

# Radical right-wing movements: Who, when, how and why?

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**abstract** This article provides an overview of the existing research on the causes of radical right-wing movements, a topic often neglected in the literature in comparison with the academic attention paid to radical right political parties and elections. It illustrates individual, organizational and contextual explanations for the emergence and mobilization (including violence) of right-wing movements in Europe and beyond, providing comparative empirical studies and data as illustration. The article concludes by discussing possible future directions for right-wing movement research.

**keywords** far right ♦ individual, meso-level and macro-level factors ♦ political mobilization ♦ radical right violence ♦ radical right-wing movements

## Introduction

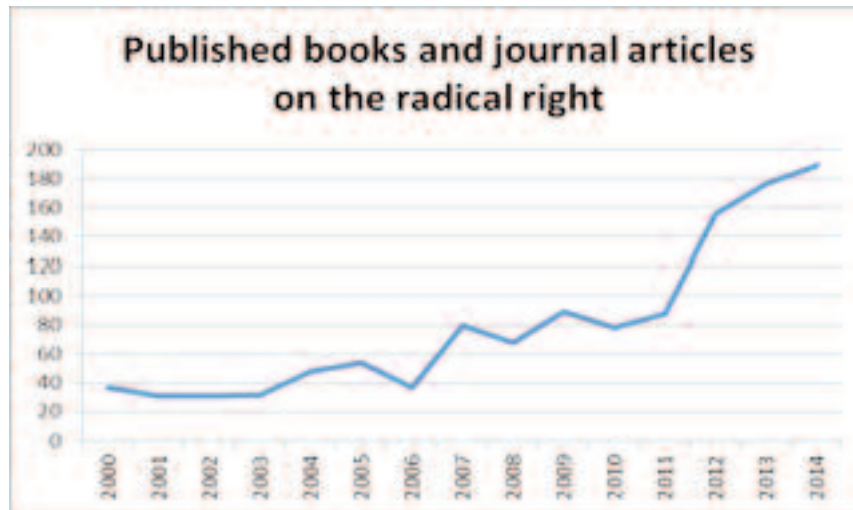
Despite the increasing academic interest in the radical right (Mudde, 2016, and as Figure 1 shows), which has accompanied its recent success all around Europe, research on the topic is still ‘biased’ towards some types of organizations and forms of political action (Goodwin, 2012; Hutter and Kriesi, 2013).

On the one hand, as other articles in *Sociopedia.isa* have pointed out (e.g. Muis and Immerzeel, 2016), the literature on the radical right has been focused mainly on political parties, elections and electoral behaviour (e.g. Carter, 2005; Ignazi, 2003; Norris, 2005), paying little attention to the non-partisan milieu and cultural phenomena that surround (and often support) the success of radical parties. On the other hand, the scholarship on social movements has often neglected right-wing radicalism (for some exceptions, see Caiani et al., 2012; Koopmans et al., 2005; Leeson et al., 2012; Minkenberg, 2011; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2005, 2007). As noted by Della Porta (2013), right-wing extremist movements have been examined mainly within studies of political

violence and terrorism, and are associated with socio-economic or political pathologies (e.g. breakdown theories, relative deprivation), whereas work on social movement, emphasizing actors’ strategic choices and the contextual opportunities for mobilization, has been more interested in analysing left-wing radicalism.

This dichotomy also holds true for research on the radical right in East Central Europe, which has concentrated mainly on explaining the emergence and electoral contours of post-Soviet countries’ radical right populism (e.g. Auers-Kasekamp, 2013; Hanley et al., 2008; Kovács, 2013; but for some exceptions, see Minkenberg, 2015; Mudde, 2005).

Moreover, although there are numerous empirical studies within the field of political violence and terrorism investigating the causes and conditions of the emergence of extremism (among others, Della Porta, 2013), the attention to radical right-wing movements is less than that paid to other types of (extremist) organizations (e.g. Islamic religious organizations). A



**Figure 1.** Published books and journal articles on the radical right, 2000–2014.  
Source: Science Citation Index Expanded.

further difficulty concerning the analysis of right-wing movements is, as Mudde (2007: 11–12) highlights, the terminological variety and the lack of a shared definition among scholars. Terms such as extreme right (Arzheimer, 2009; Caiani et al., 2012), radical right (Ellinas, 2010), right-wing populism (Mudde, 2007), anti-immigration movements and far right (Blee, 2003) are employed on the basis of a range of different interpretations of the phenomenon and depending on geographical area. Some scholars (for example Carter, 2005) define right-wing extremism (and ‘extreme right’) using two criteria: anticonstitutionalism and antidemocratic values (it is for this reason it is called ‘extremist’), and a rejection of the principle of fundamental human equality (hence the label ‘right-wing’). Others (for example Norris, 2005) prefer the label ‘radical right’ in denoting those political parties and non-party organizations located towards one pole on the standard ideological left–right spectrum. However, all these different labels are used by scholars to refer to the same organizations: this political family is identified in the literature by some common ideological attributes, such as nationalism, exclusionism, xenophobia, the quest for a strong state, welfare chauvinism, revisionism and traditional ethics (Mudde, 2007: 21) and it is usually associated, empirically, with various political movements and groups in Europe, such as the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)*, the French *Front National*, the Belgian *Vlaams Belang (VB)* and the German *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* and *Pegida* (for a classification and some lists see Mudde, 2007: 44; but also Kriesi and Pappas, 2015).

When analysing the causes for the emergence (and success) of radical right movements and mobi-

lization, although sometimes it may seem impossible to find generalizable trends – for example, the strangely divergent fortunes of the Walloon *Front National* (not successful) and the Flemish *VB* (successful) within the context of the same country, immigration, increasing cultural diversity and unemployment (Arzheimer, 2012) – overall one is confronted with three big approaches: macro-, meso- and micro-level explanations (Eatwell, 2016). Some explain the mobilization on the radical right by (at an individual level of analysis) the role of extremists’ psychological characteristics, values and motivations (e.g. Canetti and Pedahzur, 2002; Henry et al., 2005). Other scholars focus mainly on the systemic (macro) level, namely on the environmental conditions (e.g. cultural, societal) and on the institutional framework and elites’ responses that influence actors’ mobilization and success (e.g. Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Koopmans, 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2005). Finally, meso-level studies look instead at the link between context and individual concerns, focusing on the organizations to which individuals belong and through which they gain knowledge and norms (Art, 2011; Eatwell, 2005). These aspects are generally studied separately, although more recently, some authors have tried to combine individual, organizational and structural factors to explain far right political mobilization (e.g. Mudde, 2007; Pirro, 2015), observing the varieties of these actors (Caiani and Borri, 2013). This corresponds, broadly speaking, with the distinction between demand-side and supply-side factors that is deployed in the study of radical right parties especially (Caiani and Della Porta, 2017 forthcoming; Klandermans and Mayer, 2006; Koopmans et al., 2005; Rydgren, 2007; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2007).

Moving on from these reflections, *this article offers an overview of empirical research on (and analytical approaches to) radical right-wing movements and their mobilization (including violence) – with a particular focus on ‘Who’, ‘When’, ‘How’ and ‘Why’ these groups mobilize.* It distinguishes and discusses three perspectives: namely individual, meso-organizational level and macro-level contextual factors of explanation. Furthermore, it presents, by way of illustration for each perspective, many cross-national and single-case data on the mobilization of the radical right, before and after the economic crisis in Europe (and the USA), collected on the basis of various sources and methods (including protest event analysis, claims making analysis, participant observation, interviews and ethnographic methods) and usually used in (left-wing) social movement research. These methods will be discussed illustrating the PROs and CONs when investigating the far right. A brief discussion regarding the question of to what extent the various explanations (micro, meso, macro) differ between radical right-wing social movements and political parties will also be included at the end of each section – taking into account, of course, the different dependent variables they investigate (e.g. vote vs collective action outside the institutional arena). The article concludes with reflections on possible future directions for research on right-wing radicalism, emphasizing further neglected topics.

### **Who mobilizes on the radical right? When individual values and motivations matter**

In many Western countries, an increase in the intensity of radical right-wing activities is observable over the last two decades. This increase is connected with institutionalized politics (Mudde, 2016) as well as with protest incidents (both violent and non-violent) that involve right-wing activists (Minkenberg, 2005, 2011). In addition to these trends, a new populist and xenophobic right and an underground subculture, represented by racist and frequently violent young extremists, have emerged, with their own rhetoric, mythology and practices (Caldiron, 2001; TE-SAT, 2012). Waves of protest and political campaigns initiated by extra-parliamentary organizations, new ‘movement-parties’ and lone activists have emerged in response to globalization, the EU’s austerity programmes, the current economic and refugee crisis, issues around immigration and multiculturalism, and a disillusionment with mainstream politics and representative democracy (Caiani, 2017 forthcoming). All this has provoked sharp criticism and mobilization from citizens, reacting to the

challenges of modern times which have been intercepted by the radical right (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). But what are the *individual motivations and factors for mobilizing on the radical right?*

According to a study on radical right mobilization in six Western European democracies (Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom) and the USA, based on radical right ‘protest events’ (that is, actions initiated by the radical right) reported in newspapers between 2005 and 2009, in the majority of the countries the capacity of the radical right to mobilize ‘a high number of individuals’ has increased in recent years (especially after 2007, in Austria, Germany, France and the USA) (Caiani and Parenti, 2013: 114–118, results on Austria are new). The only exception is Spain, where levels of participation in radical right events (high at the beginning of the analysis) were seen to sharply decrease (shifting from up to 10,000 participants in 2005 to just 700 in 2009). Furthermore, the size of the events organized by right-wing extremists in Europe and the US varies considerably, from thousands of participants (as in the case of the demonstration organized by the Spanish Falangists to claim the unity of Spain, which involved around 2500 radical right militants [*El País*, 18 April 2005], or the demonstration organized by the Austrian FPÖ in Vienna against a mosque, which involved about 700 participants [*Der Standard*, 8 and 14 May 2009], or the rally involving thousands of neo-Nazis organized by the German NPD in 2009 to commemorate the bombing of Dresden [*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 February 2009]) to a handful of activists on other occasions. However, in all countries, more than a third of events (38.5%) involved a limited (or very limited) number of participants (no more than 5–6 on average) (*Der Standard*, 8 and 14 May 2009), confirming what official sources have suggested, namely that most radical right supporters engage in actions individually and not on behalf of any specific organization (TE-SAT, 2012). Although protest event analysis is a consolidated method in social movement studies for the systematic and formalized analysis of many properties (such as frequency, timing and duration, location, claims, size, forms, carriers, and targets, etc.) of the protest (for a review on the method see Koopmans and Rucht, 2002), only recently has it been applied to the radical right too (see e.g. Koopmans et al., 2005).

The rise of the anti-Islamic *Pegida* movement is one of the latest sustained episodes of radical right mobilization in Western Europe outside the electoral arena. A 2016 study focusing on Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, and combining protest event analysis with online data and network analysis (another technique coming from social movement

studies and rarely applied to the radical right until recently, e.g. Caiani and Parenti, 2013; Gerstenfeld et al., 2003; Qin et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2005), explained why *Pegida* mustered low-level support in some countries and failed in others, revealing the pivotal importance of the organizers' agency and their relations with other radical right players (Berntzen and Weisskircher, 2016). Unlike the *sui generis* case in Dresden, the *Pegida* label has become a rallying point, appropriated by pre-established radical right activists using it for their own mobilization efforts.

Individual-level explanations for radical right-wing mobilization (including violent mobilization) draw mostly on psychological and socio-psychological aspects. The focus is on the socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes of radical right supporters (e.g. among others Arzheimer, 2012). For example, Klandermans and Mayer (2006), through interviews with 157 radical right activists from both political parties and movements in several European countries, identify the most important motivations for their activism as being in their past: first of all, an exposure to traditional, nationalist or even authoritarian values (Klandermans and Mayer, 2006: 171) during the activists' childhood; and, second, feelings of stigmatization, together with the sense of loyalty and inclusion offered by the group, were identified as the main common factors leading people to join radical right organizations. Indeed, the authors argue, in line with Ignazi's 'silent counter-revolution' hypothesis (Ignazi, 1992), that this type of early socialization produces a sharp contrast between activists' traditional values and the values of post-industrial society (such as permissiveness, multiculturalism, etc.), which would in turn cause them to lean towards extremism (Ignazi, 1992). Among the social psychological approaches to radical right extremism, the importance of belonging and identity is also stressed. The search for status and identity is considered a main motivating factor when youths join racist groups and gangs (see e.g. the study by Bjørgo [1997] on Scandinavian countries). Young people frequently joined militant racist groups to receive protection against various enemies or perceived threats – whether they be school bullies or immigrant youth gangs (Bjørgo, 1997). In addition, it has been observed that some negative sanctions, such as branding these groups as 'racists' or 'Nazis', may have had the unintended effect of reinforcing the participation of new recruits in these stigmatized groups (Wagemann, 2005).

Against those theories that view supporters of radical right groups as being characterized somewhat by irrationality and alienation, radical right activists have been found not to have particular psychological

disturbances or to be 'sociopathic'; rather, they are socially integrated and appear to be 'perfectly normal people' (Blee and Creasap, 2010: 271; Klandermans and Mayer, 2006: 267). Similarly, psychological approaches point to individual characteristics (e.g. authoritarian attitudes) as motivating factors behind the decision to join right-wing *violent* (even terrorist) organizations (e.g. Henry et al., 2005). The possibility of finding a violent/terrorist personality and/or any accurate profile (profiling) – psychological or otherwise – of right-wing radicals is still an open debate. Sociologists today generally approach the radical right as a social movement, not as an outcome of personality disorders, but instead in terms of pathways (see also Blee and Creasap, 2010; Horgan, 2008). Similar to these explanations of right-wing movements, research on radical right political parties that has focused on their emergence and growth (for recent overviews on the scholarship on radical right parties, see e.g. Golder, 2016; Muis and Immerzeel, 2016) has also stressed the importance of the specific personality traits of right-wing leaders and of the value orientations of their supporters (e.g. levels of trust in representative institutions, xenophobia, orientation towards immigration; see Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2012). Moreover, rather than being irrational, it has been shown that voting for these parties is connected largely with ideological and pragmatic considerations (Van der Brug et al., 2005; Zhirkov, 2014). In sum, these micro-level accounts, which emphasize either activists' primary socialization and their search for status and identity or their authoritarian or xenophobic attitudes, are all focused on the 'demand side' of far right politics, namely on those individual factors that lead people to sympathize, join or vote for radical right organizations. This approach has been questioned by other scholars (e.g. Mudde, 2010), who highlight the fact that all these explanations of right-wing radicalism implicitly share one assumption: that under 'normal circumstances' (i.e. without crisis), demand for far right politics should be low. Further, Horgan (2008), challenging conventional explanations, according to which violence is easy under certain conditions, such as poverty, racial or ideological hatreds, or family pathologies, argues instead that violent confrontation – regardless of the underlying conditions or motivations – is the exception, not the rule, and that it can be triggered only when pathways around emotional barriers are present.

In addition, as noted within political violence studies, explanations of the causes of radicalization also vary in the extent to which they consider psychological differences between terrorists playing different roles (e.g. leaders vs followers), whether radicals are regarded as psychologically homoge-

neous or heterogeneous, and whether subtypes of radicalisms exist (Victoroff, 2005: 12). The activists of the radical right in Europe are certainly heterogeneous. As early as 1984, French researchers distinguished five subgroups within the *FN*'s electorate/activists: xenophobes, traditional Right, Catholic Fundamentalists, Young Workers, and Prodigal Sons of the Left. Mayer distinguishes four subgroups, based on their previous electoral behaviour. The four sub-electorates show substantial differences in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes. In Austria, researchers distinguished between at least two 'socio-political types' within the electorate of the *FPÖ*: 'welfare state chauvinists' and right-wingers disillusioned by the system (Ullrich and Plasser, 2003).

### The radical right and the importance of the context

Other types of studies, more attentive to macro-level factors, offer different (but complementary) explanations for right-wing radicalism, looking at the *country context and its characteristics*. When looking at the level of radical right mobilization in Europe and the United States from 2005 to 2009, the aforementioned study, based on protest events organized by the radical right (Caiani and Parenti, 2013: Ch. 5), confirms that right-wing mobilization is a significant – and increasing – phenomenon in the last 10–15 years. A total of 1587 actions initiated by these groups have been identified (347 in the USA, 338 in Italy, 147 in Spain, 125 in France, 115 in the UK, 393 in Germany and 122 in Austria) and, overall, the number of radical right protest events increased from 286 in 2005 to 402 in 2009 (with a peak of 431 events in 2008). Moreover, more than one-quarter (26.8%) of mobilizations identified were violent. However, considerable variations across the seven countries were observed, with stable or increasing levels of right-wing mobilization for most. How, therefore, can we explain *differences across countries and time* against the background of the potential presence, in all times and spaces, of dissatisfaction and individual grievances?

These types of studies focus on the socio-economic contextual variables (particularly economic disparities, ethnic or class cleavages, and structural factors like technology and communication) and/or political and cultural (even technological) variables (such as political culture, religion and historical experiences), which can account for (right-wing) extremism. In particular, economic and social crises are mentioned in connection with the success of radical right parties and movements (Prowe, 2004), as

are political instability, allies in power (Koopmans, 2005), the legacy of an authoritarian past, youth subcultures and hooliganism, and the diffusion of xenophobic values within society (Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2005).

For example, among work emphasizing the role of economic aspects, the 'deprivation theory' relates right-wing extremism to anomie and poverty, bridging the macro-level socio-economic features and individual factors (e.g. Heitmeyer, 2002; Perrineau, 2002). In this regard, the sense of insecurity arising from the breakdown of traditional social structures (e.g. social class, family, religion; see Oesch, 2008; Rydgren, 2012) and the grievances generated by the economic, social or political critical conditions that are brought about by processes of globalization and modernization, are considered 'precipitant' factors, which favour support for right-wing parties and groups. However, the empirical evidence regarding these aspects offers contrasting and equivocal results. On the one hand, for example, studies of right-wing radicals (both from political parties and non-party radical right organizations) stress that they are usually young (often less than 18 years old), with a lower-class background and a lack of education or professional skills (Merkl, 2003). In addition, difficulties in primary socialization, due to the weakening of the sense of family and entrenchment in the community (Merkl, 2003) are also factors which have been found to favour right-wing extremism. On the other hand, other works question the correlation between right-wing extremism and (low) economic status. For example, Canetti and Pedahzur (2002) show that right-wing extremist sentiments are unrelated to socio-economic variables. Similarly, a comfortable individual situation is found to be more conducive to radical right party affinity than job insecurity and deprivation (De Weerd et al., 2004: 81, quoted in Mudde, 2007: 223). In fact, according to Mudde (2007), populist radical right parties are supported by people who want to hold on to what they have in the face of the perceived threats of globalization, such as mass immigration and the post-industrial society (Mudde, 2007: 223). Among works which stress the role played by political contextual factors that can facilitate or, alternatively, hamper the emergence and success of right-wing radical groups, some concentrate on long-term, institutional variables (e.g. the characteristics of the electoral systems; see Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Kitschelt, 2007); while others focus on medium-term party-system factors (e.g. the models of party competition; see Carter, 2005; Kitschelt, 1995; Van der Brug et al., 2005) and short-term contextual variables (e.g. the levels of immigration; see Lubbers et al., 2000; Van der Brug et al., 2005). Particularly

popular is the idea that the political opportunity structure (see e.g. Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Mudde, 2007), available in a specific time and country – which refers to both the stable and the dynamic characteristics of the context (such as the institutional framework of a country, the functional and territorial distribution of powers, the party system or form of government; the shift in the configuration of allies and opposition, new laws, and so on e.g. Mudde, 2007) – can strongly influence radical right mobilization. While ‘open’ opportunities imply easy access for new challengers in the political system, the lack (or the closing) of these opportunities often end up in scarce mobilization or even the escalation of radicalization (Della Porta, 1995). Koopmans (2005), for instance, argues that right-wing radicalism in Europe tends to be motivated more by the lack of opportunities (e.g. through established political channels of expression) than by the presence of grievances in society (e.g. presence of immigrants, economic difficulties). As far as Central and Eastern Europe is concerned, the role of the former communist regime has been cited as favouring greater acceptance of right-wing discourses and ideologies (Minkenberg, 2015). Moreover, the idea of the political opportunity structure has been integrated with the notion of ‘discursive opportunities’, which determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be ‘“legitimate” by the audience’ (Koopmans et al., 2005; Kriesi, 2004: 72; for a literature review on the concept, see McCammon, 2013). In this regard, the importance of ‘frames’ and discourses as mediating factors for mobilization, between the individuals and the context (Furlow and Goodall, 2011; Morrow, 2015; Wodak, 2015), as well as the role of public discourse and media debates for radical right-wing movements, have been underlined (e.g. Ellinas, 2010).

Likewise, theories on diffusion and social contagion stress the importance of cognitive elements for the spread of right-wing radical mobilization (Braun, 2011; Jäckle and König, 2016; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Muis, 2015). On the basis of a longitudinal and cross-country study (on five European democracies), Koopmans et al. (2005) found that the mobilization and success of radical right-wing actors are strongly affected by the cultural and historical policies of the country (i.e. the conception of ‘citizenship’), as well as by discourses on migration and the ethnic diversity in the country, more than by other variables within the context. ‘Political claims analysis’, the methodological approach used, based on newspaper coverage of interventions by both governmental and civil society actors, has the comparative merit (vis-a-vis protest event analysis) of

accounting for the myriad other forms of contentious politics that occur upstream and downstream of protests: public statements, judicial proceedings and so on, as well as inserting social movements into a multi-actor field of contention. Similarly, Hutter (2014: 89–91), investigating contemporary data from six West European societies – Austria, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland – from 1975 to 2005, shows that the rise of immigration as a protest issue is also related to an increasing polarization on the street, due to the rise of anti-immigration claims (made by the radical right). This tends to support the thesis that there is an inverse relationship between electoral and protest politics on the political right. ‘Voices against immigration are relatively more prominent in the protest arenas of those countries where the populist radical right could not as successfully establish itself in the electoral arena’ (Hutter, 2014: 110). Within cultural variables approaches, waves of right-wing violence have been linked to the spreading of values such as radical nationalism, intolerance, xenophobia, authoritarianism, opposition to the Left and anti-parliamentarism (Prowe, 2004). Indeed, cross-national differences exist on the presence of these values. From a historical perspective, cultural racism is considered today’s substitute for the biological racism of the past (Wieviorka, 2004). Recent research has also indicated that the radical right has become a successful social movement of the losers, which reacts against economic and especially cultural globalization and related competition (Kriesi et al., 2008). The success of the radical right in its ‘mobilization of the losers’, at least in some party systems, is considered to be responsible for a shift in emphasis from questions of economics in the 1970s to questions of culture today (Kriesi et al., 2008: 265). The role of religion is also stressed. A recent study, based on the collection of 1645 events on anti-refugee violence and social unrest in Germany in 2014 and 2015, shows that radical right violent mobilization emerges primarily against immigrants and can take different forms. Four different types of right-wing violence and social unrest were identified: xenophobic demonstrations, assault, arson attacks and miscellaneous attacks against refugee housing (such as swastika graffiti) (Ben ek and Strasheim, 2016). Research has shown an increase in protests against Muslims (which became violent in some cases). By studying the English Defence League (EDL), with more than 16 months of participant observation with grassroots activists, Busher (2016) showed that this radical right group has staged anti-Muslim protests and demonstrations across the UK since 2009, nurturing activism and creating a collective bonding identity among those who have chosen

to march under its banner. He shows how people became involved with the group; how they forged and intensified their belief in the cause; and how they negotiated accusations that they were just another racist, far right group.

With regard to *violent* right-wing mobilization, there is a large (academic as well as governmental) literature claiming that there has been a major increase in violence recently, not least aimed at Muslims and new immigrants in Europe. Recent ‘TE-SAT’ reports (e.g. 2013) on the violent right-wing stress that, although to date there are no indications that right-wing radicals in the EU member states have adopted terrorist *modi operandi*, the right-wing extremist scene remains of considerable concern. For example, in Greece in 2013, the police arrested 20 party members on charges of homicide, criminal association, illegal possession of firearms, a series of racist attacks, extortion, possession of explosives and money laundering. Among the arrested were six of Golden Dawn’s 18 Members of Parliament and two police officers. As noted, in terms of trigger factors that can explain right-wing radical violence, the majority of these recent activities within the EU are motivated by xenophobia. In fact, ‘immigration and multiculturalism continued to be among the key themes of right-wing extremists’ (Busher, 2016: 39–41) (see below the section about ‘macro level factors’). To mention just a few: in 2013, hundreds of far right activists attended anti-Roma events (including marches and demonstrations) across the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (see also the point below on the ‘transnationalization of the radical right’). Violent incidents and acts of revenge also emerged in connection with right-wing extremists and Muslim extremists in Britain in the same year (Busher, 2016). In the USA, research points to the neglected issue of religion (see the next section on meso-level factors, ideology and propaganda), for example the study by Kaplan (2016: 278), which sheds light on US radical resistance, the Christian identity movement and other religiously motivated right-wing radicalism – especially in the form of Islamophobic hate crimes, which have increased since 9/11 – through an interpretative approach.

To conclude, we must consider that the configuration of opportunities and constraints that different national contexts provide for radical right mobilization is exploited differently by different types of right-wing organizations. Indeed, the radical is a plural family (as previously noted) in European states as well as in the USA (Caiani and Parenti, 2013: Ch. 2), comprised of groups with different ideological tendencies and which mobilize around different issues. Some of them are characterized by neofascist

or even neo-Nazi positions, while others have reduced their neofascist aspects to a sort of ‘right-wing socialism’ with anti-globalist and anti-liberalist traits. The family includes various kinds of very different groups, which range from right-wing parties to several radical political movements, from neo-Nazi groups to fascist nostalgic/revisionists and cultural associations, from publishers, commercial sites and *militaria* to a radically differentiated subcultural radical right area composed of skinhead, music and sports groups (Caiani and Parenti, 2013: 45): there is always the possibility that explanations might differ between them. For instance, concerning socio-economic (poor/deprived) conditions vs other mechanism/factors for right-wing activism, Arzheimer (2012) stresses that, whereas the social bases of more successful and ‘accepted’ radical right parties such as *Front National* are more mixed in their social profile, more radical fringe groups (such as the German *NPD*) ‘have frightened off the middle classes’. In a similar vein, political opportunities provided by the political context might work out differently for parties and movements when they crowd each other out, as highlighted by Koopmans et al. (2005: 21). For instance, the availability of sufficient ‘political space’ predicts a strong radical right party, but at the same time a weak social movement (see also Hutter, 2014).

## How mobilizing? Organizations and leaders of the radical right

Research pointing out meso-level aspects of right-wing mobilization focuses mostly on factors such as organizations and their dynamics, leaders, ideologies and propaganda to explain the emergence, survival and endurance of the radical right. In this respect, they point at the combination of underlying (individual and contextual) motives for contention with organizations and their networks as the basis for movement recruitment and the path to popular mobilization (Caiani et al., 2012; Diani, 2015). In the USA, for instance, the monitoring organization Southern Poverty Law Center ([www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map](http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map)) counted 939 hate groups in 2013 active in spreading propaganda (and the government estimates around 191,000 incidents occur annually), by distributing leaflets in neighbourhoods, holding public rallies, setting up websites and reaching out to like-minded activists overseas (Caiani et al., 2012). Similarly, in Europe, in 2010–2012 between 70 and 100 radical right organizations were counted in each of the following countries: Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Great Britain and Austria. All had their own website,

through which they spread their propaganda, recruited people and funds, and built organizational contacts among (Caiani and Parenti, 2013). Eastern and Central Europe are no exception (for an overview, see Minkenberg, 2011). Meadowcroft and Morrow (2017), with an original ethnographic study of the UK anti-Islamic street protest organization, the English Defence League, showed how far right groups overcome the collective action problem inherent to political organization in order to recruit sufficient activists willing to bear the costs of participation and not free-ride on the participation of others, and demonstrated how the radical right movement solved this problem by supplying selective incentives to members in the form of the club goods of access to violence, increased self-worth and group solidarity. These benefits were offset against the costs of stigma, time, money and unwanted police attention that also accompanied EDL membership (although a limit of these benefits was the inability of the group to build a broader, more mainstream movement).

More specifically, it has been shown that belonging to different types of groups matters in terms of forms (i.e. repertoire of action) of mobilization (Caiani and Parenti, 2013: 123; the data on Austria are new). Koopmans et al. (2005), in a cross-national study of radical right discourses, pointed out the importance of the organizational characteristics in the groups' strategic repertoire of action. In particular, they link different organizational forms that radical right groups may take (more institutional vs more flexible) with different political action (more moderate vs more controversial) (Koopmans et al., 2005: 187). Similarly, in the study on the seven Western democracies it was seen that (out of 1525 total events initiated by right-wing radical groups and activists) the most active right-wing actors are, first of all, informal political movements and subcultural youth groups (accounting in total for 43% of all protest events in the period under analysis), and, second, right-wing political parties (30%). This holds true for all countries studied. The only difference is the United States, where the second most active type of radical right organizations are nostalgic revisionist groups (initiating the events in 37.1% of cases from 2005 and 2009 in the country), whereas US radical right political parties initiate protest events in only 8.8% of cases. Most importantly, our research has also shown that the degree of radicalism of radical right mobilization varies according to the type of group at stake, stressing that the most violent radical right events are mainly undertaken by subcultural and neo-Nazi groups, which account for 40.1% and 20.4% respectively of violent events (whereas political parties are the least violent). And this trend

holds true in all countries. Social movement protest is considered to be dominated by 'the left', while 'the right' mainly uses the electoral channel to voice its discontent, instead of taking their grievances to the street (Hutter, 2014; Van der Meer et al., 2009). On the contrary, as is increasingly underlined by some scholars (Caiani et al., 2012; Castelli Gattinara, 2016), the radical right is able to use a variegated action repertoire beyond violence (Goodwin, 2012) and electoral behaviour, with some groups (mainly, but not only, parties) performing traditional political actions, and others (mainly movements) more oriented towards cultural (symbolic and expressive) initiatives involving 'cultural activities, music, publishing, ecology, events planning, cooperative work, that become ways to express and disseminate their own vision of the world' (Di Tullio, 2006: 37). The use of a different action repertoire between movements and parties is, however, not clear cut and the boundaries are blurred. Indeed, recent studies, as mentioned above, have also noted the increasing use of new technologies by radical right movements as another aspect of the broadening of their action repertoire, particularly the Internet (on the Internet and the radical right, see, among others, Bartlett et al., 2011; Caiani et al., 2012). The networks that radical right organizations are able to build either at the national or at the international level are considered important for right-wing mobilization (e.g. on networks built online, see Burris et al., 2000; Gerstenfeld et al., 2003; Qin et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2005). In the USA, for example, the Tea Party has been found to maintain its members through a loose, reticular organization with (albeit uneasy) relations with both the Republican Party and radical right groups (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012). On the other hand, transnational networks with other radical right organizations in other countries, through 'transnational processes of exchange and learning', are considered to play an important role in the success of right-wing radicalism in Europe (Langenbacher and Schellenberg, 2011: 22). Networking, for the radical right as for any political party, represents an important political activity, particularly on an international level, and functions as a crucible for the exchange of ideas and information on policy and praxis (Graham, 2013: 177).

Among organizational resources is the role of ideology in current right-wing movements. Because right-wing extremists generally dehumanize their enemies, attacks on target groups, such as black people, or enclaves of foreign workers in Europe, are justified by their ideology (Caiani et al., 2012). Griffin (2003) underlines the role of 'dream time' in radical right-wing political violence. Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson (2012) have, for example,



shown that the activists of the Tea Party, often Republican Party swing voters, frequently have experience in local, frequently religious and very conservative, associations. Tea Party activists voice an anxiety about the Great Recession that they express as despising those who rely on public assistance without deserving it, singling out especially people of colour and, even more, illegal migrants. They favour minimalist state intervention and oppose taxes. Scholars have analysed the Tea Party as a conservative (mostly) white, older, male and middle-class social movement in which a racist agenda is, unlike in the US radical right, largely implicit, yet holding at its core a celebration of hardworking citizens which is based on racist constructions; in this movement, racist ideologies crucially intertwine with economic and social concerns (Blee, 2003; Burke, 2013). A distinctive mixture of diverse ideological strands, characteristic of the US right, such as libertarian and traditional conservative opposition to taxation and social welfare, white racism and Christian conservatism, the Tea Party has deployed a vehemently populist discourse: this, marked by a nostalgia for an idealized past when the national community was not threatened by globalization, secularization or the 'end of white Christian America' recalls the radical right in Europe. In terms of ideology (though not necessarily politics), religion has, so far, been a somewhat neglected topic in research on radical right mobilization. A recent discussion of the state-of-the-art in populist radical right (PPR) studies (Mudde, 2016) calls for future research to reflect the broader range of issues mobilized by the PPR beyond immigration/identity, which include gender, the welfare state and religion. In this respect, scholars argue that, in the first decade of the new millennium, issues of religion and gender are closely intertwined in heated public debates on banning minarets and the burqa (Betz, 1994; Wodak, 2015). Put differently, in Western Europe, the shift from an ethno-national to an ethno-religious discourse has provided the radical right with an occasion 'to exploit broader fears and prejudices' such as concerns about gender equality and national security (Mudde, 2010). In the US, right-wing religion and conservative values are often motivational factors in right-wing activism (Blee, 2003), for example in the Tea Party. Further, the superiority of one race (or religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) over others (O'Boyle, 2002: 28), racism in terms of 'otherness' (Minkenberg, 1998: 45), right-wing activists as 'executors of a general will' (Heitmeyer, 2002: 525), and 'blood' and 'honour', have all been found as principal elements of radical right rhetoric (Wagemann, 2005). Similarly, qualitative studies in the US context show that, at the interplay between micro- and meso-dynamics of

mobilization, rightist organizations provide their members with structures of meaning which they can use to make sense of their lives: rather than assuming that individuals join these organizations because they believe that they can defend their interests defined by their social positions, they find that whiteness and racist self-interests are constructed through activism (Blee, 2003).

Moreover, charismatic leadership too is a prominent supply-side explanation for radical right mobilization in the academic literature (e.g. Eatwell, 2005). It has been argued that charismatic leaders who can maintain peace in an organization can instigate an upward spiral of organizational strength (Klandermans and Mayer, 2006). Other scholars point to the (invisible) informal leadership roles filled by women in racist movements: involving emotional work which is crucial to sustaining the group's cohesion, key to nurturing collective identities, and to recruiting and to socializing new members (Blee, 2003).

However, organizational resources seem often to be both the cause and the result of success (rather than a genuinely 'independent factor'). Certainly, organizational strength might be more important in explaining the persistence of political parties after their initial breakthrough (Ellinas, 2010). As for radical right political parties, research, employing qualitative data sources (such as interviews with party activists), has shown the endurance of these groups with the internal dynamics of right-wing activism and organizations. For example, by drawing on 140 interviews with party activists in different countries, Art (2011) explains the cross-national variation in electoral support for the radical right, using the dynamics of party building and, in particular, the skill of radical right parties in recruiting and maintaining a moderate and educated membership and leadership. More specifically, the role played by political ideology in current right-wing movement formations vs political parties continues to be somewhat controversial. Political ideology might be more important for joining a political party. Instead whereas radical right ideology is clearly identifiable, its militants are not – party organizations have a very diffuse idea of politics and are not always politically engaged. It has been noted, for example, that in most cases, young people do not join racist groups because they are racists, but instead they gradually adopt racist views because they have become part of a racist group. New recruits are usually less concerned about politics or ideological content, but frequently have vague feelings of hostility towards foreigners (Bjørge, 1997; his extensive study is based on interviews with over 70 former and present participants in the far right scenes in Norway, Sweden and Denmark).

Enticements to join violent right-wing groups, such as access to alcohol, the martial physicality and, very importantly, right-wing hate music, are far more centrally motivating than political ideology (Merkl, 2003; Wagemann, 2005; Zimmermann, 2003). The desire to belong to a group also plays an important role (the 'protection factor'; see Bjørgo, 2005). In the case of the US radical right too, it has been shown that it is not possible to infer the activists' motivations from the external conditions in which the group emerged: people are drawn to rightist movements for a variety of reasons that have little connection to political ideology, including the desire to conform to gender norms, as political acts can have non-political causes (Blee, 2003).

Summing up, all these meso- (and micro-) level studies, regardless of the field within which they are located, and therefore the focus they have (political violence and terrorist groups vs electoral and political parties studies), emphasize that structural effects alone are insufficient to explain right-wing extremism. Rather, structural effects, such as the background conditions (i.e. social, economic, demographic, political or cultural) considered by macro-level studies, are mediated by the militants' perception of reality and the small-group dynamics through which their political involvement develops (Della Porta, 1995).

### **Future directions: Where to go from here in the study of radical right movements?**

In recent years, there has been a revival in research into the radical right, following a re-vitalization of the radical right itself, both within and outside the electoral arena, as movements that are increasingly able to capitalize on the dissatisfaction of citizens with economic and political conditions, as well as the refugee crisis, and the management of these issues by the political elites. The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA has been taken as further evidence of the 'mainstreaming of radical right politics', which has affected Western democracies beyond Europe (Mudde, 2016).

In this article, after presenting the definitional debate surrounding the radical right, we have critically reviewed the literature on radical right movements and organizations in Europe (and beyond). We have seen that there are several approaches attempting to explain the 'when', 'why', 'who' and 'how' of right-wing radicalism (that is, the emergence, survival, success, etc.), and argued that, despite the increased academic attention, the debate around the causes of the radical right remains con-

troversial. As Muis and Immerzeel (2016) notice, with reference to demand-side factors: 'their failure to provide an overall explanation is clear from even a simple glance at the clear contrasts in radical-right fortunes found between neighbouring states which appear to share similar cultural values, post-industrial service-sector economies, and comparable institutions of representative democracy' (see also Norris, 2005). In the USA, too, while there has been voluminous scholarship on radical rightist movements in recent years, there remain significant gaps and opportunities for future research, for example the relationship of these movements to the spaces, networks and subcultures that surround them (Blee and Creasap, 2010). If macro-level explanations for the emergence of the radical right have the merit of underlining the contextual (pre)conditions that may favour the rise and development of right-wing radicalism (and explain country and time variations), they could still greatly benefit from more in-depth consideration of low-scale mechanisms and middle-range political variables capable of providing a link between these preconditions and the reasons of the individuals. In fact, while much attention has been paid to the question of why a group of individuals may decide to mobilize, many scholars have concluded that grievances alone are not enough to create movements (Buechler, 2000). Furthermore, in the analysis of right-wing radicalism, group-level analyses have, to date, been more neglected than the two other types of explanations (macro- and micro-level) and this is certainly a future direction that research on the radical right should take. This is quite surprising since the (few) existing studies that emphasize this aspect for the interpretation of the emergence and especially endurance of the phenomenon, stress the crucial factor of the groups themselves and their dynamics (e.g. leaders, ideologies and propaganda) as organizers of mobilization and eventually political violence (Della Porta, 2013).

These factors are generally studied separately, there have been very few attempts so far in radical right research to integrate them in a comprehensive and dynamic model of the processes of (right-wing) radicalization, which considers the context of both structural/group dynamics and psychological factors together (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2010). However, as argued in this article, rather than establishing the 'superiority' of some explanatory theories over others, the various explanations should be seen as complementary, and multi-level framework analyses – considering simultaneously the context of both structural (macro-level) and group-level dynamics, as well as conditions concerning the individual (micro-level) – linking concepts and hypotheses coming from different disciplinary approaches are desirable.

The urgent need for this is reflected in the literature on radical right political parties, where ‘it has become clear that a complete and satisfying explanation for PRR popularity and presence in the political system needs to go beyond the demand-side mode’ and ‘[i]t is difficult to see how [current explanations] could explain short-term fluctuations within countries or large differences between otherwise mostly similar countries’ (Muis and Immerzeel, 2016). Future research adopting a ‘multi-level’ framework for the explanation of the phenomenon (considering actors and circumstances together), which also considers the multifaceted nature of the radical right milieu (i.e. party and non-partisan actors) and its variegated repertoire of action, is needed. So too are studies that are not limited to observing causal inferences between macro-variables, but rather search for the mechanisms that mediate between macro-variables, and reflect on the macro–micro links in processes of radicalization.

Finally, until now, a strict division of labour seems to have divided sociologists from political scientists, with each discipline focusing on the non-electoral and electoral channels and actors, respectively (Rydgren, 2007) of radical right mobilization. This also has consequences in terms of the types and methods used. If quantitative large-N analyses are common in electoral studies on radical right-wing parties (which, however, sometimes overlook more qualitative research techniques, such as interviews, for investigating party members – though there are some valuable exceptions, e.g. Klandermans and Mayer, 2006), comparative studies that empirically investigate the strength of radical right movements in different countries are very limited. More cross-national research on mobilization is desirable, therefore, as is a cross-fertilization within the (political party and social movements) scholarship on the radical right. Further neglected topics in radical right literature, such as the role the Internet plays for these organizations and the new opportunities afforded to them by the web and social media (see e.g. Bartlett et al., 2011; Caiani and Parenti, 2013: Ch. 1), as well as the *transnationalization* processes (of networks, identities and discourses), also deserve greater attention in future research. In fact, on the one hand, several works concur in stressing the crucial role of the *Internet* for current radical right movements, arguing that it constitutes a tool used by these ‘hidden’ communities for worldwide communication with like-minded-people and for recruitment (Burriss et al., 2000), the building of collective identities (De Koster and Houtman, 2008), and the organization of mobilization (Caiani, 2014). On the other hand, it has been observed that processes of transnationalization and globalization, for example the ‘easing of

Europe’s border’, are the ‘new enablers allowing white supremacists and neo-Nazis to connect and cooperate’ (Whine, 2012: 317) (for more details on the transnationalization of radical right movements see Caiani, 2017 forthcoming). These topics deserve more attention in future research in the field, along with the development of new methodological tools of analysis that can grasp these new developments of the current radical right.

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## Suggestions for further reading: More neglected factors of radical right mobilization

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**résumé** Cet article fournit un aperçu de la recherche sur les mouvements de droite radicale, un sujet souvent négligé au profit d'études sur les partis politiques d'extrême droite. L'article fournit des explications individuelles, organisationnelles et contextuelles concernant l'émergence et la mobilisation (violente aussi) des mouvements de droite en Europe et au-delà, fournissant des études empiriques comparatives à titre d'exemple. L'article conclut en proposant de potentiels orientations futures pour la recherche sur les mouvements d'extrême droite.

**mots-clés** extrême droite ♦ facteurs individuels, méso et macro ♦ mobilisation politique ♦ mouvements radicaux de droite ♦ violence

**resumen** Este artículo ofrece una visión de conjunto de la investigación sobre los movimientos de derecha radical. Para ello, distingue y discute tres perspectivas: los factores individuales, los factores de nivel meso y los de nivel macro. Además, presenta y discute los resultados, tanto de estudios de caso como en el ámbito comparado, sobre la movilización de la derecha radical (incluyendo aquella violenta) pre y post-crisis en Europa (y en los EEUU), recogidos a partir de fuentes y métodos diversos. También incluye reflexiones sobre hasta qué punto las distintas explicaciones pueden diferir entre los movimientos sociales y los partidos de derecha radical. El artículo concluye discutiendo posibles direcciones futuras para la investigación sobre radicalismo de derechas, enfatizando diversos temas hasta ahora ignorados.

**palabras clave** extrema derecha ♦ factores individuales ♦ micro y macro ♦ movilización política ♦ movimientos de derecha radical ♦ violencia política