

An overview and assessment of current scholarship on radical right-wing populism in Western Europe

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Abstract

This paper reviews the scholarship on the populist radical right (PRR) in Western Europe. It focuses on three strands in this extensive literature. We first assess political opportunity explanations for the fortunes of these parties and movements. Second, we discuss internal supply-side approaches, referring to leadership, internal organization, and the (shifting) content of programmatic positions. Third, empirical research on the consequences of the emergence and rise of PRR parties and movements is discussed: In what respect do they constitute a corrective or threat to democracy? The review concludes with a discussion of the future direction that theorizing and research could take.

Keywords

populism, radical right, far right, anti-immigration parties/movements

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Introduction

One of the key preoccupations of scholars of contemporary politics is the political backlash of social unease about immigration and growing cultural diversity. In particular, support for populist radical right (PRR) parties and movements has swelled in previous decades, which has triggered extensive political and scholarly debate (Backes and Moreau, 2012). Whether we like it or not, many citizens give support to parties and movements that promote xenophobia, ethno-nationalism, and anti-system populism (Rydgren, 2007).

Until today a strict labour division seems to divide sociologists from political scientists, with each discipline focusing on the non-electoral and electoral channel, respectively (Rydgren, 2007). Social movement protests have generally been dominated by ‘the left,’ while ‘the right’ mainly uses the electoral channel to voice its discontents, instead of taking their grievances to the street (Hutter, 2014; Van der Meer, Van Deth and Scheepers, 2009). Consequently, social movement scholars tend to overlook the most important contemporary collective actors mobilizing against the consequences of globalization and immigration: the populist radical right (Hutter and Kriesi, 2013). As Caiani et al. (2012: 4) put it: ‘while political party studies provide more and increasingly sophisticated analyses of radical right parties, social movement studies (...) has been slow to address the “bad side” of social movement activism’. Only when sociologists widen their perspective to the electoral channel, we are able to fully grasp the implications of globalization and large-scale immigration for political contention. We will get back to the distinction between parliamentary and non-parliamentary mobilization later on.

This review provides an overview and assessment of the scholarship on the populist radical right in Western European democracies. First, we briefly discuss the definitional debate about what constitutes the PRR family. Second, we offer an overview of the literature on supply-side explanations for the fortunes of PRR-parties and movements. Third, we discuss research on the consequences of the emergence and rise of PRR-parties and movements. Do they constitute a corrective or threat to democracy, and in what respect (cf. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012)? There is now a growing literature that tackles this question in an empirical manner (Immerzeel and Pickup, 2015). The review concludes with a discussion of the future direction that theorizing and research could take.

We narrow our scope to the PRR in contemporary Western European democracies. Nevertheless, the theories, findings and suggestions for future work could also be applicable to comparable cases elsewhere, such as the Tea Party in the United States (Parker and Barreto, 2014; Williamson et al., 2011) and exclusionist, ultranationalist parties and organizations in Eastern Europe (Minkenbergh, 2015; Allen, 2015).

Definitional debate on radical right-wing populism

Different labels such as ‘extreme right’ (Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers et al., 2002; Bale, 2003), ‘far right’ (Ellinas, 2007; Erk, 2005) and ‘populist radical right’ (Mudde, 2007) are used interchangeably by scholars to refer to the same organizations, such as the French Front National (FN), Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), Flemish Bloc/Flemish Interest (VB), and *Republikaner* in Germany. A consensus has emerged that they constitute one single family. Two core features distinguish PRR parties from mainstream parties (Rydgren, 2005).

The most important common denominator is their anti-immigrant stance and exclusionist, ethno-cultural notion of citizenship, reflected in the notion of ‘own people first’ (Betz, 1994;

Immerzeel et al., 2015). The label ‘radical’ refers to the non-centrist, outspoken position at the far end of the political spectrum on issues related to immigration and ethnic diversity (Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn, 2016). On top of that, they strongly hold issue-ownership over immigration issues (Abou-Chadi, 2016). Therefore, many scholars simply refer to them as anti-immigration parties (Fennema, 1997; Van der Brug et al., 2005).

Moreover, PRR groups share their populist, anti-establishment rhetoric (Carter, 2005; Mudde, 2007; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Pelinka, 2013). Populism is a communication style or ‘thin’ ideology that divides society into two homogenous groups: the ‘pure people’ with a common will that is embodied by the PRR and the untrustworthy ‘corrupt elite’ formed by the established parties (Akkerman et al., 2013; Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

It is often stated that radical right-wing populism is at odds with some of the constitutional foundations of liberal democracies: pluralism and the protection of minorities (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Betz, 2004; Mudde, 2007). At the same, however, there is agreement among scholars that it distinguishes itself from political extremism, in the sense that PRR supporters and activists accept and respect democracy, whereas extremist groups go beyond the limits of the procedures which define the democratic political processes (Betz and Johnson, 2004; Rydgren, 2007; Klandermans and Mayer, 2006; Minkenberg, 2011).

In a nutshell, substantial progress has been made in three respects. First, scholars have diverted their attention away from trivializing definitional debates about what right-wing radicalism or populism really “is”. Instead, they have increasingly focused on more informative discussions about theories and hypotheses.

Second, scholars increasingly focus on actually measuring the ideological characteristics and policy stances of both PPR and mainstream parties (Eger and Valdez, 2015; Immerzeel, Lubbers and Coffé, 2015; Pauwels, 2011a; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011). As a corollary, scholars have abandoned reasoning in clear-cut categories. The question which parties or movements exactly deserve the label PRR and which ones not, is fruitless. A strict ‘either-or’ logic (Mudde, 2007; Van Kessel, 2015) has increasingly been replaced by the argument that populism is more a ‘matter of degree’ (Pauwels, 2011a). Likewise, parties can position themselves somewhere on the left-right or cosmopolitan–nationalist/nativist dimension (Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2015; Van Spanje, 2011a).

Explanations for failures and successes: demand- and supply-side approaches

Explanations for the rise and fortunes of PRR-parties and movements are usually grouped into two approaches: one focusing on grievances and one on political constraints and opportunities. This corresponds with the distinction between demand-side and supply-side factors (Klandermans, 2004; Koopmans et al., 2005; Rydgren, 2007; Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2005). Supply-side factors can be further divided into internal factors or ‘agency’ (Norris, 2005; De Lange and Art, 2011), like organizational characteristics (Art, 2011; De Witte and Klandermans, 2000; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2000) and external factors, such as institutional frameworks and elite responses (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). External implies that they cannot be controlled by PRR actors themselves (Goodwin, 2006). These three sets of explanations should be viewed as complementary, rather than competing theories (Van der Brug and Fennema, 2007).

This review focuses on internal and external supply-side factors. We will not discuss demand-side accounts in detail, because the socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes of

radical-right supporters have already been extensively investigated and reviewed (Arzheimer, 2012; De Koster et al., 2014; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2007). The findings can be summarized into two general claims. First, protest is not ‘unideological’, but clearly directed against policies concerning immigration, integration and law and order (Swyngedouw, 2001; Eatwell, 2000). Alternatively, now and then, supporters of PRR groups are somewhat vaguely characterized as irrational and alienated, seemingly unconnected to any particular values, policy preferences or ideology. However, this claim is empirically untenable. Voting for PRR parties is largely motivated by ideological and pragmatic considerations, just like voting for other parties (Van der Brug et al., 2000; Zhirkov, 2014). In a similar vein, Klandermans and Mayer (2006: 267) conclude that radical right activists are socially integrated and appear as ‘perfectly normal people’ (cf. Blee and Creasap, 2010: 271).

Second, 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 model. It is difficult to see how it could explain short-term fluctuations within countries or large differences between otherwise mostly similar countries. Reviewing social structure and public demand explanations, Norris (2005: 14) states that ‘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, postindustrial service-sector economies, and comparable institutions of representative democracy’. For example, Austria, where the FPÖ has enjoyed considerable electoral successes, is hardly more deprived than Germany, where the far right is weak. Similarly, comparing the divergent fortunes of the Walloon Front National and Flemish VB, it is hard to imagine that immigration, increasing cultural diversity and unemployment have created such a significantly larger electoral demand for the radical right in Flanders compared to the Walloon region (Arzheimer, 2012).

The external supply-side: political constraints and opportunities

According to external supply-side explanations, successful mobilization is first and foremost the result of constraints and opportunities that the political and institutional context offers. Examples of such external characteristics are the electoral system, the ‘political space’ (or ‘ideological room’) left open by political competitors, responses from established/mainstream parties (i.e. any party that is not considered as part of the PRR) or splits among the political elite, most notably on the issue of the multicultural society. Several researchers have convincingly shown that such factors matter (e.g. Koopmans et al., 2005; Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Carter, 2005; Norris, 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2005; Lubbers et al., 2002).

Institutional framework

Political-institutional variables generally show not much variation. These deeply embedded or fixed opportunities are obviously most useful for comparing different national settings, explaining country differences in PRR success. Scholarship that traces the impact of the institutional framework include works that assess whether the level of federalism and the electoral system affect the popularity of the PRR (Carter, 2002; Swank and Betz, 2003; Hakhverdian and Koop, 2007; Veugelers and Magnan, 2005). According to Kitschelt (2007: 1193), a review of institutional accounts of PRR party strength is ‘a frustrating business’. He notes that ‘although there are plenty of studies that test for institutional effects, they tend to be theoretically misspecified and empirically not capturing the configuration of institutional rules

that should make a difference for electoral support of such parties.’ Moreover, in short, the general lesson is that the impact is modest.

Several studies have indicated that more proportional electoral systems are conducive to the entrance or success of new parties (Tavits, 2006), but findings regarding radical parties in particular have been mixed (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Golder, 2003; Carter, 2005; Norris 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2005). Electoral thresholds may induce potential radical right voters to support mainstream parties when they perceive their favourite party to be too weak to overcome the barrier to entry (Givens, 2005). Clearly, the institutional configuration most unfavourable for newcomers exists in Britain (Kitschelt, 2007). That the British radical right has ‘failed’ is often attributed to the majoritarian electoral system as primary reason (John and Margetts, 2009).

Political space

In addition to the institutional framework, the emergence and rise of the PRR is often understood in terms of the positioning of the political parties within the policy space (Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). Political space refers to the degree to which all mainstream parties (or moderate-right parties in particular) already occupy the electoral terrain of the populist right. For that matter, the positions of the established parties shape the electoral fortunes of any ‘niche’ party (Meguid, 2005). When they ideologically converge, they leave a ‘political gap’ in the electoral market, which can potentially be exploited by challengers. Kriesi et al. (2006; 2012) argue that where major established parties follow a moderate course in favour of the ‘winners’ of globalization, they leave an opportunity open for the creation of parties that focus on the ‘losers’. Several studies indeed found that ideological convergence between mainstream parties benefited the entrance or success of radical new parties (Norris, 2005; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Carter, 2005; but see Veugelers and Magnan, 2005).

The amount of political space is measured in different ways, for different time periods. Partly due to this variation, the results of studies on the effect of the political agenda of other parties on the popularity of PRR challengers show a mixed picture. For instance, using Eurobarometer surveys (1980-2002) and party statements on internationalism, multiculturalism, national lifestyle, and law and order from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP), Arzheimer (2009; cf. Arzheimer and Carter, 2006) found that the ideological *position* of the established major moderate-right party (labelled ‘toughness’) had no significant effect on cross-national differences in the amount of support for the PRR. On the other hand, *saliency*, the relative amount of these statements in the manifestos of *all* established parties (ignoring the direction of the statements), had a positive impact on levels of PRR support.

In contrast, Van der Brug et al. (2005) found that PRR parties are more successful when the moderate-right occupies a more centrist position on a general left-right scale (it is unclear what a position on this scale exactly signifies). They relied on the European Elections Studies data (1989-1999) and use respondents’ perceptions to measure party positions. And in this case, the extent to which the anti-immigrant parties’ mainstream competitor emphasized the core issue of the radical right was not significant, although they measured saliency similarly as Arzheimer (using the CMP data) by selecting the issues crime, negative references to multiculturalism and positive references to ‘the national way of life’.

The role of the public debate

The above-mentioned contradiction could perhaps be solved when we complement the political space approach with the notion that opportunities and constraints need to become visible through

public statements in order to become relevant (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004). Political contention increasingly consists of a battle over attention and approval in the public debate (Castells, 1997). Populist movements rely heavily on media, and the controversial, tabloid-style language of its leaders flourishes well in a “media logic” in which newsworthiness is increasingly based on conflicts and scandals (Albertazzi, 2003).

The role of the public debate corresponds better with an externalist ‘opportunity’ view than with an internalist approach because gaining access to the mass media is largely beyond the control of PRR challengers themselves— gatekeepers and established political actors let them appear on stage. For smaller or marginal parties, the media are arguably more important than for established major parties, because they often lack sufficient organizational and financial means to get their message across to potential adherents. Like social movements, they are generally much more dependent on media than the reverse (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993).

There are many indications that the “media factor” shapes the fortunes of PRR groups. For example, the French FN made its electoral breakthrough in 1984 only after Jean-Marie Le Pen was given access to state television (Eatwell, 2005). His popularity increased remarkably after he appeared on a popular talk show called *The Hour of Truth*: vote intentions for FN doubled from 3.5 per cent to 7 per cent (Ellinas, 2009; Ignazi, 2003). Another example is the ‘pro-Haider line’ (i.e. favourable coverage for the FPÖ) of the *Kronen Zeitung*, Austria’s largest newspaper, between 1986-2000 (Art, 2007).

Media-related independent variables can be grouped into (1) media attention for issues associated with the PRR and (2) attention for PRR actors. Regarding the first, the empirical findings are inconclusive. On the one hand, news coverage on the issues of immigration and integration, and law and order enhances the electoral attractiveness of PRR parties (Walgrave and De Swert, 2002; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2006; Plasser and Ulram, 2003). This finding confirms the agenda-setting hypothesis, which holds that issues that appear frequently in the news tend to become the issues that voters deem important. Combined with the idea that the electorate will support the most credible proponent of a particular issue, it follows that media publicity for issues that are “owned” by anti-immigration parties enhances their electoral attractiveness (Muis, 2015).

On the other hand, however, we need to distinguish issue *positions* from issue *salience*. Therefore, mainstream parties have three strategies at their disposal: remain silent on the particular issue (dismissive), distance itself from populist anti-immigrant viewpoints (adversarial), or adopt a similar position (accommodative). Meguid (2008) argues that issue salience will only enhance PRR support when mainstream parties declare hostility toward the niche party’s policy position, but not when they employ accommodative tactics. If mainstream parties address immigration topics and adopt anti-immigration stances, electoral support for far right contenders will diminish. Most scholars similarly argue that, in line with the political space argument discussed above, the PRR loses out when mainstream parties adopt restrictive positions on immigration (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995).

Several researchers have also investigated the effect of news coverage on PRR actors (Lubbers 2001; Lubbers and Scheepers 2001; Vliegenthart et al., 2012; Muis, 2015). Scholars have differentiated between coverage for radical right speakers and for responses of other actors, between positive and negative coverage (Bos et al., 2010; Koopmans and Muis, 2009; Muis, 2015), and between the visibility of leaders and parties (Vliegenthart et al., 2012).

Research has shown that PRR leaders clearly profited from media prominence, like Pim Fortuyn (Koopmans and Muis 2009) and Geert Wilders (Bos et al. 2010). Vliegenthart et al.

(2012) find that party visibility enhanced electoral support for five of the six anti-immigrant parties they investigated (VB, PVV, *Republiken*, NPD, DVU); the Dutch CD was the one exception.

The media can indeed be a friend or a foe (Mudde, 2007); public responses can vary from negative to positive. Muis' (2015) study on the CD showed that publicity for the party was electorally harmful. The party did not increase its popularity when it achieved media access because of the outright racist claims of its leader Hans Janmaat, which provoked harsh criticism.

However, at the same time, this case of the CD demonstrated that when trying to attract as much attention as possible and gaining an influential voice in the debate, 'any publicity is good publicity'. Apparently, both news on support and criticism gives actors newsworthiness and greater opportunities to put their own viewpoints in the spotlight. Stewart and colleagues (2003: 236) argue that any media coverage advantages political figures since 'it enhances their visibility and furthers their goals, by producing some kind of public legitimation'.

The difficulty is thus to *find the right balance* between enhancing newsworthiness and electoral credibility. Populist leaders face a trade-off between 'being somewhat unusual and provocative (...) (in order to guarantee newsworthiness and therefore prominence)' and being 'taken seriously as a party' (Bos et al. 2010: 143).

To conclude, media effects are conditional on which stance is promoted. Future studies could be enriched by devoting more attention to adaptation and 'upward dynamics'. For instance, Clarke et al. (2016) argue that enhanced volatility in UKIP support increased publicity for the party, which in turn prompted further electoral growth. Media visibility and attracting additional adherents seem to reinforce each other (Koopmans and Muis, 2009; but see Van der Pas et al., 2013).

Repression, cordon sanitaire

This brings us to the role of repression and legal measures, such as bans and prosecutions. A similar logic applies here: the effect of repression is conditional. Its effects may depend on the politician or group targeted and the situation they are in. Another relevant factor is the nature of the statements in question (Van Spanje and De Vreese, 2015). For instance, the hate-speech charges on Geert Wilders in 2009 considerably boosted electoral support for his party (Van Spanje and De Vreese, 2015). Wilders had already established himself as a powerful politician by the time it was decided that he was to stand trial. He had already obtained much legitimacy and media visibility and his party already held nine seats in the national parliament. The impact of prosecution is very different for politicians and parties on the fringe.

Countries also differ significantly in laws regulating the Internet, and thus how favourable a national context is for the online activities of radical right-wing groups (Caiani and Parenti, 2013). In addition to legal measures, PRR parties sometimes suffer political exclusion in the form of a refusal of other parties to cooperate with them (a so-called *cordon sanitaire*) (Akkerman et al., 2016). It is however not clear whether it is an effective strategy if the purpose is to undermine electoral support. Results on the effects of exclusion on electoral outcomes of the PRR party are mixed (Van Spanje and Van der Brug, 2009; Pauwels, 2011b). We will come back to the exclusion-radicalisation thesis, which holds that excluded parties will radicalise their ideological stances (Akkerman et al., 2016).

Internal supply-side factors: characteristics of the PRR

From an internal supply-side perspective, PRR parties and movements are for a large part ‘masters of their own success’ (Carter, 2005; Goodwin, 2006; Mudde, 2007;). We cannot reduce them to merely passive consequences of socio-economic processes and external political conditions, but should treat them as shapers of their own fates. A successful PRR party employs strategic flexibility in order to exploit whatever favourable circumstances might arise (Ignazi, 2003). We can distinguish two sets of factors: ideology and organizational structure, including leadership (Carter, 2005; Goodwin, 2006).

The role of ideology

What parties most importantly can achieve through their own actions is to find a beneficial position in the policy space. According to Kitschelt and McGann (1995), the ideological ‘niche’ that radical-right parties have to occupy in the political space in order to achieve success, is the combination of culturally exclusionist/authoritarian positions with liberal pro-market positions on socio-economic policies. However, the ‘winning position’ is not stable over time. Kitschelt has adjusted his hypothesis (2004; cf. De Lange, 2007): the new position that is said to make the PPR successful is a more centrist socio-economic policy stance (still combined with nativism or cultural exclusionism).

There is obviously variation on the ‘cultural exclusionist’ dimension. True, most PRR groups are comparable because they share the anti-immigration stance as their unique selling point. However, PRR parties are often still fundamentally distinct in their ideological character, and that these differences have crucial consequences in terms of the parties’ fortunes.

Carter (2005) demonstrated a relation between the type of ideology PRR parties employ and their levels of success, although she encountered some notable exceptions. The Dutch CD was for instance a deviant case: most of the party’s ideological counterparts have flourished, like in Austria (FPÖ), France (FN) and Belgium (VB). The ideological character does not only have direct effects on the fortunes of parties, it also interacts with other explanatory factors. Golder (2003) found that increasing unemployment and high levels of immigration only yield more electoral success for the group of radical right parties he labelled ‘populist’, but not for the ones that were labelled as ‘neofascist’. Despite these two examples, to date, research that elaborates the internal supply-side notion that one’s ideological stance crucially matters, and systematically tests effects of PRR parties’ platforms is relatively scarce (for another exception see Kitschelt and McGann, 1995); the focus on opportunities and demand-side factors has clearly prevailed. Instead of figuring as an explanatory factor, party ideology has played a more dominant role in delimiting the dependent variable.

The studies of Carter (2005) and Golder (2003) cited above illustrate a remarkable weakness that has hampered a fruitful elaboration of explanations based on ideological positioning: Carter considers the CD as similar in ideological outlook as for instance the FPÖ, FN and VB, based on an extensive typology that (in theory) distinguishes no less than 16 mutually exclusive sub-types within the family of the radical right; in contrast, according to a straightforward dichotomy outlined by Golder, the CD is different from these three other radical-right parties.

Future work in this field could make progress in several ways. First, it could benefit from studies on the political space provided by the mainstream parties, which has led to much more fruitful research and findings (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Arzheimer, 2009; Koopmans et al., 2005; Norris, 2005; Meguid, 2005). As we discussed earlier, in contrast to party-centric

explanations, the ideological niche available on the electoral market is usually measured with continuous variables.

Second, more sophisticated behavioural models of party strategies are useful (Kitschelt, 2007). In order to explain success, we should not only try to identify a certain policy package that ‘works’ beneficially. In addition, we need to establish a deeper explanation by providing the mechanism by which parties are able or inclined to arrive at successful positions over time. Only few accounts of far-right populism clearly explicate why or how successful populist leaders were able to find a ‘successful position’ and why most other attempts of politicians failed to do so (Muis and Scholte, 2013).

Organizational arguments and leadership

Besides ideology, organizational characteristics such as a lack of financial resources, appealing leadership and shortfall of active membership have frequently been proposed as pivotal factors for the success and failure of PRR parties and movements (Art, 2011).

However, organization characteristics that are supposedly beneficial or indispensable do often not seem to be relevant in order to account for the impressive performance of populist challengers. As pointed out earlier, many leaders rely almost entirely on media attention, and successful trajectories often illustrate how media visibility can compensate organizational weaknesses (Ellinas, 2009; Mazzoleni, 2008). The growth of active membership and building and improvement of an organization often lags behind success, instead of the other way around: media attention and electoral support are first successfully mobilized, then organizational and financial resources follow. In a review article on party organization effects, Ellinas (2009: 219) states that organizational arguments ‘would need to carefully trace the evolution of party organisations to establish the direction of causality’. His evidence from the French FN indicates that organizational growth seems to be rather the consequence than the cause of electoral party success, especially during earlier stages of development. In a similar vein, De Witte and Klandermans (2000) identified a ‘circle of organisational weakness’: weak organizations (like the Dutch CD) remained weak, whereas, in contrast, strong organizations (like the Flemish Bloc in Belgium) became stronger over time. In sum, organizational resources seem often both a *cause* and a *result* of success. As a genuinely ‘independent variable’, organizational strength might be more important to explain the persistence of parties after their initial breakthrough (Ellinas, 2007, 2009).

De Witte and Klandermans (2000) argued that charismatic leaders who are able to maintain peace in an organization can instigate an upward spiral of organizational strength (cf. Klandermans and Mayer, 2006). Charismatic leadership is indeed a prominent supply-side explanation in the academic literature (Eatwell, 2005; Husbands, 1998; Lubbers et al., 2002).

However, the charisma explanation suffers from the tendency of circular reasoning (Van der Brug et al., 2005; Van der Brug and Mughan, 2004). Charisma is a legitimization for those who appear to be the ‘heroes of a war’ and can just as suddenly vanish as it appears. If a leader is unsuccessful, or if the leadership fails to benefit the followers, charismatic authority can quickly disappear. Max Weber (1947 [1921]) illustrates this by noting that even Chinese monarchs could sometimes lose their status as ‘sons of heaven’ because of misfortune, such as defeat in war, floods or drought. To conclude, outstanding charismatic appeal is thus better seen as an emergent situational characteristic, rather than attributed to the skills and personality of the concerning leader.

Consequences of PRR party and movement success: threat or corrective to democracy?

In addition to *causes* of PRR fortunes, more recently, scholars have increasingly formulated and tested hypotheses on the *consequences* of the emergence and rise of PRR-parties and movements (Mudde, 2013; Rosanvallon, 2008). Some have claimed that the PRR constitutes a serious threat to democracy because it emphasizes a homogeneous voice —the ‘voice of the people’— and threatens the rights and protection of minority groups (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2007).

Others have noted that these PRRs actually correct democratic deficiencies by speaking to a large group of citizens disillusioned with mainstream politicians (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Citizens feel that there is someone who has ‘listened to their grievances’ (Ivarsflaten, 2008) and who has enabled them to become passionately, rather than rationally, involved in politics (Mouffe, 2005).

Although the debate about whether the PRR constitutes a threat or corrective to democracy is often drawn in the normative, the issue whether the PRR has an impact on various outcomes associated with the quality of democracy is in fact a theoretical question that can be empirically tested (Immerzeel, 2015; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Therefore, and related to the observation that the PRR has assumed more stable positions within the party and electoral system (De Lange, 2012; Zaslove, 2008), the last decade has witnessed a steady rise in scholars studying the impact of PRR success on several domains, including the party system (Mudde, 2014) and media debate (Rooduijn, 2014). We restrict ourselves here to the literature on the impact on policies, on PRR groups themselves, and on the public.

Policies and mainstream party positions

Given the PRR’s alleged threatening effect on the position and rights of immigrants, it comes as no surprise that scholars paid attention to the extent to which the PRR was successful in implementing policies derived from its nativist, anti-immigrant ideology. Scholars have investigated whether governments that included members of the PRR introduced tougher policies on immigration and integration (Akkerman, 2012; Heinisch, 2003; Luther, 2011; Zaslove, 2004). These studies generally find no or a limited impact of the PRR on the implemented policies. For instance, Akkerman (2012) concludes on the basis of a quantitative analysis comparing the immigration and integration output of 27 cabinets of varying composition in nine countries (1996-2010) that when the PRR is in office, cabinets generally introduce stricter immigration and integration legislation than centre(-left) cabinets. Yet, centre-right cabinets that do not include a PRR do not differ in terms of immigration strictness of policy output from those including a PRR. She notes that the difficulties these parties face in adopting to public office seriously hinders their effectiveness to implement stricter policies (Akkerman, 2012; cf. Van Spanje, 2011b). The finding of Zaslove (2008) that the Austrian Freedom Party and Italian Lega Nord (LN) have been instrumental in passing more restrictive immigration policy may thus be more due to the performance of the conservative mainstream parties that cooperate with them than because of the performance of the PRR itself (cf. Heinisch, 2003).

Although little evidence is thus found for a *direct* impact of the PRR on policy outcome, the PRR could influence policy making *indirectly*, via its impact on other parties’ positions (Schain, 2006). As such, scholars have investigated whether the PRR’s success influences the policy positions on immigration, multiculturalism, populism, law and order, and more style-related issues, such as anti-establishment rhetoric (Bale, 2003; Bale et al., 2010; Han, 2014; Immerzeel et al., 2015; Rooduijn, De Lange, and Van der Brug, 2012; Van Spanje, 2010;

Williams, 2006). The argument is simple and revolves around electoral returns. As for instance Yılmaz (2012: 376) claims, ‘the mainstream right [has] cynically adopted the cultural focus on immigration in part to recapture the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim animosity that brought the populist far-right electoral gains’. A similar vote-seeking logic explains why the mainstream left is paralyzed: ‘rather than articulating their own vision for the future of the nation (or Europe), they have quietly accepted the basic premise of the Islamophobic/xenophobic perspective in order to keep their constituency from being attracted to the extreme right’. What about the empirical proof for such claims?

To study these effects of the PRR scholars used either expert surveys, where colleagues are asked to rate all political parties in a country on typical issues (e.g., Hooghe et al., 2010; Immerzeel et al., 2011; Van Spanje, 2010), or the salience of typical PRR issues in the party programmes summarized in the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (e.g., Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2012; Hooghe et al., 2010). Akkerman (2015) used a more fine-grained manifesto content analysis (1989-2011), since the CMP data lack sufficient detail on immigration and integration issues.

The results of these studies can be easily summarized: the PRR affects the stances of mainstream parties on immigration and integration issues, but not on other issues. Based on various expert surveys, Van Spanje (2010) concluded that in general, all other political parties have become more restrictive with respect to immigration and integration due to the PRR’s success. Using manifesto data, Han (2014) and Akkerman (2015) found similar effects. More specifically, Akkerman (2015) finds that mainly Liberals were tempted to co-opt far right positions Social Democrats are not affected at all —at least their reaction is far from uniform (Bale et al., 2010) — and Han (2014) shows that left-wing parties only become less multicultural ‘when the opinion of party supporters on foreigners becomes more negative or when the parties lost more votes in the previous election than their opponent right-wing mainstream parties did’ (Han, 2014: 1).

With regard to other issues, such as populism and law and order, mainstream parties seem to hold to their original ideological position (Bale et al., 2010). On the basis of manifesto data (Rooduijn et al., 2012) and expert surveys (Immerzeel et al., 2015), scholars do not find any effect that mainstream parties have become more populist and authoritarian.

Hence, there is evidence that the PRRs have an indirect, but modest influence on policy outcomes. This impact of the PRR on policy positions is generally limited to the issue of immigration and integration (Mudde, 2013). Specifically mainstream right-wing parties employ a convergence strategy that puts them ideologically closer to the PRR (Meguid, 2005; Williams, 2006). However, mainstream right parties are often inclined to move towards stricter immigration policy anyway, independently of PRR’ successes (Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2012; Akkerman, 2015; Bale, 2003). This conclusion also emerges from case studies, such as the UK (Bale, 2013), France (Godin, 2013) and the Netherlands (Van Heerden et al., 2014).

Consequence for PRR party/movements

There is also a growing scholarship on how successes of the PRR affect these groups *themselves*. Most importantly, what effect does the inclusion into a governing coalition have on parties, both in terms of their ideological positions and their electoral success? (Van Spanje, 2011b; Akkerman and De Lange, 2012; Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2015; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015). Heinisch (2003) argued that because of their ideology, right-wing populist parties thrive in opposition, but have trouble with actually participating in a government. He claims that

governing leads to more moderate positions and hence to electoral losses.

However, there is no consensus regarding the effect of taking up government responsibility on the ideological positions and electoral success of the PRR. Although there are several case studies, systematic tests of the so-called inclusion-moderation thesis are scarce (Akkerman et al., 2016). Observers have generalized too much from just two prominent cases of failures, the Dutch LPF and the Austrian FPÖ (Mudde, 2013).

Albertazzi and McDonnell (2010, 2015) dismiss the received wisdom that populist parties have inherent problems with assuming power. Their case studies of three populist parties in Italy and Switzerland – *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL), LN, and *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP) – show that PRR parties can thrive and hold on to their radical positions when they take up government responsibility (cf. Frölich-Steffen and Rensmann, 2007). Likewise, Mudde (2013: 15) disagrees with ‘the dominant strain in the populism literature that argues that populist parties are destined for success in opposition and failure in government’. Instead, he claims that PRR parties keep ‘one foot in and one foot out’ of government. They will uphold their oppositional image, by using radical rhetoric and pushing for radical policies, rather than run the risk of being perceived as a ‘normal’ governmental party and part of ‘the corrupt elite.’ Based on manifestos coding, Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015) found that none of the ‘non-ostracized’ parties in their study (the Swiss SVP, Austrian FPÖ and BZÖ, Italian LN, Dutch LPF, and Danish DF) moderated, except the Dutch PVV: its degree of radicalism strongly decreased between 2010 and 2012.

Overall, there is no indication that radical right-wing populist parties are becoming less radical and more “mainstream” (Akkerman et al., 2016). However, since only a limited amount of parties actually took office, it remains to be seen whether the costs of government are relatively higher for populists.

Citizens’ attitudes and behaviour

Third, the PRR’s emergence and success might have consequences at the individual level. Citizens could be affected in the sense that they attach more importance to certain issues, shift their views towards more anti-immigrant and authoritarian positions, and change their political behaviour (Andersen and Evans, 2003; Bohman, 2011; Braun, 2011; Dunn and Singh, 2011; Immerzeel, 2015; Ivarsflaten, 2005; Semyonov et al., 2006; Sprague-Jones, 2011; Van der Brug, 2003; Wilkes et al., 2007). PRR groups can make some issues more salient (Bale, 2003; Ivarsflaten, 2005) and trigger politically disengaged people to become actively or passionately involved in politics (Jansen, 2011; Mouffe, 2005).

Studies on the impact of PRR success on immigration attitudes provide a mixed picture (Semyonov et al., 2006; Sprague-Jones, 2011; Dunn and Singh, 2011). Some conclude that successful and highly visible RRP can undermine support for multiculturalism (Bohman, 2011), whereas others find no effects of radical right representation on tolerance among European populations. An extensive recent study, based on ESS data (2002-2012), showed that PRR parties have not driven anti-immigration attitudes in Europe (Bohman and Hjerm, 2016). The main difficulty is the lack of longitudinal studies, modelling the attitudinal consequences of PRR success over time. Evidence based on German and Dutch panel data showed that perceptions of threatened group interests *precipitate* rather than *follow* citizens’ preferences for PRR parties (Berning and Schlueter, 2016).

Regarding political involvement and trust, one might expect that PRR parties foster voter turnout because they are passionate mobilisers that fulfil a watchdog function and reintroduce

electoral competition (Franklin, 2004). For instance, Fallend (2012) concludes that the Austrian FPÖ fuelled polarization and addressed issues neglected by other parties, such as immigration and integration. Accordingly, over the period 1996-2001, the party seemed to give voice to an apolitical part of the electorate, which increasingly felt that politicians listened to them. Likewise, De Lange and Akkerman (2012) showed that since 1997, political trust and satisfaction with democracy in Belgium have increased with the rise of the VB. In addition, Quintelier (2008) found that over the years, the Belgium VB recruited more than twenty-five thousand members. This all suggests that the PRR's success can positively affect political membership levels.

However, at the same time, De Lange and Akkerman (2012) found that in Belgium electoral turnout numbers have decreased since 1997, whereas the VB has become more popular, which seems to contradict the idea that the PRR attracts apolitical, disengaged people. In the same line, Van der Brug (2003) and Rooduijn et al. (2016) find that the popularity of populist parties fuel political discontent, rather than dampen it.

Based on an analysis of 33 European countries in the period 2002-2012, Immerzeel and Pickup (2015) find there is no general positive influence of the PRR's popularity on electoral turnout. Yet, the Western European PRR do encourage some social groups to turn out for national elections. These groups are, however, the people who are actually repelled by them: the more highly educated Western Europeans who are more politically interested are more inclined to 'keep the rascals out'. To conclude, to speak of the populist radical right as 'corrective of democracy' is—in terms of increasing electoral turnout or increasing political satisfaction—a misunderstanding.

Another interesting question is how institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of political participation are related. Hutter (2014) finds that the more successful the right is in electoral terms, the more it tends to abstain from protest activities. Interestingly, in contrast, the more voters the radical left attracts, the more present it is in protest politics. In a similar vein, Koopmans' (1996) cross-national comparison shows an inverse relation between the success of PRR parties and the incidence of racist violence. Hence, we can conclude that the electoral channel effectively substitutes for street activity and violence (cf. Braun and Koopmans, 2010).

The action repertoire of the PRR thus depends on the political space made available by mainstream parties for far-right mobilization (Giugni et al. 2005). Most European countries have strong PRR parties. But particularly in the United Kingdom and Germany, xenophobic sentiments can hardly be canalized through the electoral channel. It therefore should perhaps not come as a surprise that both countries have experiences with large-scale street movements. Several scholars have interpreted the rise of the English Defence League and Britain First as corollary of the decay of the British National Party (Alessio and Meredith, 2014; Allen, 2014). The EDL 'offered a more attractive and confrontational alternative to perennial failure at the ballot box' (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 8). The movement hereby relied heavily on social media to get its message across and recruit supporters (Busher, 2013).

In sum, a weak or fragmented party sector corresponds with a strong movement sector or environment of violence (Minkenberg, 2011). It remains to be seen whether UKIP (in the UK) and AfD (in Germany) will change this picture in the future. Patzelt and Klose (2016) conclude that the number of Pegida protesters has shrunk since the AfD has increasingly succeeded to put their grievances on the political agenda. Although several AfD politicians have distanced themselves from Pegida (Geiges et al., 2015), a survey showed that 57% of the Pegida demonstrators in Dresden would vote for AfD, and only about 4-5 % for NPD (Reuband, 2015).

Future directions: how to proceed?

We conclude this review with a discussion of possible avenues for future research. Although the scholarship on this topic has become a ‘minor industry’ (Arzheimer, 2012: 35), there are important gaps and opportunities. Concerning research questions, scholars need to pay more attention to the temporal dimension of political contention. Since Minkenberg’s (2000: 170) observation that ‘serious comparative scholarship on the radical right is still in its infancy,’ cross-national comparisons of PRR parties have become commonplace. Remarkably, however, comparisons in time are still scarce (Ellinas, 2007; Kitschelt, 2007). A dynamic view would address the argument that explanations for and consequences of PRR parties and movements may change during their trajectory.

For instance, before groups pass the ‘threshold of relevance’ (Carter, 2005; Ellinas, 2007)—i.e. are big enough to matter—their organizational attributes might have no significant effect on their performances. And once populist outsiders have established themselves as strong and credible alternatives, traditional parties may not win back support of voters anymore if they adopt similar agendas (Van Kessel, 2015). Likewise, the impact of taking up government responsibility depends on how long parties exist and whether they have institutionalized (De Lange and Art, 2011).

Cross-national comparisons have focused mainly on the PRR’s electoral strength. The strength of social movements and the interplay between movements and parties have received relatively little attention. Except for Germany, there are few systematic comparative studies of the non-party sector of the PRR (Minkenberg, 2004, 2011; Hutter, 2014). More research is needed on the question whether the electoral channel effectively substitutes for street activity, not only on the macro level (Hutter, 2014; Koopmans, 1996), but also on the individual level. To what extent people refrain to use non-parliamentary means to voice their concerns about multiculturalism and immigration, due to electoral successes and/or government inclusion of PRR parties? Do extremist activists perceive voting as a credible alternative option to express their grievances? Minkenberg (2011) points out that supporters of PRR parties are usually not overlapping or interchangeable with perpetrators of extreme right or racist violence. Again, a dynamic perspective is important: over time, movements can turn into political parties, and parties can engage in street demonstrations when they face political obstruction.

This brings us to future avenues for theoretical progress. Both PRR actors and its competitors/opponents can adjust their action repertoire and ideology over time, a challenge which is insufficiently addressed by static, spatial comparisons. Future scholarship might need to pay more attention to two key components that stem from such an evolutionary perspective on parties and social movements: feedback and learning. Outcomes at $t1$ continually feed back as inputs at $t2$. Actors adapt to what has gone before and respond to what other agents are doing. These ingredients make political contention a so-called ‘complex adaptive system’ (Laver and Sergenti, 2012). The primary tool to map out dynamic interactions of heterogeneous, adaptive individuals is agent-based modelling.

In terms of confronting theories with empirical evidence, future studies could be enriched by greater attention to PRR parties’ and movements’ presence on the Internet. The current debate on the role of the Internet for right-wing organizations is characterized by much theoretical speculation; we know little about how these groups use the Internet for political communication and mobilization (Caiani and Parenti, 2013). To date, to assess where PRR groups stand, scholars

often rely on manifestos (Akkerman et al., 2016; Eger and Valdez, 2015), expert surveys (Immerzeel et al., 2015), and traditional media outlets (Bos and Brants, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2008).

But few citizens actually read party manifestos. Most people perceive politics by what they read in the media instead (Kriesi et al., 2008). Obviously, using mass media also has a significant drawback, since coverage might be biased (Helbling and Tresch 2011). These caveats could be addressed by relying on sources that are both widely consumed by citizens and controlled by PRR parties and movements themselves, such as Facebook pages (Arzheimer, 2015a) or tweets (Van Kessel and Castelein, 2016).

Social media material could also enrich our understanding of supporters and sympathizers, in addition to surveys or interviews. For instance: Arzheimer (2015a, 2015b) concludes that the German AfD does not qualify as either nativist, populist, or radical, but statements of Facebook fans certainly hint at more radical currents among supporters and rank-and-file members. The topics that people devote most attention to (Islam and immigration) are hardly mentioned in AfD's own posts; party leader Lucke apparently tried to distance the party from Islamophobia.

Suggestions for further reading

Review articles on explanations for emergence and rise:

- Arzheimer K (2012) Electoral sociology: who votes for the extreme right and why - and when? In: Backes U and Moreau P (eds) *The Extreme Right in Europe. Current Trends and Perspectives*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 35–50.
- Ellinas AA (2007) Phased out. Far right parties in Western Europe. *Comparative Politics* 39(3): 353–371.
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- Van der Brug W and Fennema M (2007) What causes people to vote for a radical-right party? A review of recent work. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 19(4): 474–487.

Review articles that also address the consequences of emergence and rise:

- Betz H-G (2004) Exclusionary populism in Western Europe in the 1990s and beyond. A threat to democracy and civil rights? Identities, Conflict and Cohesion Programme Paper Number 9, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Mudde C (2013) The 2012 Stein Rokkan Lecture: Three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe: So what? *European Journal of Political Research* 52(1): 1–19.

Monographs:

- Akkerman T, De Lange SL and Rooduijn M (2016) *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* London: Routledge.
- Caiani M and Parenti (2013) *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet*. London: Routledge.
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- Rydgren J (ed) (2005) *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism in the Western World*. New York: Nova Publishers.

Classical earlier studies:

- Betz H-G (1994) *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York: St Martin's.
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