), information (0.43), communication (0.40).

94 Showing the lowest scores on almost all indexes (0.37 propaganda/ideology; 0.36 communication; 0.35 information; 0.14 debate; 0.09 mobilization).

95 In particular, Germany has a high score in communication (0.50) and mobilization (0.23) and France has a high score in information (0.49).



**Figure 4.1 Forms of Internet usage by extreme right organizations, by country (indexes)**

Note: N= 295; mean values are shown.

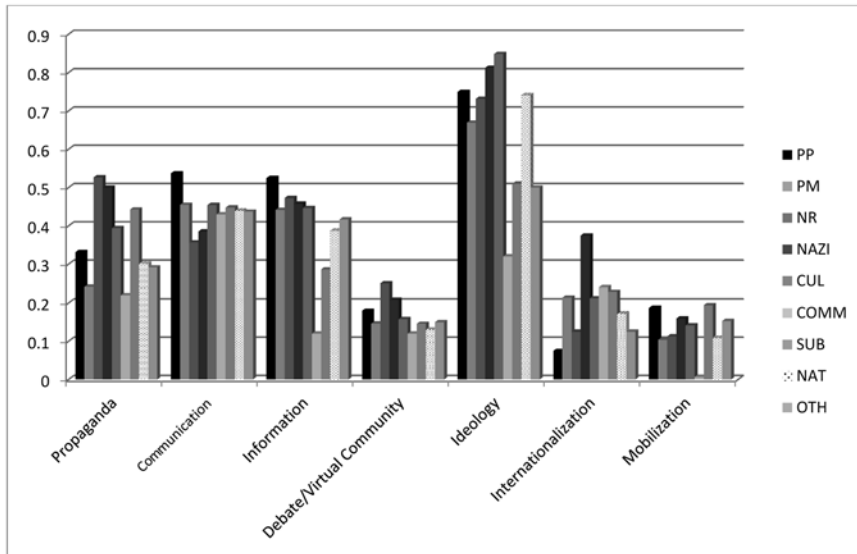
Indeed, as Figure 4.2 shows, in all countries (but with some specificities in the United States, France and Germany<sup>96</sup>), extreme right political parties and movements are those which are most likely to use the websites to fulfill functions such as ‘informing’ and ‘communicating’ with the audience—according to a more conservative usage of the Internet as an additional channel to the usual political means of consensus-seeking.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, in (nearly) all countries, subcultural youth organizations and neo-Nazi groups are those most likely to use the Internet in a more innovative way, being particularly active respectively in exploiting the Web for ‘mobilizing’ their adherents and for building ‘international contacts and contents.’<sup>98</sup> Neo-Nazi groups are, in fact, in all countries (together

96 In the United States, nostalgic/revisionist extreme right groups (together with political parties and movements) are those prominent on communication and information; in France political parties and movements are second, overcome by cultural associations, in the communication function of the Internet. Finally, in Germany the use of the Internet for communication and information is equally diffused among political parties and movements on the one hand, and commercial and subcultural right-wing groups on the other hand.

97 The values of political parties and movements on these indexes are 0.54 and 0.45 respectively.

98 However in Spain and Italy they are overcome by political parties as far as mobilization.

with youth subcultural and commercial groups), the more ‘internationally oriented’ organizations. Furthermore, surprisingly right-wing nostalgic, revisionist and negationist groups, which have been traditionally oriented to the past for the construction of their identity, are characterized by high levels of political activism within the new arena of the Internet, in particular concerning propaganda, debate and ideology<sup>99</sup> (for the disaggregated data, by type of organization for each country, see Figure 4.A in the Appendix).



**Figure 4.2 Forms of Internet usage by different types of extreme right organizations (all countries, indexes)**

Note: N= 295; mean values are shown.

PP (Political Parties), PM (Political Movements), NR (Nostalgic and Revisionist Orgs.) NAZI (Neonazi Orgs.), CUL (Cultural Groups), COMM (Commercial Orgs. and Publishers), SUB (Youth Subcultural Orgs.) NAT (Nationalistic and Patriotic Orgs.), OTHER (Single issues and Not classifiable Orgs.).

<sup>99</sup> It is however worth noticing that in those countries that did not have (or not for a long time) a fascist/Nazi past, such as Great Britain, the United States and France, other types of extreme right groups, such as in particular ‘political movements’ and ‘neo-Nazis,’ are especially active on propaganda via the Web, more than nostalgic and revisionist organizations.

**Table 4.5 Indexes of Internet usage (correlations, Pearson)**

Indexes	Propaganda	Information	Communication	Ideology	Debate/virtual Community	Internationalization	Mobilization
Propaganda	--	0.143*	n.s.	n.s.	0.227**	0.150**	0.177**
Information	0.143*	--	0.135*	0.237**	0.158**	0.154**	0.216**
Communication	n.s.	0.135*	--	0.136*	n.s.	n.s.	0.248**
Ideology	n.s.	0.237**	0.136*	--	n.s.	n.s.	0.211**
Debate/virtual community	0.227**	0.158**	n.s.	n.s.	--	n.s.	0.118*
Internationalization	0.150**	0.154**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	--	n.s.
Mobilization	0.177**	0.216**	0.248**	0.211**	0.118*	n.s.	--

*Note:* \* = Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); \*\* = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); n.s. = Correlation is not significant.

**Table 4.6 Contextual opportunities, organizational characteristics and online practices**

Independent variables		Dependent variables: indexes of Internet uses						
		Communication	Information	Debate/virtual community	Prop./ideology	Internationalization	Mobilization	
<b>TOS</b>	Legislation and policies on online against racism and crimes	0.112	-0.120*	-0.077	-0.131*	-0.137*	0.193	
	Digital divide	0.165**	-0.035	-0.068	-0.061	-0.121*	0.096	
	Extreme right electoral strength	0.003	0.150**	-0.021	0.046	0.049	0.023	
<b>POS</b>	Legal and policy constraints offline against the E.R.	-0.034	-0.247**	-0.018	-0.139*	-0.094	0.135*	
	Population mistrust in institutions	-0.069	0.019	-0.016	0.070	0.039	0.040	
	Anti-immigrant and/or nationalistic attitudes	0.100	-0.003	0.081	0.051	-0.007	0.097	
<b>COS</b>	Acceptance of the far right as a legitimate political actor	0.032	0.203**	0.073	0.168**	0.105	-0.002	
	Cultural opportunities	0.092	0.277**	0.082	0.226**	0.114	-0.024	
	Anti-immigrant appeals of elites	0.016	0.297**	0.069	0.186**	0.145*	-0.111	
<b>Organizational characteristics</b>	Formalization	0.177**	0.189**	-0.034	0.020	-0.024	0.032	
	Cohesiveness of the milieu	-0.047	-0.164**	-0.025	-0.085	-0.055	0.126*	
	Financial resources	0.228**	0.121*	-0.015	0.042	-0.061	0.111	

*Note:* For the description and the operationalization of each indicator of the technological, cultural and political opportunities, see Table 2.B in the Appendix.

How can we therefore explain the different attention of different right-wing websites (and countries) to the various aspects of Internet usage? As mentioned in Chapter 1, in line with similar studies conducted on left-wing movements and other civil society organizations (Bruszt et al. 2005; della Porta and Mosca 2005b), we believe that the characteristics of the external environment (both of the general context and of the organizations) matter on explaining the presence online of these groups (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 545) and we have elaborated, inspired by these works, a series of hypotheses on that, linking offline characteristics (such as the political and cultural opportunities and the organizational features of the groups), to their online practices.

In order to explore this issue, we have first of all looked at the correlations among the different indexes of Internet usage illustrated so far, in order to see if they reinforce each other (Table 4.5).

As Table 4.5 shows, we can identify some significant correlations which seem to suggest that right-wing actors do not address the Internet as an unchangeable reality; rather they shape the Web according to their different aims and strategic choices, “giving meaning to particular combinations of its technological features” (Bruszt et al. 2005: 161). In particular, the use of right-wing websites for diffusing propaganda is especially related to the promotion of virtual debates and identity, whereas the use of the Internet for communicating with the public is strongly related to the activation of members in mobilizations. The offering of information is correlated with the spread of ideology (as well as mobilization) and the internationalization via the Web is related (although to a lesser extent) with the use of websites for information and propaganda.

In addition, as we can see from Table 4.6, the *organizational characteristics* of extreme right groups help to explain partly the degree and forms of their Internet usage. In particular, as the Pearson coefficients show, being an organization which is well equipped with financial resources positively influences the use of the Web for ‘communicating’ with the public. Similarly, a high degree of formalization is correlated (although to a lesser extent) with the capacity of the group to spread ‘communication’ and ‘information’ through the websites. Further, the more cohesive the milieu of the extreme right in a country, the more these organizations tend to use the Internet for ‘mobilizing’ in offline actions, confirming the mobilization potential of a structure characterized by dense social networks (Diani 2003), although created on the Web.<sup>100</sup>

However, the technological, political and cultural opportunities offered by the external offline environment also seem to have an impact on extreme right online political activism (Table 4.5). In particular, in those countries where there is a favorable cultural context for the extreme right represented by the presence of

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100 However, higher levels of cohesiveness of the milieu seem to be negatively correlated to the use of the Web for diffusing information, probably because a centralized structure of a movement around few actors reduces the need (and the possibilities?) of many flows of communication within the sector.

anti-immigrant discourses by political elites, the Internet is used more frequently by these organizations as a tool for the ‘diffusion of information,’ as well as for the construction of own ‘propaganda’ and ‘ideology.’ In the same countries there is also a tendency by extreme right organizations to use the Internet for their ‘internationalization.’ Similarly, in those countries where the extreme right is accepted as a legitimate actor within the political system and in general the cultural opportunity structure is favorable, right-wing organizations tend to rely frequently on the Web for ‘information’ and ‘propaganda and ideology.’

In terms of political (and technological) factors, contexts characterized by the presence of strict offline legal constraints and provisions against right-wing extremism seem to pose an obstacle to the use of the Internet by these groups for the diffusion of information, but also for their propaganda and ideology; whereas in the same countries, the Internet is more frequently used as an arena (probably as an alternative political arena due to the sharp control in the real world) for mobilization by the extreme right. The electoral strength of the extreme right in a country, as well as high levels of population access to the Internet (i.e. a low digital divide), are positively associated with a frequent use of the Web by right-wing organizations for spreading information; whereas the latter contextual characteristic is correlated with little orientation of these groups in using the Net as a tool for internationalization. This can be perhaps related to the fact that “the Internet holds a special attraction for those in search of a ‘virtual’ community to compensate for the lack of a critical mass in their own country” (Burris et al. 2000: 232). Therefore, we can consider that when the extreme right have a fertile internal market, the need to look abroad for attracting consensus is lower. Moreover, according to our data, those countries with stricter control and monitoring on online activities tend to use the Web less for an internationalization function as well as for spreading propaganda and ideology and, to a lesser extent, to diffuse information. They tend instead to frequently use the Web for mobilization. Finally, the diffusion in society of xenophobic values and mistrust toward representative institutions do not seem to be sufficient per se to explain the political activism of the extreme right on the Internet.

### **Websites and Extreme Right: Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have illustrated the specific functions of right-wing websites for several aspects related to political activism on the Net. First, our analysis points out that extreme right organizations seem deeply interested in the new potentialities of the Internet—recalling a similarly high interest found in left-wing organizational websites (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 550). As discussed, the Internet is heavily relied on by right-wing groups as a tool for propaganda and information, as well as to keep a channel of communication with their affiliates. Although the majority of the extremist organizations are not well equipped in terms of instruments to facilitate the users, they in fact do however pay significant

attention to communicating with a potential audience. They also skillfully employ multimedia materials provided by the Internet with the purpose (presumably) to strengthen the 'faith' of members and sympathizers, suggesting an orientation to a user who is an actual or potential member (Bruszt et al. 2005: 155). Indeed, as explained by Lilleker (2006: 163), "at the heart of true propaganda are three key elements: rhetoric, myth and symbolism. Propaganda tends to use all of these to talk to our base emotional impulses," and, as our analysis has showed, the myths and symbolism (e.g. linked to historical tradition as the British Empire or the German Reich) are often used in far right organizational websites, as tools to illustrate to the public their main values, ideology and orientations (e.g. on immigration issues, the fascist period, etc.; see also Criscione 2003). In this regard, however, our research has also showed that Internet mediated communication seems to increase the opportunities for political communication through the Web especially for those groups characterized by high levels of organizational resources (either in terms of formalization, finance, cohesion and electoral strength).

We have also seen that extreme right organizations make some attempts to promote virtual debates on their websites, through forums, chats and mailing lists, which can be interpreted as "continuous assemblies that favor a constant discussion and communication between activists" (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 538). Nevertheless, truly interactive spaces of debate are rarer than asynchronous arenas. Moreover, it is debatable what the 'true' function of these arenas is, characterized as they are both by an evident intervention by the organization leadership for the purpose of 'content management', and of tracing group boundaries, where, it seems, the identity becomes stronger and more solid in response to opposition (Padovani 2008). They indeed try to construct a collective identity via the Internet by frequently presenting themselves to the public, both domestic and international, and illustrating through their websites the story of the group, its mission and goals, as well as transposing in online banners and seals a variety of content typical of the extreme right propaganda. In this sense our analysis shows the potential utility of the Internet for these groups also for the construction of (their) collective identity, since, as observed in all these narratives, the text and the images might play a role in promoting a unifying ideology for the sector (Roversi 2006: 108). Finally, if online actions are still rare for extreme right organizations, nevertheless the potential mobilization via the Internet is partly exploited by all types of groups, which increasingly rely on it for advertising their offline political initiatives and as a means for financially supporting the organization (for an overview of these aspects see Figure 4.B in the Appendix). In sum, the websites seem to work as arenas where activists of different parts of the sector can 'meet' and support each other (Caldiron 2001).

Beyond this general trend, however, some country specificities in the degree and the forms of the use of the Internet by extreme right groups have emerged, with some countries more conducive than others for right-wing extremism online, and which we can try to interpret relating them to the opportunities offered by their respective countries. Our study has indeed highlighted that among the various

political uses of the Web which can be done by extreme right organizations, contextual characteristics might contribute to explain in part their strategic choices. The Internet appears to increase the potentialities of political communication of these groups, especially in those countries where extreme right activities are subject to a less severe monitoring by the authorities, but also, on the other hand, where there is a cultural climate of social and political acceptance of extreme right actors and discourses. Moreover, it seems that specific configurations of offline political, cultural, as well as 'technological' opportunities in the real world foster or, vice versa, hamper the activities of the extreme right on the Web. In particular, with regard to political opportunities (such as the presence of potential institutional allies in power, legal constraints toward right-wing groups, etc.), Italy seems to be the most open country and the same can be said regarding the cultural and discursive opportunities, which are favorable to right-wing groups (Padovani 2008: 754; Wetzel 2009: 327). Against this background, the Italian extreme right tends to be very active politically both in the real world and in the online reality, despite the scarce technological incentives for politics on the Web. By contrast, the American political context (similarly to the UK, Germany, as well as—at least in part—France) seems equally quite 'closed' to the accession of extreme right organizations to the political system (either because there are no allies with which the extreme right could align, and because the electoral rules do not offer parliamentary representation to these actors). However, if, in line with expectations, the French and English extreme right actors show an intermediate level of political activism, the American ones are those which mostly use the Internet for conducting politics. Here it is likely that the result can be related to the more favorable cultural and 'technological' opportunities of the American context when compared to the European ones (i.e. the far right can be considered as acceptable due to the strong tradition in protecting individual civil rights, there are not legacies with the fascist past, and access to the Internet is easy and widely spread). On the other end of the spectrum there is the Spanish case, where the traditional (and current) weakness of the extreme right organizations in the country (both in terms of political access and cultural and organizational resources), coupled with an unfavorable technological opportunity context, seems to be reflected in their inability to exploit Internet opportunities for their political activity. In fact, as observed, since the end of the dictatorship the Spanish extreme right has been unable to manage the political and social changes of the transition to democracy, and renew itself; and this has resulted in its political weakness, scarce social acceptance and ideological backwardness (Casals 1999; Norris 2005).

Finally, as for the intermediate levels of online activism of the extreme right in Germany, France and England, some reflections are in order. On the one hand, in Germany, the obstacles posed to right-wing activities by a definitely 'closed' political and cultural context seem to be overcome by the organizational characteristics of the German extreme right milieu, which—different to that in Spain—is cohesive, centralized and apparently equipped with resources (see also Chapter 3). Evidently, being constantly under risk of prosecution in the offline

context, the German extreme right tend to join forces in the virtual arena of the Web, building a structure which allows them to create, as shown in the data, efficient flows of communication and mobilization via the Web.

On the other hand, in France the open cultural and (partly) political opportunities seem to help right-wing groups in their political online activism, also clearing the hurdle of the 'technological' difficulties present in the country. The opposite, instead, holds true in the English case, where it seems that a sort of 'boomerang effect' takes place (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Constrained by limited political and cultural possibilities in the offline reality, English extreme right organizations rely on the Web for their political activities, helped in this regard by a favorable technological context, characterized by the absence of legal monitoring online and a low digital divide. Both cases underline however the importance of taking into account the technological opportunities as an intertwining variable on online political activism, which might interact with the offline political and cultural factors. In sum, our results suggest that offline characteristics of collective actors indeed matter in explaining their behavior online (della Porta and Mosca 2009). This is also confirmed by another important finding of this chapter underlining that different types of right-wing organizations use the Internet for serving different purposes. The technology is, in this sense, oriented by these groups toward specific goals (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 551). In particular—and confirming our expectations—youth subcultural and neo-Nazi groups, in all countries, have appeared as the organizations most committed in using the Web as an alternative channel for mobilization (also at the international level). This is in contrast to the more 'institutionalized' right-wing political parties, which, in general, resort to the Internet (according to a more instrumental approach) as a an additional tool of information and propaganda for their offline activities, more than as a new interactive political arena (*ibid.*). The use of the Internet is shaped in accordance with offline identity (Calenda and Mosca 2007).



## Chapter 5

# Between Real and Virtual: Strategies of Action of the Extreme Right Outside the Web

Civil society groups have rapidly increased their use of the Internet for political purposes over the past few years (Garrett 2006). But how much is this reflected in a growth of mobilization in the real world? In the previous chapters, we analyzed the Web as an important arena for the extreme right; yet it is evident that the use of the Internet by extreme right organizations does not mirror the real political communication and mobilization efforts of such groups outside the Web. However, observers underline that in the last two decades, many Western European democracies have experienced a considerable rise of extreme right action (a so-called ‘right-wing populist wave’), either in terms of electoral success and in terms of activities outside the institutional arena (Art 2011; Carter 2005; Minkenberg 2008; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005). In order to capture a broader picture of the current developments in the political mobilization of these groups, in this chapter we move from the virtual sphere of the Web to the offline arena, looking at the degree and characteristics of right-wing offline protest in recent years (2005–2009),<sup>1</sup> as well as at its scope and action strategies. Indeed, an important aspect to be explored is whether we are witnessing an internationalization of (extreme right) mobilization, which, as mentioned in the first chapter, is considerably enhanced by the use of new technologies (e.g. Bennett 2003; Petit 2004). We investigate the intensity and trends of extreme right mobilization in the six selected countries, reflecting on the use of different strategies of actions (including violence) and organizational targets, issues and scope (national vs. supranational), and relating them, beyond the country’s political opportunities and the group’s resources, to the findings on the online activism of these groups discussed in the previous chapters. The chapter will be therefore led by the following descriptive questions:

- Are the countries which demonstrate higher levels of offline extreme right mobilization in the last five years the same ones that show higher degrees of online political activism by their extreme right milieu?

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<sup>1</sup> These years have been selected in order to cover the period of our Internet-based data collection (SNA and Web Content analysis of extreme right websites).

- Are the types of extreme right organizations which are characterized by higher levels of political activism on the Web the same types which mobilize more in the offline reality?
- Are the countries and/or the types of extreme right organizations that are more internationally-oriented in their political activism on the Web (including higher levels of transnational contacts online) the same ones that show the highest degree of ‘transnationalization’ (of their organizational structure, action, etc.) in the offline reality?

### **Extreme Right Mobilization (and Violence): How, When, Where Outside the Web?**

What is the level of offline mobilization that characterizes the extreme right in Europe and the United States in recent years? First of all, our protest event data confirm that right-wing mobilization is a significant—and increasing—aspect in the period under analysis (Figure 5.1): 1,465 total actions initiated by these groups have been identified (respectively, 347 in the United States, 338 in Italy, 147 in Spain, 125 in France, 115 in the United Kingdom and 393 in Germany). In particular the number of extreme right protest events passes from 258 in 2005 to 373 in 2009 (with a peak of 420 events in 2008). However, second, considerable variations across the six contexts can be observed, with stable or increasing levels of right-wing mobilization for the majority of our countries.<sup>2</sup>

#### **[Insert Fig. 5.1 here]**

In particular, France and Spain are the only two countries showing a decrease in the mobilization of extreme right groups and activists in the period under investigation (from 33 to 14 events registered from 2005 to 2009 in France and from 44 to 16 in Spain). On the contrary, in Italy and the United States, already rather high at the beginning of our analysis, extreme right mobilization demonstrates a sharp increase in the most recent years, in particular after 2006, passing, respectively, from 38 and 34 registered events in this year to 82 and 104 in 2009. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the intensity of extreme right mobilization first declines (until 2008) and then it steadily increases from 2008 to 2009, tripling the number of events (from 12 to 35). Finally, Germany, after a decrease in the number of extreme right protests in the initial years of our analysis—from 62 registered cases in 2005 to 20 in 2007—shows a dramatic increase in right-wing mobilization in the most recent years, with a peak of 156 events registered in 2008 and 122 in 2009. Besides the number of actions, an additional relevant factor related to extreme right mobilization is the number of participants at extreme right events.

<sup>2</sup> The correlation between the number of extreme right organized events and the country is strong and significant (Cramer’s V, 0.23\*\*).

According to our data the size of the events organized by extremists in Europe and the United States varies a lot (Figure 5.2), from thousands of participants (such as, for instance, the case of the BNP festival in the United Kingdom involving about 2,000 people,<sup>3</sup> the demonstration honoring soldiers organized by German neo-Nazis in 2005 grouping with than 1,600 participants,<sup>4</sup> or the three-day gathering of the French Front National involving about 3,000 sympathizers<sup>5</sup>) to several or only a few activists.

**[Insert Fig. 5.2 here]**

However, in all countries, more than one-third of events (38.5 percent) involve a limited (or very limited) number of participants (not more than five or six on average), confirming what official sources suggest, that most extreme right supporters engage in actions individually and not on behalf of any specific organization (TE-SAT 2009).<sup>6</sup> Most interestingly, the Internet seems to be a useful tool for these kinds of 'lone-wolf' actions involving few activists as shown, for example in the case of the seven German activists on trial in Berlin in 2009, for the creation of a far right Internet radio which agitated against immigrants, punks, communists and Jews;<sup>7</sup> or the young American skinheads organizing racist commemorative events through the Internet.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in some of our sample countries, the capacity of the extreme right to mobilize a high number of people has increased in recent years (especially after 2007, in Germany, France and the United States). The only exception appears to be Spain, where levels of participation in extreme right events (high at the beginning of the analysis) are seen to sharply decrease (shifting from up to 10,000 participants in 2005 to 700 in 2009).

Collective actors, however, can rely on a wide array of tactics, aimed at expressing their claims and influencing decision-makers or public opinion. Such action strategies, either conventional or unconventional, can differ greatly in the

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3 *Guardian*, August 4, 2007.

4 *Taz*, November 14, 2005.

5 *Le Monde*, September 13, 2006. Other examples of very big right-wing recent events are for instance the rally organized by the NPD in Hamburg with about 1,500 neo-Nazis (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 1, 2008) or the yearly commemoration of the death of the dictator Francisco Franco organized by the Spanish Falangist parties and usually involving thousands of extreme right militants (*El País*, November 20, 2006).

6 An example is the case of two far right militants accused of planning a terrorist attack against the British prime minister, Tony Blair, in 2007 (*Guardian*, February 14, 2007).

7 E.g. the radio station, promoted with thousands of stickers at events of the far right, denied the Holocaust, and instructions on how to build bombs were published online. They alternately moderated the broadcasts and screamed Nazi slogans (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 16, 2009).

8 *Idaho Ed.*, January 30, 2005.

logic that drives them and in the degree of radicalism they imply (della Porta and Diani 1999: 165). Our data indicate notable levels of right-wing violence in Europe and the United States in the period under study, which, however, fluctuate significantly and do not present any linear (increasing) trend (Figure 5.3).

**[Insert Fig. 5.3 here]**

Looking at the intensity of extreme right radicalism (i.e. the percentage of violent actions on the total of actions registered) in Europe and the United States between 2005 and 2009 (see Figure 5.3), out of about 1,500 total actions initiated by extreme right groups, more than one-quarter (27.4 percent) are violent. These actions range from acts of ‘light’ violence against people or things, such as, for example, insults or threats against ethnic or religious minorities and political adversaries,<sup>9</sup> graffiti or slogans in praise of fascism and Nazism,<sup>10</sup> desecration of Jewish cemeteries<sup>11</sup> to acts of ‘heavy’ violence, such as assaults against homosexuals, ethnic minorities immigrants and political adversaries (e.g. left-wing activists),<sup>12</sup> even including bomb attacks against offices of political opponents (e.g. trade unions, squatted social centres, left-wing parties or newspapers).<sup>13</sup> In a comparison among our six countries, we see that the cycles of violence and moderation culminate in more recent years with an increasing radicalization of extreme right groups in Italy and Germany, and a moderation of their action in the United Kingdom, France, Spain and the United States.

9 E.g. threats and insults against Jewish shopkeepers in Rome, Italy (*La Repubblica*, December 15, 2009); racist slogans against Afro-Americans in the United States (*The San*, January 23, 2007); attacks against properties (such as car, house, etc.) of an anti-fascist family in Germany (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 3, 2008).

10 E.g. Nazi symbols and slogans spray-painted on walls in Valencia, Spain (*El País*, October 11, 2008); Celtic crosses drawn on the walls of the Chinese quarter in Milan (*La Repubblica*, April 15, 2007).

11 E.g. the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the United Kingdom (*Guardian*, January 21, 2005); acts of vandalism against Muslim graves in France (*Le Monde*, April 27, 2007).

12 E.g. the attack against a gay youth center in Munich (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 1, 2008); the stabbing or beating up of leftist militant in Italy (*La Repubblica*, February 26, 2007 and January 29, 2008); sexual abuse of Afro-American women by KKK sympathizers in the United States (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 11, 2006); violent attacks against a Roma community in Belfast (*Guardian*, June 21, 2009); the stabbing to death of an Egyptian woman in Germany (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 1, 2009).

13 E.g. the bomb attack against the socialist headquarter in Madrid (*El País*, April 7, 2006) and, in Italy, the similar attack against the office of a local communist party (*La Repubblica*, January 16, 2009); the attacks with Molotov bombs against a squatted center in Rimini (*La Repubblica*, March 1, 2006); see also the bomb attack against an official state building in Italy (*La Repubblica*, February 19, 2007).

Another interesting statistic concerning violence is the number of arrested, denounced or injured people in events organized by the extreme right, which, as Figure 5.4 shows, is, at least as reported by national newspapers, quite high in the period under consideration: 1,022 instances in Germany, 309 in Spain, 197 in Italy, 125 in the United States, 67 in France and 31 in the United Kingdom.

**[Insert Fig. 5.4 here]**

In general, our data highlight a decreasing trend in the number of wounded, arrested, denounced and killed people in right-wing events in the initial years of our investigation (from 389 cases in 2005 to 133 in 2007), followed by a sharp increase in the following years (with a peak in 2009, with 571 wounded, arrested, denounced and killed people). From a comparative perspective, however, very different pictures emerge on this regard across the countries. On the one hand the number of arrested, injured or killed people slightly decreases in the period under analysis in the United Kingdom, France and the United States, and it slightly increases in Italy (from 15 cases in 2005 to 105 in 2008—but 41 in 2009).<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, in Germany, right-wing extremist activities involving arrested and violently injured people strikingly increase, with a peak after 2007 (reaching 439 cases in 2009). In addition Germany also shows the highest number of arrested and denounced people in the period of our analysis compared to the other countries (898) in extreme right events either offline and online.<sup>15</sup> These data constitute an additional confirmation of the growing degree of radicalism in extreme right mobilization in Italy and Germany.

Nevertheless, violence is not the only action form used by extreme right organizations. Looking at the specific action strategies adopted in the recent mobilization of the extreme right, we indeed observe that (Figure 5.A in Appendix), first of all, right-wing groups have a variegated repertoire of action, made up of conventional, demonstrative, expressive, confrontational and violent (including both soft violence and heavy violence) actions.<sup>16</sup> Second, right-wing

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14 Also Spain is characterized by a decreasing trend in the number of arrested, injured or killed people in extreme right events, which however stops in 2008, followed by an increase the following year. In 2009 in fact far right mobilization in the country counted 73 arrests, including five neo-Nazis accused of xenophobia, 18 right-wing sympathizers after violent clashes with anti-fascist adversaries (*El País*, June 2 and March 31, 2009), and even one death (an immigrant killed by a group of skinheads, *El País*, November 6, 2009).

15 For instance, 20 neo-Nazis were arrested during a rally connected to the NPD in Munich in 2008; in the same year 104 neo-Nazis were denounced with the accusation of trading far right music on an online file-sharing network; and 23 neo-Nazis were arrested for showing T-shirts of the banned organization Blood and Honour Germany (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 6, 2008, March 4 and October 28, 2009).

16 In order to classify the forms of action we distinguished the strategies that emerged from the analysis of protest events in six categories. The category ‘conventional actions’ includes those political actions associated with conventional politics (e.g. organizing press

action strategies vary a lot from one country to another.<sup>17</sup> In particular, English extreme right organizations rely much more than their European and American counterparts on the least radical forms of action, i.e. conventional actions, used in 65.2 percent of all cases registered in the country. These types of events include lobbying and electoral campaigns of right-wing parties,<sup>18</sup> public endorsements of right-wing candidates, organizing press conferences and distributing leaflets,<sup>19</sup> filling suites,<sup>20</sup> etc. On the contrary, American extreme right mobilization outside the Web is characterized by its high level of symbolism: here the majority of events are demonstrative (36.9 percent of total cases in the country) and expressive (34.3 percent) actions. However, also in Germany and Spain demonstrative right-wing events are rather frequent (in 28 and 27.2 percent of cases respectively). They are cases of right-wing marches, rallies, street protests or petitions<sup>21</sup> (as for example the demonstration organized in 2005 by a white supremacist group against Mexican immigration,<sup>22</sup> the numerous anti-immigration demonstrations,<sup>23</sup> the anti-US demonstrations of the Italian party Forza Nuova protesting against the Iraq War, etc.).<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, expressive events refer above all to ‘social events,’ (internally) directed toward extreme right activists in order to strengthen the identity of the group (e.g. commemorative gatherings, cultural and/or recreational activities, etc.). Some examples of them are the Aryan gathering organized by KKK groups every year in the United States,<sup>25</sup> or the Eastern camp organized

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conferences, distributing releases, organizing electoral campaigns, etc.). The category ‘demonstrative actions’ includes actions aiming at the mobilization of large numbers of people (e.g. rallies, petitions, street demonstrations). The category ‘expressive actions’ includes actions mainly directed (internally) towards the members of the group, in order to reinforce the in-group cohesion and identity (e.g. commemorations, cultural events, etc). The category ‘confrontational’ includes actions which are non-violent, but usually illegal, the aim of which is disrupting official policies or institutions. Finally, the category ‘violent actions’ includes those events that imply some form of physical violence (e.g. violent clashes with political adversaries or the police, etc.). For this classification see Gentile (1999), Koopmans (1993), Caiani et al. (2012), Tarrow (1989). The category ‘online’ action includes online events by right-wing groups reported in the press.

17 This is also confirmed by a high and significant Cramer’s V coefficient between ‘action form’ and ‘country’ (0.26\*\*).

18 E.g. see the electoral campaigning events organized by the German NPD and the English BNP (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 15, 2005 and January 16, 2008; *Guardian*, February 21, 2005 and April 9, 2007).

19 *Guardian*, January 11 and July 23, 2005.

20 E.g. as in the case of the member of the NPD accused of illegal gun possession (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 17, 2008).

21 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 6, 2007.

22 *Tampa Tribune*, November 13, 2005.

23 *El País*, November 27, 2005.

24 *La Repubblica*, April 23, 2005.

25 ADL Archive, April 11, 2008.

in Leibach by the German extreme right group Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend,<sup>26</sup> the monthly gatherings organized by the Nationalist Socialist Movement in many American states,<sup>27</sup> the meeting of the Italian extreme right party Alternativa Sociale with around 1,000 participants in 2005<sup>28</sup> or the BNP festival held in the United Kingdom in 2007.<sup>29</sup> Finally Italian extreme right mobilization is that which most frequently takes the form of confrontational protest (in 14.5 percent of their total cases), which includes, for instance, illegal meetings and street blockades by right-wing groups,<sup>30</sup> occupations of buildings, the disruption of meetings of political adversaries.<sup>31</sup> In addition, sometimes these types of events are also staged directly online, as shown by the case of the members of the Spanish extreme right party España 2000 who, in 2005, accessed a forum of a left-wing group announcing their intention to create disorder during the forthcoming group's events.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, although the number of 'online actions' reported in the press is very low compared to the other strategies of action of the extreme right (8.3 percent of total recorded protest events), we can observe—as the quotations at the beginning of the chapter show—strong links between the actions staged by right-wing groups offline and the Internet arena. As an example of online right-wing actions (reported in the press) we can mention the case of the German website *kreuz.net* which diffused very traditionalist Catholic and anti-Semitic propaganda,<sup>33</sup> or the Spanish online forum *Europeans.org* in which Nazi and xenophobic ideas are discussed,<sup>34</sup> or finally the case of the French movement *Bloc Identitaire*, which launched an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist campaign from its website.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, as our dataset shows, either conventional or unconventional mobilization events of the extreme right organized outside the Web are strictly related to, and often supported by, online activities of these organizations. For instance the far right increased the use of the Internet to spread home-made videos. NPD and neo-Nazi groups produce videos that look like TV news shows. While the NPD uses videos for election campaigns, other groups, such as the neo-Nazi project *Volksfront-Medien*, produce and present videos on their website to influence young people. The videos usually encourage mobilization to events like demonstrations or cover

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26 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 28, 2009.

27 ADL Archive, July 19, 2008.

28 *La Repubblica*, January 31, 2005.

29 *Guardian*, August 4, 2007.

30 *La Repubblica*, April 22, 2006.

31 E.g. in 2008 a group of 75 German neo-Nazis organized a demonstration against an anti-fascist meeting place (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 13, 2008) (see also *La Repubblica*, February 23, 2008).

32 *El País*, March 1, 2005.

33 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 25, 2009.

34 *El País*, May 9, 2005.

35 *Le Monde*, November 15, 2009.

events like rallies and concerts.<sup>36</sup> In 2008, for example, in the Italian city of Bari an encrypted notice was posted on the walls of the university and various other places of the city, providing information on how to be invited—through the Web—to the national Naziskin gathering forthcoming in Florence.<sup>37</sup> In other cases, instructions for right-wing activists and sympathizers on ‘how to behave’ during offline events are reported on the Net, for example the announcement posted on an Italian right-wing website, inviting extreme right participants “to wear normal clothes, with the attitudes of political militants.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, although organized in the real world, many of these events reach the sphere of the Internet, in an interesting inter-play between ‘real’ and ‘virtual,’ skillfully managed by right-wing groups. As shown by our Web content data indeed very frequently (in one-third of cases) extreme right websites contain a section with a narrative of offline events staged by the group, such as occupations, protests, demonstrations, clashes with the police and political adversaries.<sup>39</sup> They can be ‘conventional/institutional’ actions such as political meetings and national congresses of the group posted, once happened, on the Web (e.g. the website of French organization Adsav)<sup>40</sup> or more informal events such as protests, demonstrations and commemorative marches, videos of which are uploaded on their websites or directly on YouTube.<sup>41</sup> For example, on the website of the French organization *Renouveau Français* we can find descriptions of its past nationalistic demonstrations<sup>42</sup> and on many German right-wing websites narratives of counter-demonstrations against the left or commemorative marches are common.<sup>43</sup>

36 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 20, 2008. For other examples about extreme right concerts publicized on the Web, see also *La Repubblica*, “Alarm for the Nazi-rock Concert,” May 16, 2008 (our translation).

37 *La Repubblica*, January 23, 2008.

38 *La Repubblica*, “Milano blindata: La destra fa il saluto romano” (“Armoured Milan: The Right Makes the *Roman Salute*”), April 6, 2009.

39 This is most likely to happen on political parties’ websites (47.5 percent), but also in youth subcultural ones (43.8 percent).

40 [www.adsav.info](http://www.adsav.info). See also the site of *Nouvelle Droite Populaire* (<http://ndp-info.over-blog.com/>).

41 On this point see the newspaper article on *La Repubblica*, “Neofascisti all’assalto della RAI” (“Neofascists Assault on RAI”), October 5, 2008.

42 [www.renouveaufrançais.com/new/index.php](http://www.renouveaufrançais.com/new/index.php).

43 E.g. the day of remembrance for Horst Wessel, of bombing in Dresden, etc. See the website of the NW-Berlin -Berlin National Resistance organization (<http://www.nw-berlin.net/>) and the group *Junge Landsmannschaft Ostdeutschland* (<http://www.ostland.eu/>).

### **The Social Characteristics of Extreme Right Mobilization: Which are the Most Active Groups and Actors Offline?**

Several studies have shown that contextual dimensions alone are not sufficient to give a full account of the development and forms of right-wing mobilization, which are, instead, also tied to internal organizational factors. For example, as social movement scholars suggest, the strategic action choices of different types of organizations, beyond being a message that the organization gives to its members (Kitschelt 1988), also include the specific reactions of the groups to the context (the various structural, political, cultural and technological factors) in which they are embedded and mobilize (della Porta 1995).

Looking in more depth at the protagonists of extreme right mobilization in the period of our analysis (see Figure 5.5, which shows the percentages of protest events registered for each type of organization between 2005 and 2009), we see that the most active groups are, overall, neo-Nazi organizations and political right-wing parties, followed by subcultural skinhead groups. This holds true in all countries under study. The only difference is in the United States where the second most active type of extreme right organizations are nostalgic revisionist groups (present in 37.1 percent of all events), not political parties (which initiate protest events in only 8.8 percent of cases).

**[Insert Fig. 5.5 here]**

Most importantly, we see that the level of radicalism of extreme right mobilization varies according to the type of group at stake.<sup>44</sup> Our protest events data, which show the specific action forms used by extreme right organizations in the selected countries (Figure 5.6), stress that the most radicalized organizations are neo-Nazi<sup>45</sup> and subcultural groups, which account respectively for 48 and 39 percent of violent events (see also Figure 5.B in the Appendix), whereas the least violent are political parties. This holds true in all countries.

Among these violent events staged by these types of right-wing organizations we find for example cases of murders (as in the case of a young student killed by a skinhead in the United States in 2005<sup>46</sup> or the assassination of a police chief in Germany then celebrated on far right websites in the country and abroad),<sup>47</sup> violent attacks against authorities (as the violent attack against a police headquarters

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44 Action forms and type of organization are strongly and significantly correlated (Cramer's V, 0.40\*\*).

45 The category 'neo-Nazi' includes individual extreme right activists and generic reference to extreme right actors.

46 *Riverfront Times*, January 12, 2005.

47 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 15, 2008.

planned by a group of hooligans in Italy in 2008)<sup>48</sup> or social minorities, in particular homosexuals,<sup>49</sup> foreigners and Jews.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, once again, the Internet seems to play a role (also) in the violent mobilization of right-wing organizations, helping, it seems, a diffusion of some actions even beyond national borders. For example, according to our press data, an Italian neo-Nazi group used Internet blogs to exchange Nazi material with other groups and to set up a cell of Hitler's Youth *Naturnser Hitlerjugend*, taking inspiration from the analogous German organization, banned in the country. Amongst the evidence against them was a video in which some of the suspects were practicing to prepare and throw Molotov cocktails.<sup>51</sup> This might be related to the fact that, being often in many countries constrained by laws and at risk of being banned (e.g. in Germany), these extremists rely heavily on the Internet for their activities, especially those at the borderline between illegal and violent actions.

**[Insert Fig. 5.6 here]**

Beyond violence however our data also stress that different types of organizations tend to adopt a different action repertoire in their (offline) mobilization. This suggests that, similarly to what we have witnessed in the previous chapter for right-wing political activism online, different types of actors tend to specialize in specific action strategies in order to reach their goals (Figure 5.6). In particular, overall, political parties and movements, representing the most institutionalized actors among the four categories, rely heavily on the most 'orthodox' forms of mobilization, mainly conventional (45.6 percent) and demonstrative (24 percent) actions.<sup>52</sup> Demonstrative actions are also frequently used by youth subcultural groups (25.1 percent of their mobilization events registered).<sup>53</sup> Finally, nostalgic neo-fascist organizations are mainly involved in expressive events in all countries under study, with the exception of France and the United Kingdom where expressive actions are mainly performed, respectively, by subcultural youth groups (18.2 percent of their total actions) and political parties (4.3 percent).

48 *La Repubblica*, February 27, 2008.

49 As in the case of some French skinheads who in 2005 assaulted a group of young homosexuals, beating them to death (*Le Monde*, May 29, 2005).

50 *Libération*, May 21, 2007.

51 *La Repubblica*, November 12, 2009.

52 See the electoral campaign organized for the presidential candidature of Le Pen (*Le Monde*, November 11, 2006); or the German NPD campaigning for the local elections in Bavaria (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 16, 2008).

53 Such as in the case of the anti-immigration rallies and marches initiated by the American Nationalist Socialist Movement in 2006 (*The Columbian*, September 24, 2006).

### The Transnationalization of Extreme Right Mobilization in the ‘Real World’

An interesting feature of right-wing extremism today concerns the scope of its mobilization, that is, the territorial dimension of extreme right events, actors and targets.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the paucity of transnational right-wing organizations is a problematic issue also in the institutional electoral arena, where, as noted, the absence “of unity within the EP of radical right parties gives evidence of a lack of cohesion of their intents and strategy” (Conti 2011: 8).

This is testified for instance by the (unsuccessful) attempt of the creation of a ‘European’ right-wing group within the European Parliament, the ‘Independence/Democracy,’ during the 2004–2009 legislature.<sup>55</sup> The group, formed in 2004 when parties from the Euroskeptical ‘Europe of Democracy and Diversities’ made an alliance with some parties from the new member states, included the English Independence Party, the League of Polish Families, the Italian Northern League and the Movement for France. Additionally, some members of the European Parliament from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden also took part in the group. However, other important radical right parties such as the French Front National and the Vlaams Belang did not join the organization and decided instead to belong to the ‘not attached’ group. It has been argued that this lack of transnationalization of the extreme right party (which is not transnationally organized as most other party families are) may create “an impediment for the establishment of greater coherence of action within this political area” (ibid.: 8).

But what about the supranationalization of mobilization of the extreme right beyond the electoral arena?

Our protest event data confirm that, overall, the main focus of right-wing mobilization in the ‘real’ world is still the domestic (or, more precisely, the local) level. Some 28.4 percent of right-wing registered events have a national scope, 39.5 percent are organized by a right-wing national actor, and 33.4 percent have a national target. In addition, 66.2 percent of the total events have a local scope, 57.4 percent are initiated by a local actor, and 53.9 percent have a local target. Although

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54 The notion of ‘scope of the actor’ refers to the organizational extension of the organization and/or institution. In our coding scheme the categories for the scope of the actor that initiates the event and the scope of the actor-target of the mobilization vary from local to international. The notion of ‘scope of the event/action’ refers to the scope of mobilization. That is, if the article mentions ‘extreme right organizations from different member states,’ the scope is ‘European Union.’ Either for the variable ‘actor scope’ and for the variable ‘event scope,’ we include in the category ‘supranational/international/crossnational’ also the category ‘multilateral,’ which refers to ‘actors involved from two or more countries.’

55 The group ceased to exist in 2009 when some of its components united with the remnants of the ‘Union for a Europe of Nations’ group to create a new formation called ‘Europe of Freedom and Democracy.’

only a minority of the coded events imply a supranational dimension,<sup>56</sup> our analysis also points out significant signals of an emerging transnationalization of right-wing action (either in terms of targets, actors and scope of the mobilization)<sup>57</sup> (Figure 5.7).

**[Insert Fig. 5.7 here]**

Looking at cross-time trends, we see, overall, a development of transnational extreme right organizations in the more recent years (although slow). Indeed, as Figure 5.7 shows, the percentage of events initiated by ‘supranational’ extreme right actors<sup>58</sup> increases in the course of the five years under consideration: from 2.4 percent of all registered events in 2005 to 3.2 percent in 2009, with a peak of 4 percent of all cases in 2007. In this regard we can mention the recent birth of the European movement Stop Islamification of Europe, founded in 2007 in the United Kingdom against “the overt and covert expansion of Islam in Europe”<sup>59</sup> and now active in several European countries, or the famous international neo-Nazi organization Blood and Honour, active in both Europe and the United States with many affiliated groups,<sup>60</sup> as well as the extreme right neo-Nazi network Stormfront.<sup>61</sup> Also transnational right-wing events (namely events with a transnational scope of mobilization) slightly increase in the period of our analysis (from 3.5 percent of all cases registered in 2005 to 6.3 percent in 2006, 4.5 percent in 2007, 5.6 percent in 2008 and to 4.6 percent in 2009), as well as right-wing events addressing supranational institutions and targets (from 4.5 percent in 2005 to 9.3 percent in 2006, 6.3 percent in 2007, 5.3 percent in 2008 and 5.6 percent in 2009).<sup>62</sup> These types of transnational right-wing protests includes events such as the European campaign to boycott the products of American multinational

56 Only 3.1 percent of the total registered events have a transnational actor initiating the event, 6.5 percent a transnational target, and 5.4 percent a transnational scope of the mobilization.

57 The correlation between year and transnational right-wing events is 0.26\*\* (Cramer’s V), between transnational right-wing is 0.19\*\*, and between transnational right-wing targets is 0.22\*\*.

58 Namely right-wing international organizations or organizations diffused in more than one state, or finally, European federations.

59 *Guardian*, October 24, 2007.

60 E.g. ADL Archive, August 30, 2008 and *El País*, April 27, 2005.

61 ADL Archive, April 13, 2008.

62 For example, the demonstration of the Spanish party Falange Española directed toward European institutions, against the approval of the European Constitution in 2005 (*El País*, May 20, 2005).

companies;<sup>63</sup> cultural events such as international concerts; or gatherings<sup>64</sup> or European party meetings and congresses, such as the conference entitled 'Our Europe: Peoples and Tradition against Banks and Usury,' organized in March 2009 in Milan by the British National Party, the French National Front and the German National Demokratische Partei with the aim to bring together representatives of the main extreme right parties and followers in Europe.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, we can also mention the foundation in October of 2009 of the far right alliance 'European National movements,' a network of various right-wing parties in several European countries, aiming to become a political group within the European Parliament. Evidently, as noted for left-wing movements (della Porta and Caiani 2006), the European institutions, beyond being even more frequently the target of protest, also represent an opportunity to create European network and identities for right-wing radical groups. It remains a problem for these groups how to reconcile this new need toward 'transnationalization' with their nationalistic ideology.

As observed for other characteristics of right-wing mobilization, also this emerging trend toward a transnationalization of their activities seems to be helped by the use of ICTs by these organizations. For example, in 2008, the German extreme right group Blood and Honour, after its banning in the country, could survive and continue to do its activities through its website that was hosted on non-German servers and allowed the group to keep advertising and organizing mobilization events such as concerts in the country and abroad.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in 2005, some neo-Nazi organizations in the United Kingdom sent around Europe a virus created in order to diffuse Nazi propaganda via email;<sup>67</sup> and in 2007 some French far right activists posted negationist videos on YouTube, with the aim of reaching an international audience.<sup>68</sup> Finally, several neo-Nazi organizations in Germany used to 'meet' on a blog in order to celebrate the international commemoration of an old German Nazi leader.<sup>69</sup>

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63 As the slogan of the campaign explained, "We are doing consultations among leaders of nationalist movements in Europe, with the aim of extending the boycott campaign against the USA to a transnational level" (Forza Nuova, March 2003—our translation).

64 Such as the international neo-Nazi gathering, organized by some French skinhead groups, involving 300–400 participants coming from different countries, above all Germany (*Le Monde*, January 24, 2005) or the music festival Hammerfest organized in the United States in 2005, involving extreme right bands from all over the United States and Europe (*The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, October 1, 2005).

65 *La Repubblica*, "Naziskin d'Europa in arrivo a Milano" ("European Naziskin Coming to Milan"), March 25, 2009, see also *Le Monde*, January 13, 2007. Another example of transnational campaign is the European congress organized by the German party Republikaner in Rosenheim in 2008, involving extreme right parties from all over Europe (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 19, 2008).

66 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 30, 2008.

67 *Guardian*, December 10, 2005.

68 *Le Monde*, April 24, 2007.

69 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 7, 2008.

There are, however, some cross-country differences on this regard. In a comparative perspective (Figure 5.8) we see that the most ‘transnationalized’ extreme right mobilization outside the Web is in France and the United Kingdom. In these countries respectively 21.4 and 9.5 percent of all registered events address a transnational target, and 17.4 and 13 percent have a transnational scope. Also the presence of transnational right-wing actors initiating the events is significant, accounting for about 8 percent of cases in both countries. Examples can be the international convention organized by the Front National in France in 2007 with the goal of creating a European unitary radical right party<sup>70</sup> or the British demonstration organized by the Anti-Islamification Movement in 2007, taking place, at the same time, in many European cities.<sup>71</sup> On the contrary, according to our data, the Spanish extreme right is the least ‘internationalized’ in its mobilization (either in terms of actor, event and target). Italian, American and German extreme right groups appear as mainly nationally oriented in their protest events, not exceeding the 5 percent of cases with a transnational scope, target, or organized by transnational actors.

**[Insert Fig. 5.8 here]**

In particular, looking at the prevalent organizational level of right-wing actors in each country (see Figure 5.C in the Appendix), we observe that in France, the United Kingdom and Germany, above all ‘national’ extreme right organizations are present. This happens in about 60 percent of all registered events in both countries and involves organizations such as the French political party *Mouvement pour la France*,<sup>72</sup> the British National Party, the extreme right political movement *English Defence League* in the United Kingdom,<sup>73</sup> and the extreme right rock-band *Noie Werte* in Germany.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, the majority of Italian (79 percent) and Spanish (64 percent) right-wing actors are active at the local level (which also includes city and district levels). These local groups mainly operate in the subcultural youth sphere, as is the case, for example, of the Italian right-wing squatted centre *Cuore Nero* in Milan<sup>75</sup> or the Spanish youth group *Grupo de Acciò Valencianista (GAV)* operative in Valencia.<sup>76</sup> In the United States there is a prevalence of regional or state level extreme right organizations (in 40 percent of all coded cases) as the *Missouri Militia* movement for instance or the racist *Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*.<sup>77</sup>

70 *Le Monde*, January 13, 2007.

71 *Guardian*, October 24, 2007.

72 *Le Monde*, November 12, 2006.

73 *Guardian*, August 4, 2007, November 20, 2008 and September 12, 2009.

74 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 29, 2008.

75 *La Repubblica*, October 30, 2007.

76 *El País*, May 24 and September 8, 2007.

77 ADL Archive, July 26 and August 16, 2008.

What are therefore the most internationally oriented types of extreme right organizations? As shown in Figure 5.9 political parties and movements and neo-Nazi organizations are the most ‘internationalized’ actors of the right-wing milieu (either in the scope of mobilization, and the target).<sup>78</sup> This can also be related to the fact that political parties and movements, working in a more institutionalized field compared to the other more informal types of extreme right organizations, are more involved in multilevel transnational politics. However neo-Nazi organizations are those, in all countries, more ‘transnationalized’ in terms of organizational structure (i.e. in terms of the development of transnational organizations). Indeed, many neo-Nazi movements and the actions they perform are not confined within national boundaries, such as for instance the memorial gathering organized every year in memory of Robert Jay Matthews (the leader of the American White Nationalist Movement, killed by the police in 1984) by the members of Stormfront, one of the most important neo-Nazi, white supremacist international Web forums or the Naziskin rally organized in Italy and gatherings of militants and extreme right music bands coming from Germany and other countries.<sup>79</sup>

**[Insert Fig. 5.9 here]**

The second most internationally-oriented type of right-wing organization is represented by youth subcultural right-wing groups, which are especially internationalized in terms of targets of their action and the scope of the mobilization they are able to organize.

### **Extreme Right Mobilization: Targets and Issues**

Right-wing extremists also attack their political opponents on the Internet. For instance, on October 5, 2006, German right-wing extremists hacked a left-wing extremist mail-order site and published customers’ personal data on the Internet (TE-SAT 2007: 38). Social movement scholars have insisted on the importance of looking at collective action, by inserting it into the broader ‘organizational field’, whose product it is. In particular, right-wing mobilization does not happen in a vacuum, but in the interaction between a number of different (social, political) actors which extreme right groups deal with and whom they address (e.g. anti-racist groups or autonomous squatted centres, political institutions, other adversaries (della Porta 2012: 77)).

In our study, when looking at what are the main targets of the European and American extreme right (Figure 5.10), we observe that, overall, the emergence

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<sup>78</sup> The relationship between the scope of the ‘event’, ‘actor’ and ‘target’, and the type of organization is strong and significant: respectively Cramer’s V, 0.265\*\* (event scope); 0.325\*\* (actor scope); 0.233\*\* (target scope).

<sup>79</sup> *La Repubblica*, January 23, 2008.

of right-wing mobilization is more likely when the targets are political actors and ethnic minorities. The former count as targets in more than one-third of the total events registered in the period under consideration (in particular political adversaries—e.g. left-wing parties, unions—in 19.8 percent of cases and national politicians and institutions in 17.7 percent of cases), the latter in almost one quarter.

**[Insert Fig. 5.10 here]**

This is true in all countries<sup>80</sup> with the exception of France, where the extreme right is more likely to address religious minorities (in 28.9 percent of cases). Right-wing events addressing political institutions usually focus on the institutional political arena, as shown by the demonstration of the Spanish Party La Falange against the Catalan Statute of Autonomy in 2009;<sup>81</sup> the German NPD annual protest against some local authorities over their denial to party militants to access a local military cemetery;<sup>82</sup> or, finally, the hunger strike carried out by militants of the Italian party Alternativa Sociale protesting against the Court for its exclusion from the elections.<sup>83</sup> However, as our data suggest, many of these events against political adversaries are violent.<sup>84</sup> Most of them are generated during confrontations between extreme right organizations and counter-movements, such as, for example, the massive riots in Hamburg in 2009 involving NPD activists and left-wing demonstrators; the attack in 2009 in Dresden by a group of neo-Nazis against left-wing counter-demonstrators<sup>85</sup> or the violent clashes between left-wing and extreme right university students in Rome in 2008.<sup>86</sup> Also recurring events are those concerning conflicts between far right organizations and political actors (such as riots,<sup>87</sup> clashes<sup>88</sup> or attacks<sup>89</sup>). In this regard, the Web might play a role in

80 Political adversaries are the main target of extreme right mobilization in Italy (30 percent), Spain (28.25 percent) and Germany (26.2 percent); whereas ethnic minorities are the main target in the United States (53.6 percent of total events) and the United Kingdom (24.4 percent).

81 *El País*, September 14, 2009.

82 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 25, 2008.

83 *La Repubblica*, March 13, 2005.

84 In general, in about half of the cases events targeting political actors are violent, as well as those addressing ethnic minorities. Similarly more than two-thirds of events targeting social minorities are violent (the Cramer's V between violent actions and target is 0.48\*\*).

85 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 16 and 20, 2009.

86 *La Repubblica*, May 26, 2008.

87 E.g. the riot between extreme right militants and a group of punk-anarchists in Italy in 2008 (*La Repubblica*, September 28, 2008).

88 E.g. the clashes between members of the Spanish far right party Falange Española and left-wing counter-demonstrators in 2008 (*El País*, March 2, 2008).

89 E.g. the attack of some right-wing groups against an anti-fascist youth centre in Germany in 2008 (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 3, 2008).

the escalation of violence during the confrontation between the two parties, since it is often the arena where such violent threats between extreme right groups and their political enemies are exchanged. This is the case, for example, of the right-wing website Redwatch, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, where hundreds of photographs of anti-fascist activists (many taken during counter-demonstrations against the British National Party), together with their personal details, were posted.<sup>90</sup> Similarly some German neo-Nazis have published a list of members of anti-fascist groups on the Web<sup>91</sup> and, in Spain, the party España 2000 published on its website the list of accusers at the trial of its leader.<sup>92</sup> Finally, the movement English Defence League posted threats against anti-fascist groups on its website.<sup>93</sup>

As far as right-wing events targeting ethnic minorities are concerned, Germany emerges as the most violent country. There, more than two-thirds (63.3 percent) of protest cases against ethnic minorities are violent events. Specific ethnic minorities are targeted by the far right in each country. We can mention the numerous actions carried out by German neo-Nazis against Kurds or Turkish minorities,<sup>94</sup> by French right-wing extremists mainly against those of African descent<sup>95</sup> or by American far right organizations against Hispanic or Afro-American citizens (e.g. the racist message sent by the the Ku Klux Klan to an Afro-American teacher in 2005 or, the same year, the distribution of flyers against Hispanic citizens by a skinhead group<sup>96</sup>). Other frequent targets of the extreme right mobilization are religious minorities (above all Muslims and Jews), which account for 13.5 percent of all covered events. In this respect we can cite cases of firebomb attacks against Islamic centres (e.g. in Germany in 2008<sup>97</sup>), gatherings to protest against Islamic fundamentalism (e.g. in the United Kingdom in 2009),<sup>98</sup> as well as verbal negationist declarations by far right leaders (e.g. Le Pen's anti-Semitic public declarations in 2008),<sup>99</sup> or letters against Jews (e.g. those sent by the National Socialist Workers Party in the United States in 2007).<sup>100</sup>

Others scholars have however suggested investigating extreme right mobilization by looking at its preference for specific political arenas (i.e. topic of mobilization) and argue its emergence is explained in relation to the different fields of issues. For example, Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008) have shown that opposing immigration and European integration (i.e. key issues linked to cultural and

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90 *Guardian*, October 4, 2006.

91 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 7, 2008.

92 *El País*, January 16, 2007.

93 *Guardian*, August 10, 2009.

94 E.g. see *Taz*, November 16, 2006.

95 E.g. see *Libération*, November 13, 2006.

96 *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 24, 2005 and *The Sound*, January 9, 2005.

97 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 22, 2008.

98 *Guardian*, October 19, 2009.

99 *Le Monde*, April 27, 2008.

100 *The Virginian-Pilot*, May 26, 2007.

political globalization) has become central for the current populist right's programmatic offer.

In our study, when looking at what are the main issues<sup>101</sup> around which the European and American extreme right mobilize outside the Web in the most recent years (Figure 5.11), overall the interest for political issues of the current extreme right is confirmed. We see, indeed, that political issues and, second, issues related to the internal life of the extreme right sector, are prominent (both accounting for almost one-third of all events registered).

**[Insert Fig. 5.11 here]**

Another significant portion (17.9 percent) of the extreme right protest events concern conservative issues (which are particularly prominent in the American case, 29 percent) with a strong attention to religious issues. These are instances of events of demonstrations against the building of mosques in European countries,<sup>102</sup> or actions against the Jewish community<sup>103</sup> or simply gatherings and conferences of right-wing radical groups.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, as our data points out, extreme right mobilization on conservative issues might also center around law and order,<sup>105</sup>

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101 In our analysis we classified the various issues of extreme right mobilization which emerged into seven categories: 'social and economic issues,' which includes all events related to social and economic policy in general (e.g. unemployment, taxes, pension, etc.); 'political issues,' which includes events related to political life (e.g. corruption, political system, political party and groups competitions, etc.); 'conservative values,' which includes all events related to religion, law and order and family (e.g. gay issues, abortion); 'life of extreme right organizations,' which refers to events related to the internal life of the extreme right milieu (e.g. organizational field of extreme right groups and strategies, relation with judiciary, etc.); 'globalization and European integration,' entailing integration issues, which includes all events focused on issues of 'membership,' 'competences' and 'decision-making rules' as regards the European integration process, or focused on neoliberal globalization and/or its supposed main promoters (including the G8, WTO); 'migration,' which includes all events related to immigration policy (security, economic, cultural situation in host countries, etc.); and 'nation and history,' which includes events on facts related to history and national identity (e.g. related to fascism, Nazism, World War II, etc.) (for a similar classification see Caiani et al. 2012).

102 E.g. as in 2009 in France (*Libération*, December 23, 2009).

103 E.g. the riot of a neo-Nazi group at the Israel Fest in Munich in 2009 (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 27, 2009).

104 As the national gathering of the Church of the National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in 2009 (ADL Archive, October 17, 2009) or the conferences organized by various racist Christian Identity organizations around the United States (ADL Archive, May 30, 2008).

105 E.g. the demonstration of the Italian party Forza Nuova for the 'neighbourhood safety' (*La Repubblica*, January 30, 2009).

homosexuality<sup>106</sup> and abortion.<sup>107</sup> Surprisingly, a lesser amount of events concern immigration (12 percent) and issues related to ‘history and national identity’ (10 percent), but this is not the case in Spain and in the United Kingdom where, on the contrary, immigration issues are particularly frequent (in respectively 24 percent and 20 percent of cases) as the source of right-wing mobilization. Examples found of extreme right events on immigration and national historical issues are rallies of these groups against specific ethnic minorities,<sup>108</sup> verbal attacks by right-wing leaders against foreigners,<sup>109</sup> physical attacks against immigrants<sup>110</sup> or pro-immigrant associations,<sup>111</sup> as well as commemorative demonstrations on historical events of the Nazi-fascist regimes<sup>112</sup> or conferences.<sup>113</sup> Our data highlight also that these types of actions often involve the use of the Internet, such as in the case of the racist campaign launched online by the group Combat 18 in 2009, or the various online debates and discussions on national identity issues organized by the right-wing party French Front National,<sup>114</sup> or the racist comments posted on the Stormfront website,<sup>115</sup> or the anti-Semitic insults posted on the website of an Italian group of Nazis.<sup>116</sup>

Finally, globalization and European integration, as well as socio-economic issues (e.g. unemployment), seem of low salience for the extreme right as topics of mobilization, accounting for only 4 percent and a tiny 1.2 percent of cases, respectively. This appears to be in contradiction with what has been observed with regard to the recent mobilization of the left (della Porta and Caiani 2009; della Porta et al. 2007, but for a different perspective see Uba and Ugglia 2011). However it is worth noting that, in these (few) cases, extreme right-wing mobilization seems to borrow the repertoire of actions and frames from the left (della Porta 2012) occupying buildings, organizing ‘anti-capitalist’ demonstrations against the United States, boycotting products, protesting against ‘neoliberal’ oriented

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106 E.g. insults and threats against homosexuals (*El País*, August 29, 2009), violent attacks against gay meetings and locals (*La Repubblica*, August 27, 2009).

107 E.g. anti-abortion clinic attacks and threats (*El País*, August 22, 2006).

108 E.g. attacks against the Mexican community in the United States (*The Tampa Tribune*, November 13, 2005).

109 E.g. those of Le Pen in 2009 on French radio (*Le Monde*, August 21, 2009).

110 E.g. the attack against Kurds by a neo-Nazi group in Germany in 2006 (*Taz*, November 16, 2006).

111 *La Repubblica*, March 23, 2009.

112 E.g. the yearly commemorations of the dictator Francisco Franco in Spain (*El País*, November 7, 2005).

113 E.g. the conference on the history of the SS organized by the Italian party Forza Nuova in 2007 (*La Repubblica*, February 8, 2007).

114 *Le Monde*, November 6, 2009. Similarly the online sale of CDs with songs of World War II by some British commercial extreme right organizations (*Guardian*, February 19, 2009).

115 *Guardian*, June 21, 2009 and October 25, 2005.

116 *La Repubblica*, September 5, 2009.

European Constitutional Treaties.<sup>117</sup> In those countries where the far right is closer to radical Catholics (e.g. Spain, the United States) violent attacks are perpetrated also against religious adversaries. An example of this may be found in Madrid, where a bomb was placed in a theater which was running a show overtly against the Catholic religion<sup>118</sup> or the several attacks against abortion clinics in the United States perpetrated by anti-abortion far right movements since the 1980s.<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

Against the background of an increasing intensity of right-wing mobilization, in this chapter we have analyzed the characteristics and trends of extreme right activities, at least those emerged from the analysis of newspapers, in our selected democracies. We also considered that focusing on only one arena of mobilization (the offline vs. the online) can be partial and misleading for researchers who want to understand the changing dynamics of right-wing mobilization in the present day. While some scholars may consider the cyber world to be limited and without connection to what might be called the 'real' world, others are not in agreement, stressing that this is apparently not the case for those organizations "who contribute regularly and with purpose within the online communities they have helped to create and forge within cyberspace" (Bowman-Grieve 2009: 1005). We therefore tried to bridge the two sides, looking at how right-wing political mobilization and its characteristics have developed in recent years in the European selected countries and the United States and how these developments can be related (although indirectly) to those in the virtual arena of the Web.

Our analysis does not offer any definitive answer, solution or strategy for dealing with the assumption that the Internet can increase the mobilization capacity (and violence) of extreme right organizations; however our data highlight some common characteristics in the offline and online mobilization of right-wing groups which are worth underlining.

First of all, our research indicates that extreme right action is a notable and widespread phenomenon in all the countries analyzed, and that it is growing. This is especially true in Italy and the United States, which have also emerged as those countries characterized by the highest levels of extreme right activism on the Web (for a synthetic overview, see Figure 5.D in the Appendix). This also

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117 E.g. the occupation of a building in Naples by a group of extreme right unemployed with the aim to create a social right-wing center (*La Repubblica*, November 20, 2009), the demonstration against the United States and the boycott campaign against American products (e.g. McDonalds, Timberland, etc.) organized by the party Forza Nuova in Italy in 2005 and 2006 (*La Repubblica*, April 23, 2005 and March 2, 2006), the French gathering against the 2005 EU Treaty (*Le Monde*, June 28, 2005).

118 *El País*, March 3, 2006.

119 *UffPost*, June 2, 2009.

includes the capacity of the extreme right groups to mobilize a large number of people, which, although discontinuously in time and space, appears in our study to be on the rise as well. In fact, the latter trend appears particularly prominent in Germany (especially in the most recent years), which also demonstrated a special commitment on the part of right-wing groups to mobilization through the Web (see Chapter 4). Apparently these efforts on the Net are able to exit from the virtual sphere and reach the real world. The only exception is the Spanish extreme right, which also outside the Web (as we have seen in its online activism) is the least active and smaller in mobilization than the other European and American countries.

The parallels between right-wing mobilization online and offline do not seem, however, to concern violence (either in terms of use of violent actions, nor in terms of casualties during extreme right events), which is diffused in our six countries, but not coherently with their respective levels of online activism. Furthermore, in general, the level of right-wing violence (i.e. radicalism), at least that reported in the press, is not on the rise, as is, to the contrary, the use of the Internet by these extremist groups all around the world in recent years (TE-SAT 2007). However, it must be noted that the German extreme right organizations, beyond being the most violent on their organizational websites in terms of propaganda and diffusion of hate statements (see Chapter 4), are also—according to our protest data—those able to stage events with the highest number of participants, and also the highest numbers of those denounced, arrested, wounded and even killed. Moreover, our analysis also points out that the main protagonists of right-wing activities are usually not collective organizations but instead single or few activists, who, as observed, can find on the Web practical instructions and ideological resources to motivate and organize their actions (Garrett 2006; Petit 2004). This is an additional confirmation of the potential of the use of Internet for the mobilization of extremist right-wing organizations.

Nevertheless, beyond the use of the new technologies, we can also relate the development of right-wing mobilization and its forms (violent or transnational) to the political opportunities offered in the offline reality to these groups, as well as to their organizational characteristics. In fact our study emphasizes that also the ‘symbolic and material’ resources linked to different organizational types (della Porta 2012; McCarthy and Zald 1977) seem to affect the mobilization (and strategic choices) of right-wing groups, with above all neo-Nazis and political parties active, in general, outside the Web. This is similar to what emerged in the virtual arena of the Web, where these types of extreme right groups were the champions of online activism (see Figure 5.E in the Appendix). In addition neo-Nazi groups, beyond being the most violent, have also emerged as those more internationalized either in their protest events and online action.

Our research finally indicates that, as for other social movements, extreme right mobilization is more likely to emerge where political and cultural opportunities are more open (McAdam et al. 2001), as in Italy, for the many access points to the institutional system for the extreme right, or in the

United States, where discursive opportunities are favorable to these groups. Moreover, the forms of right-wing mobilization also seem affected by context characteristics, being more radicalized in the closest country, as in Germany. More specific context opportunities and circumstances, as well as historically rooted traditions (della Porta 2012) and different issues salience and targets, can be furthermore referred to in order to understand some other features of right-wing mobilization that we have seen in this chapter. In particular, the higher orientation towards transnationalization of the extreme right events in France and the United Kingdom compared to the other countries, can be linked to the lively cultural French extreme right milieu,<sup>120</sup> as well as the penetration of the English far right music in the subcultural right-wing scene all over the world since the 1970s.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, although, according to our data, extreme right mobilization is particularly likely to emerge on political issues as well as against political adversaries and ethnic minority targets, this is not the case in the United States where the focus is on conservative, and especially religious, issues. This probably stems from the lack of electoral access for the American extreme right and the presence in the country of strong fundamentalist religious far right movements and racist anti-immigration conservative organizations (Durham 2003).

In spite of these differences, our research finally points out that the extreme right is able to use, outside the cyber-sphere as we have seen on the Net, a variegated action repertoire, with some groups mainly performing truly 'political' actions, and others more oriented toward cultural (symbolic and expressive) initiatives. In this regard we can utilize the term *metapolitics* (Tarchi 2003) to refer to that dimension that goes beyond the traditional political action and which concerns "cultural activities, music, publishing, ecology, events planning, cooperative work, that become ways to express and disseminate the own vision of the world" (Di Tullio 2006: 37). Indeed, as another aspect of the broadening action repertoire of the extreme right, we also noted that, although still facing some difficulties, these organizations look also at the transnational level in their mobilization, both in terms of increasing supranational targets, for the capacity to stage supranational and cross-national events and give birth to supranational organizations.

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120 In this regard, we should not forget that France is the 'birthplace' of the new-right ('Nouvelle Droite'), one of the most influential currents of thought for the European modern extreme right.

121 This milieu is indeed characterized by a long 'internationalist' tradition, ranging from the 'invention' of white power music- source of inspiration for the youth subcultural area and 'soundtrack' of extreme right mobilization all over the world.

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities of the Internet for Right-Wing Organizations

Throughout the world, the usage of the Internet by extremist groups is on the rise. For the neo-Nazi far right “videos and music are the number one instrument of propaganda,” says Stefan Glaser of jugendschutz.net and the possibilities that the Web gives them to spread their messages “are without any boundaries” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 14, 2009). In parallel, the specific literature on right-wing political parties indicates that they are increasingly using the Internet to attract new voters, with appealing websites, animations and interactive elements (such as surveys, chats, forums and guest-books) as well as invitations to concerts, midsummer celebrations or party meetings.<sup>1</sup> Although in the last two decades the field of studies concerning the relationship between the Internet and political actors has sharply developed (Chadwick and Howard 2009), however, as mentioned, the use of this new medium by extreme right groups has been partially neglected, when not underestimated.

This is the reason why in this book we aimed at offering an empirical contribution to this debate, moving from the observation that the online and offline arenas cannot be conceived as two separate entities (della Porta and Mosca 2006), but that, instead, offline characteristics of collective actors, as well as of the context of political and cultural opportunities where they operate can help us in better understanding their behavior online (ibid.). Indeed, we considered that if the Internet is assuming a growing important role for civil society organizations (including the radical ones), for the greater freedom offered to express political claims and ideas and for organizing mobilization, then a crucial subject for scientific enquiry, as well as for policy analysts, is to investigate empirically—in detail, but with systematic and formalized analyses—the role of this medium as a potential substitute for important face-to-face social and political processes.

We have therefore looked at the current relation between *right-wing extremist groups* and *the Internet* in five Western European democracies and the United States, providing a detailed comparative map of emergent tendencies toward an increasing role of the Internet for the identity formation and mobilization of these groups, but also reflecting on the opportunities and the challenges offered to them by this new medium (for social movements in general, see also Mosca 2007). In order to offer to our readers a picture as exhaustive as possible of the radical right politics online, beyond focusing solely on extreme right political parties, we

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1 <http://www.inach.net/content/jgs-annual-report2004.pdf>: 4.

decided to include in our study non-party organizations and subcultural groups, a significant object of research for both scholars and practitioners of political communication as, “the populist radical right is not merely a moderate form of the extreme right, but it includes fascism and Nationalist Socialism as well as its various neo-forms” (Mudde 2007: 31).

In this concluding chapter we summarize our findings, highlighting the main characteristics of the usage of the Internet by right-wing groups found, and stressing how they can be related to the scientific literature on ICTs and politics and social movement studies. We will also address the possible normative implications of our results, referring to the controversial debate about the use of a more democratic and pluralistic media environment by organizations that are anti-democratic.

### **The Internet and the Extreme Right: Networks, Identity and Mobilization**

First of all, as has emerged from our data concerning the *social network map and analysis* (Chapter 3), our research highlighted that (also) extreme right movements are active participants on the Web, masterfully exploiting the advantages of the new medium as a tool for strengthening their linkages, internally (within the national right-wing sector) and beyond (cross-nationally). While this aspect emerged as widespread in all six countries, reinforcing the observation that “publicly accessible links between websites offer an alternative and effective means for groups to coordinate their efforts” (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 2), our cross-national analysis also allowed us to detect country-specific evolutions. If extreme right organizations multiply their presence on the Internet, forming a dense network of contacts between them, however, the structural arrangement of some of these virtual communities does not seem favorable to close cooperation within the sector, endorsing namely a different impact on the potential for extreme right mobilization. If the network form of a movement is “closely tied to the availability of information and communication technologies” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1996, quoted in Kavada 2003: 11), our results showed that the overall configurations of the extreme right online (in terms of density, network centralization, closeness, etc.) differ significantly from one country to another, also mirroring some offline national specificities. Some of them appeared to be very heterogeneous, sparse and split by cleavages from within, whereas others (fewer in our sample) were denser and much more concentrated on a few central political right-wing actors, still unanimously considered as a point of reference for the sector. What do these results suggest? A certain degree of organizational weakness of the current extreme right, or a (strategic) form of ‘leaderless’ organizational structure, namely the preference for a form of flexible organization and ‘resistance’? In the latter case we have to note that the Internet would become a complementary tool for the far right, organized with a fluid ‘membership’ that engage in spontaneous and sporadic campaigns of violence (Griffin 1999). In fact, important right-wing

violent events, including the recent attack in Oslo,<sup>2</sup> have been carried out by various 'lone wolves,' with often few affiliations to formal organizations but many contacts online (Caiani et al. 2012).

Furthermore, our study also indicated that different types of extreme right actors play a prestigious and leading role within the right-wing sector in the different democratic contexts. In some countries they are party organizations, presumably exploiting their offline institutional resources in order to position themselves as crucial actors also in the virtual sphere. In others countries, more informal groups such as the youth ones instead have acquired a prominent role in the virtual right-wing communities. This finding, in our view, also has some policy implications, as far as one considers that most of the social and political life of the overall sector might depend on the identity and ideology (e.g. more or less violent) of these prominent organizations. In addition, as our research has underlined, in a field that is undergoing constant change, such as that of right-wing extremism, where organizations well known in the past have today disappeared, resulting in a myriad of small groups which often operate at the very local (such as street) or hidden levels (EUMC 2004), the arena of the Web and the relational dynamics (i.e. coalitions and conflicts between organizations) taking place within it, can be crucial for the existence and the organization of the far right area (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003: 40). At the organizational level, for instance, as we have seen especially in some extreme right networks (such as Germany), the strategic work of brokering and bridging coalitions between organizations with different standpoints becomes an important activity for these groups, greatly helped by digital media (Diani 2011). In fact, as argued, "hyperlinks help extremist groups to forge a stronger sense of community and purpose," persuading "even the most ardent extremist that he is not alone, that his views are not, in fact, extreme at all" (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). Our collection of data on the organizational characteristics and mobilizational potential through the Web of the extreme right in different European and American countries may in sum provide important clues, both for scientific enquiry and for policy-makers, on possible future trajectories regarding new forms of radical politics. Data obtained by hyperlinks can offer fresh insight into "ongoing debates about the offline proximities and affinities between different groups" (Ackland and Gibson 2005: 4). In addition, as social movement scholars have underlined, networks (also those online) can constitute "a better conceptualization of social movements, one that captures more accurately their fluid and evolving nature" (Diani 2000, quoted in Kavada 2003: 8).

Indeed, as the *content analysis* has shown (Chapter 4), these groups exhibit a notable level of Web knowledge and a considerable degree of Internet usage, through which they appear to pursue several different strategic goals concerning their offline and online political initiatives. Our study has in fact indicated that, at least in the countries analyzed, extreme right organizations largely use the Web as

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2 Observer, "Norway Attacks: How Far Right Views Created Anders Behring Breivik," July 30, 2011.

an instrument for propagating their ideology and expressing their views, as well as disseminating information on a wide range of social, economic and political issues, demonstrating in this way their ability and willingness to explore the possibilities offered in the Internet era. Second, extreme right organizations also emerged as sufficiently effective in supporting communication and interactions with new potential recruits, members and sympathizers, utilizing Web technologies and multimedia materials to espouse nearly the same “identity kit made by icons, norms and values” referring to national socialism, fascism across countries. In this sense they try to create electronic communities of like-minded people, which could help the extreme right, organizationally very differentiated and structurally fragmented across countries, in the formation of a collective identity (Padovani 2008). This is an important aspect concerning collective action, since as social movement research has argued, “framing work may help to mobilize individuals and ultimately lower resource costs by retaining their emotional commitment to action” (Bennett and Sergeberg 2012: 13). Extreme right organizations are nevertheless also aware of the instrumental possible uses of the Internet, such as to financially support the organization with, for example, online commerce.

Some political uses of the Internet emerged, however, as more difficult than others for right-wing groups, as the still moderated presence of interactive virtual debates and discussions on their websites demonstrated. In addition, the genuine role of these arenas appeared ambivalent, between the function of aligning right-wing websites’ content to the mainstream rules of ‘netiquette’ and the role of tracing boundaries between the group of peers and the external world. As Downing et al. (2001) suggested, we could talk in these cases of “repressive radical media,” when new media are used in a way that hampers “the empowering characteristics of democratic radical media” (Padovani 2008: 89), namely the aim to create a negotiable identity that emerges out of a critical dialogue among its members (*ibid.*). Further studies, more in depth, and including a micro-level analysis focus (e.g. qualitative in nature, with interview data), would be necessary to detect the real impact of these arenas of virtual discussions on right-wing activists and their values and normative orientations (for an exception see De Koster and Houtman 2008).

We also observed some indications of a small mobilization capacity of the extreme right on the Web (e.g. in performing online actions), however, as our data showed, these groups try to use the channel of the Internet to activate their members in offline actions, promoting, through it, mobilization and political campaigns outside the Web. These results not only highlight the potential of the Internet for (right-wing) mobilization, but also stress that with the diffusion and development of the new technologies and their social uses, the distinction between the online and offline dimensions is disappearing and “crossbreeding processes between the Net and the social and political reality are establishing” (Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 17). In this new scenario the new media represent for the extreme right an important source of interest and discussions in politics, circulation of

information and opinions, knowledge on topics of general interest and, above all, of soliciting the engagement of people (Dahlgren 2009).

Indeed, as our *protest event analysis* (in Chapter 5) has illustrated, the boundaries between their offline and online politics are blurred in the political mobilization of right-wing groups. As seen, they often utilize the Internet as a sort of “showcase” (della Porta and Mosca 2006: 538) to advertise (before or after the event) or organize their initiatives and actions outside the Web. In addition, these right-wing actions are varied in nature, ranging from truly conventional political events such as electoral campaigns and meetings, to other symbolic and expressive initiatives, such as marches and rallies. This confirms for the (radical) right what has been already noted for left-wing social movements, namely the capacity of various type of actors to adopt and adapt different strategies, as an effect, among others, of the enlargement of citizens’ repertoires of political participation and of growing interest in transnational issues (della Porta 2007), which are further helped by the Internet. However, this also implies violence, which, as our study has demonstrated, is a significant component of the current right-wing mobilization, at least in our selected countries. Research on terrorism and political violence is still unclear on whether the ability to communicate internationally online has contributed to the increase in radical violence and transnational collective action, however, there is a strong consensus among scholars that online activities substantially improve the capacity of such extremist groups to raise funds, attract new followers, and to reach a mass audience (e.g. Conway 2006; Weimann 2006a, 2006b). In fact, as our protest event data showed, although still moderated, there are signals of an emerging transnationalization of right-wing mobilization outside the Web, either in terms of their targets, scope of the events organized and actors involved and that the countries (and the types of right-wing groups) particularly active online are also those which show significant levels of offline mobilization. Our study cannot provide any conclusive answer to that important question, nor, at a prescriptive level, to criticize any particular technology or to make a prediction about its uses by specific actors. Moreover, we are aware that focusing on the ‘cyber dimension’ of the Internet does not imply that it is the only arena in which extreme right organizations act, construct their identities and express their views. However, as our research highlighted, the Internet seems to help these groups in many aspects related to outside mobilization, including: the possibility to reach a greater audience and resonance for their actions thorough the frequent transposition of them into the Web-sphere; the option to sustain both conventional and unconventional political actions through online activities; and, finally, the increased facility of diffusion beyond borders of right-wing actions (including violence). In sum, as underlined by social movements studies, we have to recognize the impact of ICTs and the Internet on radical right protest organization, as a crucial resource that sustains and transforms grassroots political participation and collective action (Mattoni 2012). In fact we may add, to conclude, that small groups and single activists, who are the main players in recent extreme right mobilization, can rely on the Net, as

illustrated in the analysis of the content of right-wing websites, for practical advice and incentives to organize (and ideologically support) their action.

### **Between Offline and Online: Toward an Explanation?**

Beside the descriptive dimension, in this volume we have also tried to show and interpret differences in degrees and forms of the strategic usage of the Internet across countries and types of right-wing groups. If the literature on the extreme right has explained the development of right-wing extremism with reference to demand- and supply-side factors (for a recent review see Mudde 2007), our data seem to suggest that the Internet, and its use by these groups, can constitute an additional aspect to be considered for understanding their mobilization, either concerning the electoral arena and beyond. The Internet indeed, as emerged in this book, possesses an important advantage for right-wing political parties and movements, as for any other collective actor: it does not cost much and it connects the followers.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, what is certain is that the degree and forms of Internet usage by these groups cannot be fully understood only remaining on the Web. Instead, as we did in our study, it is necessary to take into account the opportunities and constraints offered by the political, cultural and technological, as well as organizational, contexts within which these collective actors act (della Porta and Diani 2006).

In fact, as seen in this research, we noted country patterns emerging with regard to right-wing political activism online, with US (and Italian, among the Europeans) extreme right organizations as the most cyber-oriented and the Spanish the least ones. Furthermore, also the organizational characteristics proved to be important to explain, in part, extreme right use of the Web, with a sort of 'differentiation of the work' among different types of extreme right organizations between the more traditional approach to the Net of political parties and the more innovative youth subcultural and Nazi groups, using the Internet as a substitute for face-to-face social interactions in organizing their mobilization and international contacts. This suggests a link between collective actors' values and identities offline and their approach to Internet technologies (Chadwick 2006; Pickerill 2003) and also confirms (according to our expectations) that, as suggested by social movement scholars, more institutionalized and hierarchical organizations make for a more traditional and instrumental usage of the Web, whereas less formalized and more fluid networks are much more interested in using the Web for innovative functions related to identity-building and mobilization (della Porta and Mosca 2006).

In addition our findings concerning the links between organizational characteristics and offline behavior confirmed what has been found in other studies on online collective action, that "newer, resource-poor organizations, that tend to reject conventional politics, may be defined in important ways by their internet

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3 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "Parties on the Net," October 20, 2008.

presence ... while established organizations seem to have a conservative approach” (della Porta and Mosca 2009: 783). Indeed groups better equipped with financial and formal resources, including being embedded in a more cohesive movement, tend to rely on the Internet more for their political activities. Evidently, as stressed for offline mobilization, a more formalized structure of the organization fosters the capacity of action (also online) by deepening the ties between the organization and its members (Pressman 2009: 21).

This raises the important issue about the difficulties in online participation for weak civil society groups (what about the ‘equalizing effect’ and ‘pluralism’ of new technologies?), also belonging to the extreme right. A further problem that might arise is that the form of mobilization (violent vs. non-violent) of the far right sector can depend on the types of extreme right groups (i.e. violent vs. more institutionalized) around which the milieu converges. In any event, our results prove that social actors do not relate to the Internet as a ‘monolithic unity’ (Bruszt et al. 2005), rather shaping the technology to form newer platforms for participation, they organize collective action in a way largely depending on additional factors, like the structure of social and political opportunities (Tarrow 1998). In fact, as seen in our research, actors’ resources seem to interact with the characteristics of the political, cultural and technological opportunities of the country in influencing the extreme right political activism on the Web, which is higher where they are opener. In particular, as seen, favorable cultural and discursive opportunities available to the extreme right organizations (as the use of racist and xenophobic discourse by politicians, which contribute to the legitimization of the extreme right rhetoric), seem to favor a more active use of the Web, for several political activities such as propaganda and the diffusion of their ideology. In parallel, closer contexts characterized by a stricter control and policies against them are less conducive for the use of the Internet for the political communication of these groups; whereas in the same countries the Web is used more frequently as an arena for mobilization. Evidently, as observed, where public space is limited in the ‘real’ world “individuals will use increasingly the Internet to discuss, debate, and dissent particularly in relation to topics and issues that are highly emotive in nature” (Bowman-Grieve 2009: 1005). However, this is more likely to happen when—vis-à-vis a ‘closed’ political and cultural opportunity structure in the real world—the technological opportunities of a country are favorable. In fact, as our study has shown, the levels of access to the Internet in a country, namely a bigger diffusion of the Internet, explain, as expected, a different commitment of right-wing organizations in this new medium (see also della Porta and Mosca 2006: 545). The research on politics and the Internet has often been divided between two different and contrasting paradigms: the ‘technological determinism,’ looking at new technologies as autonomous forces able to drive the social and political change and the ‘social determinism,’ which instead believes that social forces and political actors transform and adapt technologies according to their dynamics and needs (Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 207). If we cannot conclude, with our study, that low levels of digital divide are per se sufficient stimulus for the political

activation through the Web of collective actors, however these findings confirm the importance to look at, beyond the general political and cultural opportunities, more specific factors for the explanation of collective action online. Future research would be needed that integrates this aspect in the theoretical models for understanding political participation in the era of the Internet. In sum, we argue that online politics is a result of complex dynamics, also contradictory, incoherent and divergent, whose final result is often explained by contextual and environmental factors (Chadwick and Howard 2009 cited in Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 12).

### The Democratic Potential of the Internet (and its Risks)

These findings emerge as particularly central for the recent debate on the *democratic potential of the Internet*, since discourses and actions (also online) of the extreme right organizations are also important in the context of democratic representation “due to the criticism they voice and the ‘real’ policy effects they have—even without participating in government coalitions” (Lefkofridi and Casado-Asensio 2010: 3; Minkenberg 2001). What happens, as underlined by the sociologist Roversi, when more than merely constituting a ‘global village,’ the Internet is used “as a space where differences are reproduced and emphasized, and not negotiable identities prevail”? (Roversi 2006).<sup>4</sup>

The discourse of the extreme right has been addressed by several subfields of the social sciences. Political communication studies have looked at political campaigns, stressing that, by making use of an anti-establishment and anti-party rhetoric, radical right populist parties and movements are able to gain visibility and mobilize citizens’ feelings of disaffection toward the national and European political class (for example, Mazzoleni et al. 2003). Electoral studies have explored extreme right party manifestos (for example, the influence of the left/right dimension on party position toward European integration; for a summary, see Statham 2008). Social constructionist studies have addressed the discourse of the extreme right as ‘a site of the construction’ of extreme right identity, “exploring how meaning works in discourse” (Ferber 1998: 48). Also, the success/failure of extreme right parties has been linked to their discourse and frames (for example, Rydgren 2008). Indeed, the ideology and propaganda of xenophobic parties or movements “may influence people’s frame of thought” (Rydgren 2003: 52–53), offering “a theory guidance in black-box situations, a powerful tool to reframe unsolved political problems.” On sensitive issues such as migration, nationalism and religion, the extreme right has put exclusive frames on the agenda, often influencing right-wing and even center-left parties (della Porta 2012).

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with A. Roversi, Sociologist of Communication, “Politica e calcio, la violenza in rete” (“Politics and Soccer, Violence in Goal”), *La Repubblica*, January 17, 2006 (our translation).

More in general, if the Internet can be a powerful democratic means for civil society in oppressive regimes, as recent events (e.g. the Arab Spring between 2010 and 2011, the ‘Green revolution’ in Iran in 2009, etc.), have demonstrated, as well as a tool in defense of a perceived ‘lack’ of democracy within liberal contexts (e.g. see the Spanish mobilization in 2004 against terrorist attacks in Madrid, los Indignados in Spain, Occupy Wall Street, etc.), since it allows marginal actors to increase their power in politics, problems might however arise to democracy and free speech if—as illustrated in the quotations at the beginning of the chapter—“people use the Internet to listen and speak only to the like-minded” (Sunstein 2007). Through the Internet people can access to limitless news and information options, especially in the blogosphere, however, as argued, in a situation where partisan weblogs emerge as a significant political force, the relationship between democracy and the Internet may become critical (*ibid.*). On the one hand, for constitutionalists, regulation of hate speech violates the First Amendment and damages a free society. On the other hand, other commentators reject this view, underlining that hate speech should be regulated as part of a commitment to human dignity and to inclusion and respect for members of vulnerable minorities (e.g. see Waldron 2009). On this line, one of the most famous American Supreme Court judges underlined that the greatest threat to freedom is “an inert people” (Sunstein 2007: xi). If freedom from censorship is the condition for a democratic not-inert public, however, we can note that “the system of free expression must do far more than avoid censorship; it must ensure that people are exposed to competing perspectives” (*ibid.*). In fact, as the founding fathers of political theory (as well as current influential commentators) stressed centuries ago, a precondition for democracy is the Madisonian “yielding and accommodating spirit” (Sunstein 2007: xii) and members of a democratic public “will not do well if they are unable to appreciate the views of their fellow citizens, or if they see one another as enemies or adversaries in some kind of war” (*ibid.*). We have to recognize that, when political actors, as we have seen in our study, narrowly filter the information (and related views, values, norms, ideas) to citizens, the benefit of the unlimited choices of the Internet for the public can be transformed into a dangerous tool for a truly democratic discourse.

Related to this point, when looking at the use of the Web by radical organizations, we have to consider the aspect of the changes brought to politics and democracy by the Internet, with an increased personalization and individual control over content and the corresponding decrease in power of the ‘general interest intermediaries’ (e.g. magazines, newspapers, TV) (Sunstein 2007: 8). One consequence of this trend is the increasing diffusion of “personalized action frames” (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 4), which “supported by the new digital media, take the role of established political organizations.” In this way political demands and grievances

of any kind, even based on false or biased accounts, “can quickly travel the world via personal stories and images shared on social networks such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook” (ibid.). Once again we note a contradiction. If ‘disintermediation’<sup>5</sup> (see, for instance, Dayan and Katz 1992) seems to endorse a positive value, we have to be aware that ‘general interest intermediaries’ “serve many of the functions of public forum” (Sunstein 2007: 32), promoting shared experiences and exposing people to information and views that would not have been selected in advance. Indeed there can be two risks, among others, implied in the relation between democratic politics—freedom—and ‘filtering’ and this also concerns the use of the Net by radical groups. First, the risk that discussion among like-minded people will breed excessive confidence, extremism, contempt for others, and sometimes violence, and, second, the potentially dangerous role of ‘cyber cascades,’ in which information, whether true or false, spreads like wildfire (Sunstein 2007: 11). As noted for the Tea Party, and the same can be said for the extreme right organizations analyzed in this book, the members of the organization regularly exchange facts and points of view (such as the ‘self-protection’ against illegal immigrants, etc.), through discussion groups on the Internet, and share relevant literature with one another and “for the majority of them, the discussion group provides most of the information on which they base their judgments about political issues” (Sunstein 2007: 47).

In sum, in this study we have operated from the assumption that the Web today represents one crucial arena of political and social action, and that most actors—especially if, as in the case of these extremist groups, they are constantly at risk of public censure—will, at one stage or another, use it in order to air their views. This however raises the tricky normative question related to the greater freedom afforded to specific types of groups (non-democratic? Hate oriented? Extremists?) through new forms of online communication. This question has been poignantly reformulated by a *New York Times* article as: “Hate speech or free speech?”<sup>6</sup> As we have seen in this volume (Chapter 2) the European and American approaches to the constitutional protection of free expression are very different and this opens up a controversial and still open—as anticipated above—debate between ‘free speech US first-amendment liberals’ and ‘free speech antifascist Europeans.’ On the one hand there are the ‘absolutists’ of the First US Amendment, aiming at protecting the freedom of speech (i.e. the “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech”), and convinced, on the basis of this principle, that also racist speeches deserve as much protection as any other idea on a free democracy (National Center for Human Rights Education 2011). These commentators often refer to a declaration of the Supreme Court Jurist Wendell Holmes, who argued

5 Disintermediation refers to the possibilities enabled by the Web for organizations and leaders to establish a direct contact with a large public bypassing the filter (and control) of typical intermediaries in politics as political elites and journalistic elites.

6 [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/11/world/americas/11iht-hate.4.13645369.html?pagewanted=2&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/11/world/americas/11iht-hate.4.13645369.html?pagewanted=2&_r=1).

that “the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market” (ibid.). Harvey Silverglate, for example, a civil liberties American lawyer, stresses that “Free speech matters because it works. Scrutiny and debate are more effective ways of combating hate speech than censorship, and all the more so in the post-Sept. 11 era.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in a recent interview held at Leiden University in the Netherlands (March 14, 2011), Chomsky discussed freedom of speech, its history, and how to deal with the rise of racist right-wing movements, stressing that the protection of freedom of speech is one aspect of the American culture that deserves most respect and admiration, however the meaning of the Bill of Rights is that the government cannot prevent speech, but it does not say it cannot punish it. Moreover, beyond normative reasons also pragmatic ones fuel this debate, as those who underline that “censorship can backfire because it is usually viewed as a violation of the right to free expression, which is widely valued as an ideal ... Backfire occurs, for example, when censorious attacks on a film or book cultivate increased demand for the forbidden work rather than restrict access to it” (Jansen and Martin 2004: 1).

On the other hand there are those commentators who reject this approach and give prominence, as the tradition of European laws do, to the protection of human rights and social harmony. For them, for example, the free market of ideas is an unrealistic situation which underestimates the inequities in racial power. In particular they emphasize that a democratic liberal government has the constitutional obligation to eliminate obstacles that prevent equal participation in society, as racial discrimination that undermines a person’s or groups’ humanity,<sup>8</sup> and they make appeal to the international law of human rights.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the appeal to the First Amendment can risk, according to some, to be manipulated by racists, which in defense of freedom can freely make hate propaganda and incite violence. In this line also some prominent US legal scholars insist that the United States should reconsider its position on hate speech.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the findings of the present book in the light of this discussion, we can use here, in conclusion, the words of Chief Justice Dickson, who said that “there is much to be learned from First Amendment jurisprudence ... but the international commitment

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, “Hate Speech or Free Speech? What Much of West Bans is Protected in U.S.,” June 11, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> As said by Jeremy Waldron, a legal philosopher, a liberal democracy “must take affirmative responsibility for protecting the atmosphere of mutual respect against certain forms of vicious attacks” (*New York Times*, June 11, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law” (art. 20, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination condemns all incitement of racism (art. 4, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm>).

<sup>10</sup> For example, a re-examination of the Supreme Court’s insistence on the likelihood of imminent violence (which is, in the United States, the only justification for making incitement a criminal offense—see Chapter 2 of this book) is called for.

to eradicate hate propaganda ... necessitates a departure from the view, prevalent in America at present, that the suppression of hate propaganda is incompatible with the guarantee of freedom of speech." The results of our book suggest that the offline context can matter in the political behavior online, even the extremist one, and therefore that policy or cultural changes (e.g. fewer xenophobic discourses by political elites or stricter policies against fascist-Nazi groups) can affect the intensity and uses of right-wing political activism online. Whereas, tailored hate speech policies that are aware (and respectful) of the varying traditions, histories and values of different countries seem the most viable way to currently deal with the legislative changes and proposals concerning criminal law on hate and extreme speech, one could wonder, as sharply argued by Herz and Molnar (2012) whether or when different cultural and historical settings justify different substantive rules given that such cultural relativism can be used to justify content-based restrictions and so endanger freedom of expression (*ibid.*). A concrete (policy) strategy aimed at further improving the development of a democratic Internet public sphere and reaching a balance between freedom of speech and defense of a pluralistic liberal democracy should address and solve the above question.

### **Ahead to Future Research?**

What indications for future studies? As in any honest scientific research, beyond the contributions of our work, we have also to recognize some pitfalls in our study.

First of all, as observed in Chapter 1, in the research on ICTs and collective actors, there are still many areas which deserve more attention (Garrett 2006). One of them is the understanding of how and to what extent, when used in different contexts, technologies yield different effects (e.g. on participation levels), since it is likely that "effects such as these vary by individual, organization, and movement" (*ibid.*: 216). In our book we have illustrated the great potentialities of the online environment for radical right groups and have shown that the Internet is used more for some political functions and less for others by such groups. Nevertheless we can say little about the extreme right successes and failures (as for example in actually recruiting members) in the use of new technologies. Additional comparative empirical studies, both on more countries and on different types of extremisms, as well as including different levels of analysis (i.e. the meso level of organizations and the micro level of activists) are desirable for the future, in order to investigate on a larger scale and more in depth, the dynamics and the consequences of collective action on the Web by extremist actors. This could help "testing" if the same mechanisms (e.g. between the influencing factors and forms and degree of Internet usage) are at stake for different groups and countries. In spite of these limits, we are convinced that our findings can be fruitful to be read in comparison with existing studies on other types of extremisms (e.g. religious) and their use of the Net, stimulating further reflections on similar trends and possible reasons for them.

Second, regarding a study, such as ours, based mainly on online data, we have to underline that the numerical weight of the groups themselves behind their webpages remains questionable, and there is the risk, analyzing their websites, to attribute to them and their ideology greater importance than is actually justified in the real world. This point is strongly related to another important question which deserves attention.

Recent developments in the use of the Internet to carry out politics by other means suggest that websites are ‘already’ considered as an old tool by political actors, institutional as well as from civil society, and other types of Internet related arena, such as the various social networks (e.g. Facebook, blogs, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) are increasingly being used. Facebook is the most widespread and popular social media site in Western Europe and, as it has been recently noted, “populist parties have a sizeable presence on this site” since “it allows for precise and highly targeted advertising” (Bartlett et al. 2011: 16). A quantitative investigation of online supporters through Facebook of populist groups from 11 countries in Europe and based on over 10,000 survey responses, has shown that right-wing populist parties and movements are adept at using social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to amplify their message, recruit and organize (ibid.: 17) and that their online supporters are motivated by positive identification with the party’s values and the desire to protect national and cultural identity (ibid.: 19).

Another example is Metapedia, the ‘Alternative Encyclopedia,’ as it is called by extreme right actors themselves), or the anti-Wikipedia, as it is called by newspapers. It was created in 2007 by a group of young right-wing Swedish people with the goal of collecting everything that is censored by Wikipedia’s moderators. Today it exists in 17 European countries and it is a gallery for all the different streams of the identitarian radical right, with the ambition ‘to influence the history.’<sup>11</sup>

Blogs have also become increasingly popular in recent years and in the blog space many communities have emerged, which include racist and hate groups that are trying to share their ideology, express their views, or recruit new group members (Chau and Xu 2006: 1). According to a recent study conducted in Germany, in 2010 in the country 6,000 ‘posts’ were published on Facebook, YouTube and other social networks characterized by extreme right content, triple the number of 2009.<sup>12</sup>

In this book we found important signals of the political activation ability of the extreme right using websites, however further empirical studies concerning the phenomenon are needed which will be based on the use of new social media by

11 CafeBabel.com, *La Rivista Europea*, “Tra raduni rock e nuove tecnologie: l’estrema destra europea al contrattacco” (“Between Rock Rallies and New Technologies: European Extreme Right Fights Back”—our translation. <http://www.cafebabel.it/article/30757/estrema-destra-politica-europa-partiti.html>).

12 *La Stampa*, “I Neonazisti traslocano su Internet” (“Neonazis Move Into the Internet”—our translation), July 24, 2011.

extreme right groups. Indeed, in terms of how these social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube might be changing the Web-based nature of right-wing online politics addressed in this book, we can note all possible ‘efficiency’ gains (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 14).

First of all, the new social media would facilitate what is defined as “*organization without organizations*” (Shirky 2008), namely the emergence of ‘light’ organizations able to initiate collective action utilizing a limited amount of resources and a flexible and less demanding membership than traditional organizations. Indeed as (the few existing) studies on the use of these new social media by right-wing groups point out “online supporters of populist movements represent a whole new generation of predominantly young activists, who far outnumber the formal members of these parties” (ibid.: 15). The possibility offered for right-wing actors by new social media to become “digitally mediated organizations” (Chadwick 2011) seems therefore optimal, since they are often political actors which operate in between visible and hidden spheres.

This brings us directly to a second aspect related to the so-called evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0: the *content of political communication* via the Internet allowed, among others, to right-wing groups. With such new social media a big impact, also even anonymous, of personal messages is possible (Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 18) (as the story of the Spanish Indignados recently showed us), achieving “impressive levels of communication with outside public, via images and messages spread virtually across social networks, and indirectly, when anonymous Twitter streams and YouTube videos were taken up as mainstream press sources” (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 4). It goes without saying that since the Net represents today an important portion of the public sphere (Polat 2005, cited in Mosca and Vaccari 2012), the quality of democracy depends (also) on the content of such messages. With specific regard to right-wing extremism it is worth underlining that, as noticed, “these more personalized, digitally mediated collective action formations have frequently been larger; have scaled up more quickly; and have been flexible in tracking moving political targets and bridging different issues” (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 4). The usefulness of blogs is indeed that “instead of having a few people being in control of the discussion (like in traditional Internet forums), blogs basically allow anyone to express their ideas and thoughts freely in one’s own blog space” (Chau and Xu 2006: 1).

Finally, the platforms of Web 2.0 are spaces of aggregation and integration between actions and relations of users which led to *new forms of participation* (Chadwick 2009; Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 21), where virtual and real-world political activity are mixed up. Indeed the political relations and the shared identities which it is possible to build and keep alive on the Net can easily translate, also for right-wing organizations, in resources and concrete activities online, with political and electoral results more significant than the term ‘virtual’ could suggest (Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 19)—as shown, for example, in the efficient mobilization during the municipal electoral campaign of the right-wing Spanish party *Plataforma per Catalunya* (PxC) in 2007. This is true especially for young

generations among which the new media are as popular as TV, and above all, considered more trustworthy (Ceccarini 2012). In this sense, as far as right-wing activists are concerned, we have to recognize that future studies are necessary, in order to investigate who these people are, their background and activities. This will be “key to understanding new political movements, and whether they are likely to grow or fade” (ibid.: 22), since, as observers increasingly underline, the current generation of leaders of the extreme right, younger and more educated than before, master the tools of communication of the Web 2.0 and know very well its public, as the slogan of Project Schoolyard says: “We don’t just entertain racist kids, we create them.”<sup>13</sup>

Future research is therefore needed, which could adapt the methodological instruments of social research to these more fluid and constantly transforming virtual spaces. In particular, as argued (Mosca and Vaccari 2012: 216), in three different directions: at a systemic level, the study of the transformation of the political opportunities and constraints offered to collective action by the development of digital media. At a meso organizational level, in order to address the still opaque question of the impact of the current new ‘hybrid’ ways of doing politics, between offline and online, on the identities (beyond structural aspects) of collective actors. Finally, at the individual level in order to understand if the politics online, especially the new development of the Web 2.0, would affect preferences and electoral behaviors. In the case of extreme right groups this would be particularly crucial in the light of the recent electoral success of these parties all around Europe (e.g. see the 2012 presidential election in France). Finally it goes without saying that new field of research about Internet and politics would also require a (methodological) innovation of techniques, able to grasp social and political phenomena which are constantly and rapidly changing.

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13 <http://www.cafebabel.it/article/30757/estrema-destra-politica-europa-partiti.html>.







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