Chapter 1

Understanding the rise of the radical right

On 21st April 2002, the defeat of the socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, by Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the French Presidential elections, sent a profound shockwave throughout Europe. The result galvanized massive anti-Front National demonstrations by millions of protestors all over France. One of the best-known leaders on the radical right, Le Pen dismissed the holocaust as a ‘detail of history’ and he continues to voice anti-Semitic, racist views. These events were rapidly followed in the Netherlands by the assassination of Pym Fortuyn on 6th May 2002, a flamboyant and controversial figure, leading to a sudden surge of support for his party in the general election. The anti-immigrant Lijst Pym Fortuyn, formed just three months before the election, suddenly became the second largest party in the Dutch parliament and part of the governing coalition. Nor are these isolated gains; during the last two decades, radical right parties have been surging in popularity in many nations, gaining legislative seats, enjoying the legitimacy endowed by ministerial office, and entering the corridors of government power. Some have proved temporary ‘flash’ parties while others have experienced more enduring success across a series of contests. The popularity of figures such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jörg Haider, Umberto Bossi, Carl Hagen, and Pym Fortuyn has aroused widespread popular concern and a burgeoning scholarly literature.

The core puzzle that the book seeks to explain is why these parties have established a clear presence in national parliaments in recent years in a diverse array of democracies – such as in Canada, Norway, France, Russia, Romania and Chile - and even entered coalition governments in Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Italy - while failing to advance in comparable nations such as Sweden, Britain, and the United States. Their rise has occurred in both predominately Catholic and Protestant societies, in Nordic and Mediterranean regions, in liberal Norway and conservative Switzerland, as well as in the European Union and in Anglo-American democracies. The puzzle is deepened by the fact that they have surfaced in many established democracies, affluent post-industrial ‘knowledge’ societies, and cradle-to-grave welfare states with some of the best-educated and most secure populations in the world, all characteristics which should generate social tolerance and liberal attitudes antithetical to xenophobic appeals. Moreover radical right parties are not confined to these countries; they have also won support within certain post-Communist nations, as well as in some Latin American democracies. Their rise is all the more intriguing given the remarkable resilience of established party systems and the difficulties that left-libertarian insurgents, exemplified by Green parties, have commonly encountered when trying to break through into elected office.

Despite extensive interest, little consensus has emerged about the reasons for this phenomenon. This book reexamines classic questions about the underlying conditions facilitating the rise of the radical right, the nature of electoral change, and the drivers behind patterns of party competition. Building on ideas of rational voters and rational parties developed nearly half a century ago, this phenomenon is understood here through the concept of a regulated political marketplace which distinguishes between public ‘demand’ and party ‘supply’, both operating within the context of the electoral rules. On the ‘demand-side’, the book suggests that certain conditions in the mass electorate, notably the growth of political disaffection and partisan dealignment in contemporary democracies, make it easier for supporters to defect, at least temporarily, from mainstream parties. The rising salience of cultural protectionism, in a backlash against globalization and population migration, has altered the public agenda in each country, providing sporadic openings for new parties. But these developments are common across contemporary societies so they are insufficient by themselves to account for the varying fortunes of the radical right. The theory developed here argues that the key to radical right success depends upon the complex interaction of public demand and party supply under conditions of imperfect competition in a regulated electoral marketplace. Each section of the book is organized to explore different dimensions of this account.
• Part II examines the broader institutional context of the type of regulated marketplace, comparing the formal rules determining the nomination, campaigning and election process;

• Part III considers the role of public ‘demand’, notably conditions of widespread political disaffection and attitudes sympathetic towards cultural protectionism;

• Part IV analyzes how far party ‘supply’ matches electoral demands, in particular whether radical right parties emphasize either ideological or populist appeals within this environment, contributing towards sporadic electoral gains, and, the condition necessary for persistent success, whether the radical right manages to build and consolidate effective party organizations.

This theory is tested against survey evidence derived from almost forty societies. The conclusions drawn from the study are designed to contribute toward informing the debate about the role of the radical right in contemporary democracies, by dismissing certain common fallacies while highlighting other under-emphasized causes. By contrast, the study establishes that remarkably little evidence supports many other popular myths about the reasons for their success, for example the claim that the radical right has advanced most strongly in societies with rampant unemployment or strong waves of immigration, or that they appeal most strongly to socially disadvantaged sectors of the electorate. Nor does this account emphasize, as others commonly suggest, that radical right fortunes depend primarily upon where other mainstream center-right and center-left parties locate themselves across the ideological spectrum, or that ‘charismatic’ leaders are vital to their success. Taken by themselves, none of the core propositions advanced in this book can claim to provide particularly striking or original insights; indeed they can be regarded as fairly conventional assumptions pervasive in many standard rational choice accounts of electoral systems, voting behavior, and party competition. The book borrows from, and thereby builds upon, the substantial literature in these subfields, rather than seeking to reinvent the intellectual wheel. Nevertheless the combination and dynamic interaction of these factors has been insufficiently understood theoretically, still less demonstrated empirically, to explain this particular phenomenon.

The rise of radical right parties

Before setting out the key components of the argument developed at the heart of this study, and discussing how this relates to the previous literature, for those unfamiliar with this phenomenon, the study first briefly sets the stage by describing the basic facts concerning where and when the radical right has advanced most successfully during the postwar era – and where they have failed. The precise definition and categorization of parties within the radical right family is discussed in detail in subsequent chapters but here, for an overview of this phenomenon, some of the best-known contemporary cases are highlighted.

In the post-war decade, the remnants of the radical right existed at the shadowy fringe of party politics in established democracies. The most significant parliamentary party which could trace its origins to Europe’s fascist past was the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), although in post-war German politics the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) remained active at the margins. In the United States, powerful forces of racist rightwing reaction included the Ku Klux Klan and George Wallace’s American Independent Party. The most dramatic new insurgent which shocked established party systems occurred in France, where the Poujadists registering sudden albeit short-lived gains during the 1956 general election. By the early-1970s, however, initial signs suggested that the deep tectonic plates of European party politics were starting to shift elsewhere. In 1972, Mogens Glistrup established the Danish Fremskridtspartiet (Progress Party or FP). Tremors reverberated throughout Western Europe when, just a year later, they became the second largest party in the Danish Folketing, gaining 16% of the vote on a radical anti-tax program. Other leaders sought to emulate their success in Britain (with the National Front, founded in 1967), France (Le Pen’s Front National, founded in 1972), and Norway (the
sister Fremskridtspartiet, created in 1973). The initial electoral record of these parties remained erratic and uncertain during this decade: by the early-1980s, national parliaments in Western democracies contained only a half-dozen parties which could be classified as constituting part of the radical right family, even by the most generous definition.

Today, by contrast, multiple contenders jostle for power. To give just a few illustrations of their contemporary success, as well as the recent contests in France and the Netherlands mentioned earlier, in Italy, the government was returned to power in May 2001, resting on the support of the xenophobic Lega Nord, led by Umberto Bossi, and the Alleanza Nazionale, led by Gianfranco Fini (with roots in the fascist MSI). In Austria, in 1999 Jörg Haider's Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs (FPÖ) won 26.9% of the vote and the FPÖ (although not Haider) became part of the new coalition government led by the conservative Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP). In the 2001 Danish general election, the Dansk Folkeparti, headed by Pia Kjaersgaard, got 12% of the vote. In Norway that year, Carl Ivar Hagen’s Fremskrittpartiet won 14.7% of the vote, becoming the third largest party in the Storting. In Belgium, in October 2000, the Vlaams Blok (led by Frank Vanhecke) became the biggest party on Antwerp city council, winning 20 out of 50 seats. During the June 2004 European elections, Vlaams Blok won the second largest share of the Belgian vote. In Switzerland, the Schweizerische Volkspartei consolidated gains in the October 2003 elections with 26.6% of the vote, becoming the largest party in the Swiss parliament, with 55 out of the 200 seats in the Nationalrat, gaining an additional seat in the executive Federal Council. Not all these peaks were sustained in subsequent elections, by any means. Nevertheless each temporary surge administered a sharp shock to mainstream parties and generated considerable alarm in popular media commentary.

So far we have only mentioned some recent electoral gains for the more successful contemporary radical right parties in Western Europe. The list remains far from complete. As discussed in chapter 3, in Anglo-American democracies similar parties include New Zealand First, the Canadian Reform Party (subsequently known as the ‘Alliance’ and then the ‘Conservative party’),
3 the British National Party and the UK Independence party, Ross Perot’s Reform party in the United States, and One Nation in Australia. In post-Communist Europe, ultra-nationalist rightwing forces emerging since the fall of the Berlin Wall in Central and Eastern Europe are exemplified by the Hungarian Justice and Life Party, the Slovene National party, the Greater Romanian party, the Romanian National Unity Party, and the Liberal Democratic parties in Russia and the Ukraine. In regional elections, the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the German People’s Union have also registered some modest gains in the former-communist eastern Germany. Comparisons elsewhere include the Independent Democratic Union and National Renewal parties in Chile, and the National Religious Party and National Union in Israel.

[Figure 1.1 about here]

Figure 1.1 summarizes some of the basic trends in party support. The graph illustrates the proportion of votes cast for seven relevant radical right parties in Western Europe which contested a continuous series of national elections since the early-1980s. This includes votes cast for the Italian MSI/AN, Austrian FPÖ, Swiss SVP, Danish FP/PP, Norwegian FrP, Belgian VB, and French FN. All these parties are defined as ‘relevant’ as they have achieved over 3% of the vote in one or more national parliamentary elections during this period, and they represent some of the more consistently successful radical right contenders in Western Europe. The figure demonstrates the dramatic advance of these parties: in the early-1980s, support remains flat and the radical right was often excluded from parliament through failing to meet the necessary vote thresholds over successive elections. The surge gathered momentum from the mid-1980s onwards until these parties eventually reached a slight plateau in 2001, with the support of around one in six European voters. To summarize, during the last two decades, popular support for these parties almost triples.

By now, too many gains have occurred in too many countries to accept the idea that the radical right is simply a passing fad or fashion, a temporary phenomena which will eventually fade
away on the contemporary political scene. Still the success of the radical right should not be exaggerated: for example, the British National Party, the German NDP, and Australian One Nation currently remain stranded at the peripheries of power, attracting disproportionate media angst and headline news coverage despite, so far, only sporadic and limited electoral success. ‘Flash’ parties, exemplified by Lijst Pym Fortuyn, enjoy a meteoric rise but an equally precipitate fall. Elsewhere, however, as discussed in Chapter 10, some other contenders such as Lega Nord, the Norwegian FrP and the Belgian Vlaams Blok, have managed the successful transition from fringe into minor party status. After their initial entry into local government or national parliaments, parties which have consolidated support over successive elections have gradually gained status, resources and legitimacy, which they can use to build grassroots party organizations, select more experienced candidates, and expand access to the news media and to public campaign funding, all of which can provide a springboard for further advances. Access to legislative office often provides important opportunities to accumulate valuable political resources, such as access to public funding, political patronage, and media coverage between elections, which are denied to fringe parties persistently excluded from power.

Alternative explanations in the literature

Of course, no shortage of alternative explanations for the rise of the radical right is available, as discussed further in subsequent chapters. The reasons for this phenomenon have attracted widespread speculation in popular commentary and in the academic literature. Research on the extreme right is hardly new; indeed classics in political sociology published during the late-1950s and early-1960s focused on understanding grassroots support for fascism and Nazism (Adorno et al, Lipset), the French origins of Poujadism (Hoffman), and the American phenomenon of McCarthyism (Bell). One summary of the literature by Rydgren developed the following ‘shopping-list’ of reasons which had been proposed in research to explain the emergence of contemporary radical right parties:

1. A post-industrial economy;
2. Dissolution of established identities, fragmentation of the culture, multiculturalization.
3. The emergence or growing salience of the socio-cultural cleavage dimension.
4. Widespread political discontent and disenchantment.
5. Convergence between the established parties in political space.
6. Popular xenophobia and racism.
8. Reaction against the emergence of New Left and/or Green parties and movements.
9. A proportional voting system.
10. Experience of a referendum that cuts across the old party cleavages.”

Other commentators have identified ten distinct ‘theories’ of the radical right. Yet it remains unclear how these various ad hoc causes relate to each other theoretically. Nor is it evident how structural developments which are thought to be common in most post-industrial nations, such as political disaffection, can account satisfactorily for contrasts in the electoral fortunes of the radical right within or among similar societies, such as between Wallonian and Francophone Belgium, or between western and eastern Canadian states. Many common propositions, such as the assumed role of economic conditions or patterns of immigration, have found only limited or mixed support in the literature. The research also remains divided in part because, rather than systematic comparative analysis with testable generalizations, the sub-field remains heavily dependent upon descriptive narratives about specific national case-studies. As a result, contingent factors emphasized as critical for the rise specific radical right parties in some particular countries (or elections) are reported as unimportant in others. Many of these explanations are discussed and considered further throughout this book but found to be less closely and consistently linked to the rise of the radical right in many countries than the account developed here.
To make sense of the contemporary literature, and as a brush-clearing exercise, the predominant perspectives can be categorized analytically into three main perspectives. The most common sociological approach has long emphasized structural trends altering popular demands in mass society, notably developments in the socioeconomic background and political attitudes of the electorate, which are thought to have generated opportunities for new parties. Alternatively, more recent institutional accounts have often focused more heavily upon supply-side factors, including the strategic activities of parties as rational agents and where they choose to locate themselves across the ideological spectrum when seeking to compete for votes and seats. Finally, the traditional approach found in the literature on electoral systems has long stressed the importance of the institutional context, emphasizing the formal electoral rules constraining both supply and demand in the regulated marketplace.

Social structure and public demand

Essentially, one-level models based on how changes in the social structure have fuelled public demand for the radical right are by far the most pervasive approach in the previous literature drawing upon political sociology, social psychology, and political economy. These accounts emphasize long-term ‘bottom up’ generic conditions and secular trends in mass society — notably the growth of a marginalized underclass in post-industrial economies, patterns of migration flows, and/or the expansion of long-term unemployment — which are thought to have facilitated public demand these parties as an outlet for political frustrations among the losers in affluent societies. Specific arguments within this perspective claim, alternatively, that the radical right is strongest under conditions where: (i) new waves of immigration, asylum-seekers and refugees have raised public concern about this issue; (ii) the electorate has become widely discontented with the mainstream parties and mistrustful of the political system; (iii) a breakdown has occurred in the traditional class and religious cleavages structuring mainstream political affiliations and party loyalties; (iv) a cultural backlash is evident against the rise of post-material values; and/or (v) where cuts in the welfare state, growing levels of job insecurity, and rising patterns of unemployment have generated new forms of social risk and disadvantage. These conditions are regarded as largely ‘structural’ in the sense that they are understood as persistent and enduring developments in mass society which constrain the behavior of all actors in the political system. This relationship involved some endogeneity; in the long-term, public policies can gradually transform society, for example through cuts in the welfare state expanding the number of households living in poverty, or through legal restriction on the influx of immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. Politicians seek to shape and alter public opinion, for example by populist rhetoric heightening fears of ‘outsiders’, or by proposing new legislation restricting immigration, thereby raising the salience of the issue on the policy agenda. Nevertheless, demand-side approaches treat mass society as the ‘given’ context within which political parties have to fight any particular election.

Although frequently assumed, for example by commentators in the news media, in fact some of the most popular explanations fail with even a cursory glance at the comparative evidence. Many accounts blame job insecurity and unemployment rates in each society, assuming that radical right support is strongest among poorer and less-educated groups who feel threatened by rapid socio-economic change. Contemporary accounts commonly echo post-war theories in social psychology offered by Adorno et al., suggesting that low-status individuals are more prone to suffer from ‘authoritarian personalities’, where frustration born of experience of urban over-crowding, poverty, and joblessness in industrial societies is translated into hostility and prejudice against ‘outsiders’. Studies emphasize the rise of ‘new social cleavages’ which are believed to facilitate these parties, for example if the politics of resentment is concentrated among an ‘underclass’ of low-skilled and low-qualified workers in inner-city areas, experiencing growing levels of job insecurity and under-employment, who have fallen through the welfare safety net in affluent societies. Yet, contrary to these predictions, in fact the survey evidence presented in chapter 6 establishes little support for this popular view. Some radical right parties do draw heavily upon the socially disadvantaged populations among the poorest and least-
educated social sectors; others attract a mix of social sectors. Class-based explanations fail to account for radical right support found among the comfortably self-employed bourgeoisie, as well as among the lower working class. Moreover, if we compare the aggregate evidence, the contemporary radical right has surged ahead in European nations where unemployment rates are relatively low (Switzerland and Austria) as well as fairly high (France). Simple accounts of structural change have limited capacity to explain this phenomenon.

Nor can this rise be attributed in any straightforward, mechanical, and mono-causal fashion simply to a backlash against the growth of the ‘borderless’ European Union, and waves of population migration, ‘guest-workers’, political refugees, and asylum-seekers. As discussed later in chapter 8, contemporary radical rightwing parties have failed to enter the German Bundestag, the Swedish Riksdag, and the British House of Commons, for example, despite the fact that these countries have absorbed some of the highest proportions of asylum-seekers in Western Europe. UN estimates suggest that during the 1990s there were almost one million refugees and asylum-seekers in Germany, 200,000 in the UK, and 175,000 in Sweden. By contrast, Italy hosted about seven thousand refugees and asylum-seekers during this decade, yet during the 2001 general elections the Alleanza Nationale (AN) elected two-dozen deputies with the support of over one in ten voters. Other variants within this perspective include those who claim that a backlash has occurred in Western Europe against powerful cultural tides and the rise of post-materialist values. But the classic ‘value change’ thesis of Ronald Inglehart predicted the gradual emergence of left-libertarian and green parties in postindustrial societies, due to long-term cultural shifts in values among the secure younger generation, and the gradual process of population replacement, but not a return to the authoritarian past. Simple path-dependent historical explanations also fail: the radical right has advanced in Austria and Italy, scarred by memories of fascism, but also in Norway, at the forefront of Allied resistance.

What of protest politics? The ‘politics of resentment’ is often brought into explanations where the populist rhetoric of the radical right is believed to tap into deep-seated public disaffection with the political system, an erosion of trust in the institutions of representative government, and the expression of disgust against ‘all of the above’. There is also considerable survey evidence that the rise of the radical right in recent decades has been accompanied in many established democracies by growing popular disaffection with political institutions and with mainstream parties. But despite the apparent links between these trends, if the rise of political disaffection is fairly universal, why should this estrangement generate the rise of the radical right in Austria and not Germany, why Norway and not Finland, why New Zealand and not Britain? As discussed further in chapter 7, the assumed direction of causality in this relationship can also be questioned: on the one hand, voters may indeed seek an outlet for expressing disaffection with ‘all of the above’ by casting ballots for the radical right. Alternatively, on the other hand, ‘losers’ who support fringe and minor parties on the radical right which consistently fail to win legislative and government office may rationally come to feel greater disaffection with the political system and mistrust of the institutions of representative democracy.

Another prime candidate concerns theories of partisan dealignment. In political science, a wealth of survey evidence indicates a loosening of the life-long bonds tying loyalists to mainstream parties in many established democracies. This process is also believed to have occurred throughout postindustrial societies, due to common structural developments (rising educational levels, generating greater cognitive skills, and the ubiquity of non-partisan sources of information through the spread of the electronic media). Where more ‘voters are up for grabs’ this should facilitate electoral volatility and sudden surges in popular support, including for newer challengers. Although closer to the mark, again these accounts only take us so far. In particular, they remain silent about the reasons why the beneficiaries of this process should necessarily be Le Pen, Haider, and Hagen, for example, rather than multiple other challenger and insurgent minor parties in the crowded electoral marketplace, whether Greens, regional-nationalist, ethno-religious, left-wing populist, or reformed communist. Moreover since the causes of partisan dealignment are thought to lie in social processes and structural trends common in most affluent
postindustrial societies, by itself this explanation fails to account for marked cross-national variations in popular support for the radical right. As discussed in chapter 10, some of the clearest evidence for partisan dealignment can be found in Ireland, West Germany and Britain, all nations where the radical right has failed to establish a serious challenge. By contrast, the proportion of partisan identifiers has not fallen so dramatically in Denmark and Belgium, both countries where radical right parties have made considerable advances into legislative office.

In short, separate ‘demand-side’ accounts frequently expressed in popular and academic commentaries often contribute an important part of the puzzle, and they can provide building-blocks useful for developing more comprehensive theories. But their failure to provide an overall explanation is clear from even a simple glance at the sharp contrasts in radical right fortunes found between neighboring states which appear to share similar cultural values, postindustrial service-sector economies, and comparable institutions of representative democracy, such as the sharp differences in these parties between the Netherlands and Germany, France and Britain, or Canada and the United States.

Party agency: The role of supply-side factors

By contrast, two-level models emphasizing supply-side factors have recently become more common in the literature, for example in historical-institutional accounts, descriptive case-studies, rational choice theories of political economy, as well as in theories linking challenger and insurgent parties with the rise of new social movements. This approach suggests that demand-side analysis is too simple and instead we need to give far greater emphasis to what parties can do through their own actions as strategic agents. Supply-side approaches focus upon patterns of party competition, including where mainstream parties decide to place themselves to the left, center, or right across the ideological spectrum, as well as the actions taken by the radical right themselves, and the dynamic interaction of both these factors. In particular, research working within this perspective has emphasized factors such as the anti-immigrant and economic policies carried in radical right manifestos; the communication channels, populist styles, and rhetorical strategies these parties use when targeting voters; the characteristics and popularity of their leadership; and the financial resources and organization of each party.

One of the most influential theories along these lines, developed by Herbert Kitschelt, suggests that the spatial location of mainstream parties across the ideological spectrum constrain the opportunities for the radical right to expand. In particular, in countries where the major parties of the left and right converge in the moderate center of the political spectrum, and where the mainstream parties fail to address issues of race relations, immigration and free market economics that concern the electorate, Kitschelt suggests this allow the most space for the radical right to maximize their support. Following a similar logic, van der Brug et al also suggest that radical right parties are more successful when the largest mainstream rightwing competitor, in particular, occupies a centrist position. Carter argues that the electoral fortunes of the radical right may also depend upon the ideological position that these parties choose to adopt within the available political space, along with cross-national variations in their party leadership and organization. Alternatively, others such as Martin Schain theorize that when mainstream parties seek to articulate and co-opt the radical right signature issues of political disaffection and anti-immigration, or where they accept them as coalition partners, this may serve to legitimize radical right parties in the eyes of the electorate. This general approach assumes that the electorate’s ‘demand’ for public policies can be regarded as constant across affluent nations, on the basis that broadly similar processes of globalization, population migration, structural unemployment, and multiculturalism have transformed most postindustrial societies. Variations in the success of the radical right across similar nations are therefore attributed to how far parties respond effectively to public demands through their own actions and strategies. Radical right parties are believed to react as rational actors to the opportunities arising from the ideological position of other mainstream parties, as well as, in turn, influencing the position of their rivals.

Electoral rules: The role of the institutional context
By themselves, however, ‘supply-side’ explanations suffer from some important limitations; for example, during the postwar decade many established democracies experienced a broad social and economic consensus, with most mainstream parties clustered within the moderate center of the political spectrum, agreeing about the importance of maintaining the welfare state and Keynesian planned economies, yet in most places, although there was much ideological space to develop, radical right parties remained marginalized throughout this era. Chapter 9 compares expert perceptions of party locations and establishes the relatively poor fit between the type of radical right party found in a range of European democracies and either the size of the ideological gap between the mainstream center-left and center-right parties (the Kitschelt thesis), or the size of the ‘right-wing’ space (the van der Brug thesis). What is needed is a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon which provides insights into the interaction of the distribution of public opinion (‘electoral demand’) with how parties respond in their ideological locations (‘party supply’). Recognizing party ‘supply’ as well as electoral ‘demand’, while representing an important step forward, is also limited in the sense that in practice party competition is imperfect; instead supply and demand operate within a regulated electoral marketplace. Three-level nested models emphasize the institutional context of the political system, notably the formal and informal rules determining the nomination, campaign, and election process, which, in turn, influence both party supply and public demand.

Ever since the seminal work of Maurice Duverger, the ‘mechanical’ effects of the electoral rules are well-known, with majoritarian systems depressing the seat share of minor parties, and this process is often assumed to affect smaller radical right parties. The rules can also set a legal threshold of exclusion, or the minimum share of the vote stipulated in the constitution to secure a seat. Whether parties and candidates can get ballot access or equal campaign funding is also shaped by the formal rules. What is less well-established, by contrast, are the psychological (‘informal’ or ‘indirect’) effects concerning how the legal rules shape the informal norms, attitudes, and behavior of parties and citizens, including their strategic calculations made in anticipating how the formal mechanisms work. Such psychological effects include strategic contests (whether and where parties contest seats), strategic campaign communications (which electors parties target and why), and strategic voting (whether citizens vote for their second choice party, if they regard ballots cast for smaller radical right parties as ‘wasted votes’). The institutional context of the electoral system is also partly dependent upon party activity, for example where the governing parties pass legislation controlling the nomination process, campaign funding, and ballot access which restricts or even excludes minor parties. But during any contest, the electoral rules can be regarded as largely stable constraints operating upon all parties and candidates, and thereby shaping patterns of ideological competition.

Building upon this literature, theories of new social movements developed by Gamson and Tarrow popularized the idea of a ‘political opportunity structure’. Several accounts have utilized this concept when emphasizing the opportunities which new radical right insurgents face within the external constraints set by existing electoral rules and the established patterns of party competition. Yet rather than using this framework, it seems preferable to keep the electoral system and patterns of party competition as logically separate. In the long-term, formal electoral rules operating at the level of the political system are usually the stable and fixed institutional context within which patterns of party competition evolve and develop in the medium to short-term, for example as parties adjust their ideological position and programmatic policies between elections and even within campaigns. Governing parties can and do alter the formal rules at irregular intervals. Occasional radical reforms transform the basic electoral system, as exemplified by major changes in the early-1990s in New Zealand, Italy and Japan. More commonly, modest incremental adjustments alter the legal and administrative rules governing the nomination, campaign, and election process, for example the regulations used in US presidential elections for campaign funding, constituency redistricting, and presidential debates. But the basic institutional context usually proves far more stable than the policy platforms and specific position of parties across the political spectrum, that are more commonly adjusted from one contest to
Patterns of party competition are also best understood as an interactive and dynamic process, where radical right parties both respond to the position of other mainstream parties, and in turn also influence them. Mixing both patterns of party competition and the electoral rules into a ‘political opportunity structure’ is conceptually confusing and adds little clarity to the analysis of the radical right. As Koopmans argues, some versions of the ‘political opportunity’ model over-stretch the context to include aspects which are not political, not structural, or which just happen to fit the particular case-study. As such, this book avoids the term altogether and instead analyzes the impact of how party agencies position themselves ideologically and programmatically in any contest within the given context of formal electoral rules.

The institutional rules governing nomination, campaigning and election are both formal and informal. ‘Formal’ electoral rules are understood here as the legislative framework governing nomination, campaigning and election, as embodied in official documents, constitutional conventions, legal statutes, codes of conduct, and administrative procedures, authorized by law and enforceable by courts. It is neither necessary nor sufficient for rules to be embodied in the legal system to be effective; social norms, informal patterns of behavior, and social sanctions also create shared mutual expectations among political actors. Nevertheless the formal rules compared in chapters 4 and 5 are important as these are the core instruments of public policy, open to amendment whether by legislation, executive order, constitutional revision, judicial judgment, or bureaucratic decree. Although there is a ‘gray’ overlapping area, by contrast most social norms are altered gradually by informal processes such as social pressures, media campaigns, and cultural value shifts located outside of the formal policy arena.

This study will examine evidence supporting both demand and supply perspectives with a critical eye, but it will also build upon previous studies to offer an alternative and more comprehensive ‘middle’ way of understanding the dynamics of this phenomenon. Taken in isolation, each of these perspectives - emphasizing popular demands, party responses, and the context of electoral rules - provide limited insights. But, in combination, if we understand their interaction, these factors go a long way towards explaining this phenomenon. This book seeks to develop an integrated approach where the varying fortunes of the radical right are understood to be the product of how the formal institutional rules set the context, and thereby interact with, both party ‘supply’ and public ‘demand’ in any election. It develops a theoretical framework for understanding the role of parties as strategic actors crafting their ideological appeals to match public demands, within the constraints set by electoral rules. This deceptively simple analytic step, developed in an earlier book, provides an extremely powerful and comprehensive lens through which to understand the dynamics of public opinion and party competition. The challenge is to understand how shifts in attitudes towards cultural protectionism, coupled with partisan dealignment, and growing political disaffection, have altered the distribution of public opinion in mass society (demand); how mainstream and radical right political parties have responded strategically to, and contributed towards, these changes in public opinion when emphasizing their party platforms and ideological values (supply); and how both ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ are constrained by the formal rules regulating the nomination, campaigning, and election processes, thereby determining which parties get into power.

Understanding the puzzle of the sporadic rise (and occasional fall) of these parties is important, even where the radical right remain marginalized on the fringes of public life, for a number of reasons. As explored in the final section of the book, there are plausible grounds to believe that successful radical right parties are exerting growing influence over public policy, especially on their ‘signature’ issues of race and immigration, by encouraging the center-right parties to adopt more restrictive policies towards refugees and asylum-seekers. The dynamic theory of party competition presented here suggests that where radical right parties succeed, they expand the perceived ‘zone of acquiescence’, so other will follow in subsequent contests. Their success could also signify a profound realignment of traditional party systems, as well as potentially legitimating greater social intolerance in contemporary democracies. Yet at the same time it is also true that some of the more alarmist concerns about the consequences of their rise
for the overall health of democracy, commonly expressed by popular commentators, may well be exaggerated.

The theoretical framework: the interaction of structure, agency, and rules

If social structure, party agency, and electoral rules are the key analytic building-blocks of this theory, how are they theorized to interact? Rather than a ‘one-size fits all’ approach, the argument developed here seeks to explain significant variations in the strategic appeals and electoral success of parties within the radical right family, for example the sharp contrasts evident between the political fortunes of the US and the Canadian Reform parties, or the French and British National Front, or the radical right in Norway and Sweden. The focus is primarily upon explaining the outcome of contemporary elections, and the consequences of this for party competition and for political systems, rather than upon individual-level voting behavior, although the latter helps to underpin the former. The core argument is evaluated against alternative explanations and competing counter-hypotheses offered in the literature, using national-level and survey data drawn from almost forty countries. This account unfolds in far greater depth throughout the book, along with the supporting evidence, but here the logic of the main argument is sketched out as a series of theoretical propositions.

(i) The proximity model of voter demand and party supply

The theory at the heart of this study starts from conditions of perfect electoral competition, and then modifies this subsequently to account more realistically for behavior under a regulated marketplace. The traditional Downsian rational choice axiom assumes that both voters and parties are located at ideal points across an ideological spectrum ranging from left to right. The proximity model of voting behavior assumes that each voter can locate him or herself at a point in this space reflecting their ideal preference. The position of each party can also be represented by a point in the same space. The theory assumes that under conditions of perfect competition, rational voters will choose the party whose position is closest to their own ideological preference and will shun the parties furthest away. This process generates voter demand for parties. At the same time, rational parties seek to maximize their share of votes and seats by adopting the ideological position closest to the median voter, thereby generating party supply.

Further, the distribution of public opinion across the ideological spectrum is assumed to follow a normal curve (Figure 1.2). Some issues do not fall into this pattern, for example if opinion is heavily skewed towards one side of the distribution, but as we shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters, public opinion reflects a normal distribution on most major issues, such as preferences for tax cuts versus public spending, or attitudes towards tolerance of ethnic minorities. In the ideological space, the theory assumes that some policy options are located too far left for the public’s acceptance, some are located too far right, and there is an asymmetrical zone of acquiescence between them with a range of choices that are acceptable to the public. A broad public consensus exists about issues and values within this zone. Typically, these are exemplified by the desirability of bread-and-butter ‘valence’ public policies, such as broad agreement about the importance of maintaining economic growth, basic standards of health-care, educational services, law and order, and national security, as well as a consensus about shared social and political values such as the desirability of social tolerance, protection of human rights, and support for democratic processes and principles. Mainstream center-left and center-right parties typically compete primarily on which team is more competent to manage these valance issues. The public acquiesces to policies within this central zone because the differences among the alternative policy proposals are relatively minor, involving incremental more-or-less shifts rather than absolute black-and-white options. In democratic societies with competitive party systems, elected representatives are assumed to respond fairly sensitively to the distribution of public preferences. Rational politicians wish to maintain popular support (and hence office) by remaining safely within the ‘zone of acquiescence’ where the public is in accord with policy proposals and social values,
rather than moving too far across the ideological spectrum to either the extreme left or right, where they risk gaining some votes but also losing others. Most politicians therefore implement policy changes step-by-step broadly in terms of their perceptions of what the public wants. It follows that successful parties shape their policy platforms, rhetorical appeals, and values to maximize their popularity within the public’s zone of acquiescence. Citizens converge in this zone and hence a center position generates the greatest electoral rewards and the least risks for parties.

(ii) The dynamics of public demand

Yet the zone is not static. At a certain stage, the theory suggests, public preferences on the ‘demand-side’ may shift towards either the right or left. These movements are assumed to occur in response to ‘shocks’ to the status quo, which may include: (i) the impact of external events (exemplified by the sudden and dramatic impact of 9/11 on American perceptions of threats to national security); (ii) public reactions to major changes in government policies (such as the implementation of drastic reductions in public spending or taxation); (iii) the gradual and cumulative influence of long-term cultural trends (typified by growing public concern about the environment, rising support for gender and racial equality, or greater tolerance of homosexuality); or the persuasive arguments and rhetoric of politicians38. This specific account assumes that external events are important to the dynamics of public opinion, notably the impact of globalization in all its manifestations. But from the point of view of the general argument, the theory is broadly agnostic about the impact of different exogenous factors in causing shifts in public opinion. The essential assumption made here is that public opinion is not static, irrespective of the exact cause of such change. An expanding literature based on the analysis of long-term trends in opinion polls, for example by Page and Shapiro, suggests that mass public opinion shifts fairly rationally and predictably in response to these sort of social and political developments39. The theory suggests that government policies, however, often continue to overshoot the new public consensus, until policymakers become aware of the shift and move back into line with the zone of acquiescence. If politicians fail to perceive a significant change in public sentiment, or else fail to respond to the shift, they face the threat of electoral defeat. In the short-term, the link between public preferences and electoral outcomes remains crude and imperfect, since parties and candidates may be returned to power on successive occasions for many reasons, such as distortions of the electoral system, the personal popularity of charismatic leaders, or the impact of media campaign coverage, even when the policy mood is slowly moving against them. In the longer-term, however, the theory assumes that in democracies, politicians remaining outside the zone of acquiescence and unable to turn the tide of public sentiments will eventually suffer electoral defeat.

The challenge facing rational office-seeking politicians is therefore to maintain their position close to the zone of acquiescence in public opinion where they can maximize their support among electors. The art of politics is like a circus dog balancing on a rolling balloon. Politicians may lag behind public opinion if they believe that certain policy options remain popular, such as programs promising tax cuts, even though the public has now shifted preferences towards public spending. Alternatively, policymakers may also run ahead of public opinion, for example if they are more liberal than the electorate in their own attitudes towards political refugees. Perceptual and information barriers often hinder how far political leaders can identify public preferences with any degree of accuracy40. But when lagging or leading, politicians face an electoral penalty. Assuming the proximity model of voting behavior, where rational voters seek to maximize their utility by opting for the party closest to their ideological preferences, and against parties furthest away, in the longer term any growing disjunction between public preferences and the actions of policymakers can be expected to produce an electoral response that ‘throws the rascals out’ in favor of others more in tune with the national mood.

(iii) The impact of globalization has functioned as an external ‘shock’ to public opinion, driving the rising demand for cultural protectionism
If we accept that the ‘zone of acquiescence’ is not static, the study theorizes that one such major ‘external shock’, which has altered demand-side public opinion during recent decades, can be identified as growing emphasis on the values of ‘cultural protectionism’. The key catalyst for the value change, we theorize, is not just patterns of immigration flows per se, but rather the broader impact of globalization in all its multiple manifestations. Globalization is a complex phenomenon which is understood here to refer to the expansion in the scale and speed of flows of capital, goods, people, and ideas across borders with the effect of decreasing the effects of distance. Multiple studies have documented patterns of globalization using indicators such as levels of international trade, communications, and migration. We assume that public opinion has reacted most strongly to some of the most visible manifestations of this phenomenon, especially to perceived threats arising from growing rates of immigration, ethnic diversity, and job losses arising from the greater permeability of national borders during recent decades. As we shall demonstrate later, attitudes towards cultural protectionism represent a powerful force, tapping into older nationalist sentiments. The radical right is far from the exclusive beneficiaries of the public reaction against globalization; certain core protectionist beliefs, such as suspicion and mistrust about the consequences of untrammeled free trade and the hegemony of multinational corporations, are also advocated by diverse parties and social movements on the libertarian left. Nevertheless, the more xenophobic and least tolerant dimensions of cultural protectionism have become, in many ways, the signature issue of the radical right. The rising salience of this issue in recent decades, as a parochial backlash against globalization and cosmopolitanism, has created openings for these parties and problems for all governments in established democracies.

(iv) Radical right parties have responded most effectively to this shift in public opinion by articulating concerns and supplying policies about cultural protectionism, thereby meeting popular demand.

Within this context, on the supply-side, the strategic challenge facing radical right parties is how to mobilize sufficient support to carve out a niche section of the electoral market which is not already occupied by the established parties on the center and center-right. The study theorizes that they can do this in at least three distinct ways.

One supply-side strategy open to the radical right is an attempt to compete with the established center-left or center-right parties on consensual left-right values, by stressing their ability and competence to manage the economy, public services, or national security. Yet party competition remains fiercest on these valance issues. Without the experience, legitimacy, and authority that come from an established record in government, or the resources derived from elected office, new radical right parties face serious problems in establishing their credibility and authority on these issues.

Rather than emphasizing their positive competence, the radical right may instead seek to undermine support for the political system by negative attacks, especially those directed against the performance and record of the main party or party coalition in government, or by sowing general mistrust of political institutions and politicians as a class. Populist rhetoric directed against ‘all of the above’, fuelling popular resentment about the political system, is commonly used by outsiders. Parties can thereby hope to gain support from any period of government unpopularity, although, of course, this is a risky strategy since they cannot be certain whether any voter dissatisfaction will benefit them, whether it will boost support for other alternative opposition parties, or whether citizens will simply stay home and fail to participate at the ballot box.

Alternatively, radical right parties may seek to appeal positively to the electorate by supplying specific values and supplying policy proposals perceived to lie outside of the zone of acquiescence, and therefore neglected by the mainstream parties in the center. Minor parties can seek to gain ‘ownership’ of these values. Given the normal distribution of public opinion on issues to the extreme left or right, new parties may thereby maximize support among the smaller sectors of the electorate located at these poles. Radical right parties therefore emphasize the values associated with cultural protectionism in a strategic attempt to build support, emphasizing
signature issues such as the repatriation of immigrants, the closure of borders to ‘foreigners’, and economic protectionism. They may also advocate more diverse economic and social policies only loosely related to cultural protectionism, such as proposing harsh anti-crime laws or stringent requirement to qualify for public services and welfare benefits, although they can be framed and understood implicitly as coded attacks upon ‘foreigners’ and ‘outsiders’. These issues and values are usually regarded as too far outside the public’s zone of acquiescence to be adopted by the mainstream center-right parties: by emphasizing these values, any marginal gains major parties might make from the small proportion of extreme right voters carry serious risks of counterbalancing losses from the larger number of moderate center-left. But new radical right parties are assumed to be less risk-averse, since they also contain fewer incumbents facing potential electoral losses. If radical right parties succeed in gaining popular support by advocating these values, then the theory predicts that mainstream parties will probably move towards the right flank in subsequent elections, adjusting their perceptions of the state of public opinion, as a rational strategy to keep within the shifting zone of acquiescence.

(v) Facilitating demand-side conditions: partisan dealignment and political disaffection

Within this context, support for the radical right is further assisted by demand-side processes of partisan dealignment which loosen voter loyalties and by growing disaffection with government, both of which weakens habitual support (brand loyalty) for mainstream center-left and center-right parties, and thereby encourages electoral volatility. This should provide opportunities for newer competitors to attract supporters, especially short-term voter defections in second-order elections, exemplified by mid-term contests for regional bodies and for the European parliament. In occasional ‘deviating’ and ‘critical’ elections these contests can provide important breakthroughs for the radical right, whether on a short-term or longer-term basis. But, as discussed in depth in subsequent chapters, it would be a mistake to regard partisan dealignment and political disaffection as sufficient by themselves for explaining the rise of radical right parties; any weakening of traditional party-voter loyalties and any upsurge of protest voting could be channeled equally into support for a range of other minor parties and candidates seeking to provide ‘a choice not an echo’, whether green, regional, ethno-national, ethno-religious, ‘personalist’, or ‘independent’, as well as encouraging non-voting or ‘exit’. Not surprisingly, as a result indicators of political disaffection and partisan dealignment are expected to prove significant but relatively weak predictors of electoral support for the radical right.

(vi) Yet under conditions of imperfect competition, in a regulated marketplace, radical right parties face institutional barriers to nomination, campaigning, and election

So far, we have sought to explain the dynamic interaction between the demands of rational voters and the supply of public policies and ideological values by rational parties under conditions of perfect competition. The theory is simple and parsimonious. Far from being novel, the main assumptions are those conventionally accepted within the rational choice literature on proximity models of voting behavior and party competition. The account generates certain potentially testable propositions open to examination against the empirical evidence. The theory is powerful because it seeks to provide a general explanation applying to the strategic behavior of political parties in electoral democracies, not limited to the fortunes of specific radical right parties in particular countries, whether the charismatic charm of Haider, the financial resources of Perot, or the legacy of Italian fascism.

Yet the theory developed in this book modifies traditional Downsian models by recognizing and emphasizing that the pursuit of office is also constrained in important ways by electoral institutions. In practice, it is more realistic to assume a regulated electoral marketplace, rather than conditions of perfect competition. In particular, this account assumes that the electoral system determines how the share of the popular vote translates into seats, patterns of voter and party behavior, and whether just a few major parties are represented in national parliaments or whether multiple parties are included. If electoral systems were perfectly proportional then there would be no need to bring in this intervening condition: any party’s share of seats would
automatically reflect its share of the vote. But in practice, no electoral system is perfectly proportional. The most important features of electoral systems that affect party competition include the effective electoral threshold (the average percentage of votes needed to gain a seat) and also, to a lesser extent, the structure of opportunities regulating ballot access and party finance. These regulate competition and constrain both demand and supply-side factors.

The assumption that the electoral system matters for the distribution of seats is also hardly contentious, let alone original; ever since the classic work of Maurice Duverger and Douglas W. Rae, an extensive literature has established that basic electoral rules shape the degree of party fragmentation, and thus influence the electoral fortunes of minor parties of any political stripe and ideological persuasion. As discussed earlier, the direct or ‘mechanical’ impact of rules is widely acknowledged, for example, how the legal threshold prevented the NDP from entering the Bundestag in 1969, or how the temporary shift to PR in the 1986 French parliamentary elections helped Le Pen’s *Front National*. But the indirect impact of these rules on party ideological strategies is often overlooked, especially in studies limited to comparing radical right parties in Western European parliamentary elections, which includes few majoritarian electoral systems. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the reasons for this relationship and confirm the proposition that the electoral system represents an important part of the explanation for cross-national variations in the emergence and consolidation of radical right parties, although these rules function as necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for their rise.

(vii) The electoral system also shapes the success of emphasizing core ideological values or vaguer populist appeals

Building upon these insights, the seventh proposition of this theory is that within the established system of electoral rules, constraining actors, the effectiveness of adopting either ideological or populist strategies to maximize potential seat gains depends in part upon the type of electoral system. In this regard, parties are not just prisoners of their environment, but rather can become masters of their electoral fate. All radical right parties are located, by definition, towards the far right section of the ideological spectrum (for example, ranged from 7-10 on the conventional left-right 10-point scale), but nevertheless they are expected to differ systematically in the ideological appeals they adopt to maximize their support under different types of electoral systems.

Strategies emphasizing core ideological values work best in proportional representation electoral systems with low effective thresholds. The theory predicts that in this context, radical right parties can gain seats by adopting ‘bonding’ strategies emphasizing the ‘signature’ ideological appeals which distinguish them most clearly from mainstream competitors on the center-right and center-left. Under these rules, minor radical right parties can gain seats by focusing their appeals almost exclusively upon the values of cultural protectionism, emphasizing hard-line xenophobic rhetoric, proposing racist anti-immigration, and anti-refugee policies, and by advocating radical economic and social policies, such as a ‘flat tax’ or the abolition of welfare eligibility for non-citizens. The extreme nature of these proposals means that they are rejected by the majority of the electorate in most democracies, but there remains some support for these values among the public located to the extreme right. Low effective vote thresholds, common in PR elections, allow radical right parties to gain elected office through this strategy based on a relatively modest share of the popular vote. The theory predicts that party systems under proportional rules will therefore be centrifugal, with competition dispersed throughout the ideological spectrum and issue space.

By contrast, vaguer populist strategies work best in contests with higher effective electoral thresholds to gain seats, common in majoritarian systems. In this context, radical right parties will fail to gain office unless they also expand their policy platform and ideological appeals beyond cultural protectionism to encompass a broader range of values and if they dilute their ideology with populist appeals. An effective electoral strategy requires radical right parties to advocate more diverse social and economic values, and to emphasize populist appeals,
characterized by vague rhetoric and simple slogans, largely devoid of any substantive policy content. Majoritarian electoral systems have higher electoral hurdles, since parties need a simple plurality or a majority of votes in each district to win. Under these rules, successful parties commonly adopt populist strategies designed to gather votes among diverse sectors of the electorate. This proposition suggests many important consequences, not least that under majoritarian electoral rules, electorally-successful radical right parties such as the Canadian Reform Party (subsequently the ‘Alliance’ and the ‘Conservative’ party) have to appeal beyond narrow single-issue anti-immigration or anti-tax policies, to expand their electoral support. Of course, radical right parties, such as the UK National Front and Australia’s One Nation, may decide to focus only on their core values, emphasizing single-issue xenophobic anti-foreigner cultural protectionism, prioritizing ideological purity over electoral popularity. But under majoritarian electoral rules, given the distribution of public opinion on these issues, the theory suggests that such parties will repeatedly fail to surmount the hurdles to become elected on a sustained basis and they will remain marginalized at the periphery of power. The theory therefore predicts that party systems under majoritarian rules will prove more centripetal, clustered closely around the center-point of the ideological spectrum. Other accounts have also emphasized patterns of party competition, notably work by Kitschelt and by van der Brug et al, but these patterns are usually treated as static, and radical right parties are often regarded as passive actors in the process, rather than developing theories of the dynamics of party competition within institutional constraints.

(viii) For sustained success, new radical right challengers also need to develop and consolidate party organizations

The theory assumes that parties need effective ideological strategies to gain support. But for persistent success over a series of elections they also need to build and consolidate their organizational structure. Here the evidence remains more fragmentary, but nevertheless case-studies suggest that new radical right fringe parties can occasionally enjoy sudden electoral success, but whether they manage to sustain their position over successive elections depends upon what ideological or populist strategies they adopt and also whether they manage to develop effective organizational structures. This includes agreeing on the formal procedures facilitating leadership succession and internal decision-making processes, as well as maintaining party discipline in parliament, and fostering a grassroots base among party activists, members, and voting loyalists in local communities. If parties remain poorly institutionalized, then they remain more vulnerable to capsize following developments such as internal factional splits, legal difficulties, or the loss of their founder-leader. The process of institutionalization also means that parties qualify for public funds allocated for election campaigning and full-time party staff; gain access to the powers of patronage to favor supporters; develop links with the news media, access to election broadcasting, and networks of volunteers to manage political communications; and build the modern infrastructure which maintains contemporary party organizations through good times and bad.

(ix) Where radical right parties have surged in popularity in one election, by meeting popular demand for cultural protectionism, then other mainstream competitors will respond by attempting to appeal to the electorate on their issues in subsequent elections.

If radical right parties are perceived as expanding their electoral popularity due to public demand for cultural protectionism, then the theory predicts that other parties within the same country will not simply stay static; instead they will seek to emulate their success by adopting their rhetoric and taking a more right-wing position on their signature issues of immigration, anti-crime, and cultural protectionism in subsequent elections. The ‘zone of acquiescence’ thereby expands further towards the right. Again this poses challenges for the sustained electoral success of newer parties, if established competitors can ‘steal their clothes’ and also appeal more effectively on mainstream issues, such as economic performance and public service delivery. Any ‘contagion of the right’ over issues of cultural protectionism is likely to have significant
consequences for the public policy process and for government, for example by more restrictive immigration laws, as well as for patterns of party competition.

Evidence for these propositions?

Are the core propositions arising from these assumptions supported by good evidence? Ever since seminal work by Douglas Rae and Arend Lijphart, there is certainly an established literature in comparative politics demonstrating that the parliamentary fortunes of minor parties are directly determined by the type of electoral system. What is less well understood is how the structural context interacts with party strategies and the distribution of public opinion to explain the fortunes of the radical right. The analysis of party strategies is a complex and difficult area of study. This book does not seek to analyze direct evidence for campaign and electoral appeals, since it is problematic to gauge these reliably and consistently, especially across the wide range of countries contained in this study. Data from the Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifestos Project, coding party platforms published from 1945 to 1998 in 25 nations, allows comparison of left-right party policy programs within a common content analysis framework across many Western democracies. This material is invaluable for tracking the ideological position and electoral fortunes of parties in countries such as France, Austria, and Norway, as employed later in chapter 11. Unfortunately it has certain limitations as a guide that could be used to classify the range of parties contained in this study. In particular, the dataset excludes some important contenders, such as the British National Party, Perot's Reform Party in the United States, and Lijst Pym Fortyna in the Netherlands, as well as radical right parties in the newer democracies in post-Communist Europe and Latin America. The coding scheme, developed in 1979, also focuses primarily upon the economic and social policy concerns most commonly dividing the major parties in Western democracies during the post-war era, exemplified by issues of nationalization, economic planning, and the welfare state. It was not designed to track detailed information about many signature radical right issues which have become increasingly salient during the last decade, including policies hostile towards asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants, and in recognition of the need for updating the coding scheme and methodology is in the process of being revised.

Alternative qualitative attempts to determine party electoral strategies directly, for example by asking campaign managers which voters and regions they targeted, or by interviewing party leaders about their priorities, encounter serious problems of accessibility to pre-hoc ‘war room’ campaign plan secrecy, and the dangers of post-hoc self-serving ‘spin’ rationalizations after the event. Indeed rational parties, like rational voters, may even be following certain strategies unconsciously, adapting to their institutional constraints without ever realizing the reasons behind their actions. Another alternative approach is to estimate party positions using proxy measures, such as indicators of party election spending on certain target voters, or content analysis of media coverage, campaign speeches, party websites, and election literature. But again this evidence is simply not available on a functionally-equivalent reliable basis for a wide range of parties and countries, and it is also often contextually-driven, for example spending-limits and control of TV advertising are often determined by campaign finance laws and broadcasting regulations.

The most reliable alternative research strategy for a consistent cross-national comparison is to define party families from ‘expert surveys’ which ask a sample of political scientists in each country to locate each party on a left-right 10-point ideological scale, or an equivalent scale on specific issues. This technique has been widely used in the literature and, building on previous studies, this book draws upon expert (and public) judgments for the location of parties contained within the CSES survey, and also the most recent expert survey conducted in 2000 by Marcel Lubbers. Chapter 2 uses these measures to define and classify which parties can be regarded as falling within the radical right family. Subsequent chapters then analyze and compare the attitudes, values, and social characteristics of supporters of these parties with other voters in the mass electorate. Under PR systems, where radical right parties are predicted to focus on
mobilizing core voters on their core ‘signature’ issues, including appeals to xenophobia, nationalism, and cultural protectionism, their supporters are expected to be fairly homogeneous in their values, and ideological cues are predicted to be stronger guides to voting choices. Under majoritarian systems, by contrast, where radical right parties need to broaden their appeal to succeed in gaining office, their supporters are expected to prove more heterogeneous in their attitudes and values, and populist appeals are expected to be more important than ideological cues in determining voter choice. The theory predicts that the type of electoral rules will have important results for the campaign strategies adopted by successful radical right parties. These appeals can be tested empirically by examining survey evidence about the characteristics of party supporters in many nations, as well as by comparing selected detailed case-studies illustrating historical processes in specific countries.

Most analysis of voting behavior is conventionally conducted at the individual-level with comparisons made among groups of party supporters within each country. Cross-national comparisons then add a second level, for example by comparing the class basis of voting for the Austrian FPÖ and the Italian Lega Nord\(^5\), examining contrasts between supporters of the Flemish Vlaams Blok and the Wallonian Front National in Belgium\(^5\), or analyzing trends over time in political attitudes among supporters for radical right parties in one or two countries\(^5\). But with comparative studies limited to just a few countries it is difficult, or even impossible, to isolate institutional effects, such as the role of electoral and party systems on voting support for different parties. As a result, explanations which appear to be based on the social or ideological profile of voters for particular parties may, in fact, be due to the electoral and party systems in operation in each country.

Given this understanding, this study compares individual voters clustered in their support for relevant radical right parliamentary parties (defined as those with over 3% of seats in the lower house) within national elections. In turn, national elections are clustered into different types of electoral systems. The type of electoral institutions, and the socio-economic conditions in each country, are classified and gauged at macro-level. This data is combined with survey evidence monitoring voting behavior, political attitudes, and social characteristics, all measured at individual-level. This evidence is compared across a wide range of thirty-nine nations in total, including established and newer democracies from many regions in the world, using the 32-nation Comparative Study of Electoral Systems 1996-2002 (CSES) and the 22-nation European Social Survey-2002 (ESS), as the primary survey datasets. In combination, as discussed in detail in the next chapter, these recent large-scale cross-national surveys allow us to compare electoral support for radical right parties at individual-level within varying institutional contexts. The comparative framework contains established and newer democracies, as well as industrial and postindustrial societies, including countries in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, North and South America, and Asia-Pacific.

**Plan of the Book**

The challenge for this book is to explore the comparative evidence supporting the strategic agency theory compared with alternative accounts. The theory does not claim to be particularly novel in its components. Many have regarded either the direct impact of electoral systems, or the breadth of the policy appeal of the radical right, or the rise of cultural protectionism, as important parts of the explanation for their success. The combination of these factors, however, has been insufficiently emphasized to explain exactly how successful party strategies respond to different electoral contexts. **Chapter 2** explains the comparative framework and sources of survey and ‘expert’ data used in this study. **Chapter 3** clarifies the party classification, an important preliminary step in order to examine whether parties identified as located within the radical right family share common social and ideological characteristics, as commonly assumed, as well as describing patterns of support for the most important parties on the radical right in each country.
Building on this foundation, Part II then starts to test the empirical evidence for the importance of formal rules in explaining the rise of the radical right in some affluent societies and established democracies, but not in others. Chapter 4 focuses upon the impact of ballot access and campaign finance rules, while Chapter 5 considers how far electoral systems generate patterns of party competition and opportunities for minor parties.

On this basis, Part III examines three dimensions of electoral demand. Chapter 6 considers survey evidence to see whether contemporary radical right support is drawn disproportionately from the petit bourgeoisie, as with classic fascist movements during the interwar era, or whether today these parties mobilize an ‘underclass’ of the less affluent and less educated strata who feel resentment against ethnic minorities, so that radical right support is concentrated within disadvantaged sectors, or instead whether processes of partisan dealignment mean that these parties gain votes from different social sectors and classes. Chapter 7 focuses upon the ‘protest politics’ thesis suggesting that support for the radical right is essentially motivated by negative evaluations of the performance of the party in government, the lack of electoral choices due to closure of the gap between the center-left and center-right, or a more diffuse rejection of democratic institutions. Chapter 8 looks in more depth at attitudes towards immigration, multiculturalism, xenophobia, and cultural protectionism, and, in particular, how far electoral support for the radical right is linked to lack of tolerance towards ethnic minorities, asylum-seekers, and refugees.

Part IV turns to the role of agency, representing the strategic appeals, ideological values and policy proposals that parties present to the electorate. Chapter 9 compares the impact of the perceived ideological location of radical right parties, leadership popularity, and partisanship. The study also uses case-studies to see whether their ideological location is more strongly associated with votes for radical right parties in countries with PR rather than majoritarian electoral systems, as predicted by the strategic agency theory. Yet the analysis of cross-national survey evidence remains limited in its capacity to document processes of party change over time, and how some radical right parties move from periphery to becoming minor partners in coalition governments, while others fail. Chapter 10 outlines the importance of organizational development and consolidation for sustained success and then illustrates this by selected case-studies in nations where the radical right has, and has not, advanced into power.

Lastly, Part IV considers the wider consequences of this phenomenon for party competition, public policy, and the political system. Chapter 11 recaps the theoretical framework, summarizes the major findings established throughout the book, and also seeks to understand the broader implications of this development for representative democracy. Many liberals are alarmed by the contemporary resurgence of the radical right, but are these concerns actually justified? The conclusion reflects on whether these parties represent a healthy outlet for the expression of genuine public concern about issues of multiculturalism, thereby contributing towards public debate and diffusing tensions, or whether the growing legitimacy and power of the radical right poses substantial threats to social tolerance, political stability, and therefore the fundamental health of democracy.
Figure 1.1: Mean vote for seven radical right parties in Western Europe, 1980-2004

Note: This summarizes the average share of the vote in the lower house from 1980-2004 for the following parties in Western Europe, all of which have contested a continuous series of national parliamentary elections since 1980: Italian MSI/AN, Austrian FPÖ, Swiss SVP, Danish FP/PP, Norwegian FrP, Belgian VB, French FN. All these parties can be defined as ‘relevant’ i.e. they have achieved over 3% of the vote in one or more national parliamentary elections during this period. In the Italian and Danish cases, splits occurred within parties, but there are still recognizable continuities in renamed successor parties.

Figure 1.2: The theoretical model of party competition

For the expectation that a worldwide 'liberal revolution' would supersede the attractions of authoritarianism, see, for example, the argument presented by Francis Fukuyama. 1992. *The End of History and the Last man.* London: Hamish Hamilton.

The Canadian Reform party, although showing considerable continuity, has relaunched its organization occasionally in recent years. The party became the ‘Canada Reform Conservative Alliance’ (or Alliance for short) in the 2000 Canadian election, and it subsequently merged with the Progressive Conservatives in October 2003 to become the ‘Conservative Party of Canada.’ See Chapter 10 for a fuller discussion.


This perspective is common throughout the literature but it is perhaps best exemplified by Hans-Georg Betz. 1994. *Radical Rightwing Populism in Western Europe.* New York: St Martin's Press.
One of the clearest theoretical arguments along these lines is developed in Herbert Kitschelt. 1994. *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


The class basis of radical right voters is explored in Chapter 6.


For this argument, see Pia Knigge. 1998. 'The ecological correlates of right-wing extremism in Western Europe.' *European Journal of Political Research*. 34:249-79.

Estimates of the flow of refugee populations are provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 2002 Statistics on asylum seekers, refugees and others of concern to UNHCR. www.unhcr.ch. Table 1.2.


See, for example, Elisabeth Carter. 2005. *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.


27 Martin Schain. 1987. ‘The National Front in France and the constitution of political legitimacy.’ West European Politics. 10(2) 229-252.


33 We put aside, for the moment, any consideration concerning ‘informal’ electoral rules, which can be understood as those widely shared tacit social norms and conventions governing electoral behavior within any particular culture, enforced by social sanction. These are more properly understood as ‘social norms’ rather than informal institutions. This definition also excludes more ambiguous cases, such as party rulebooks that are enforced by internal committees within particular party organizations rather than by court of law, although there is a gray dividing line as these cases may be relevant for legal redress. For a discussion of the meaning of ‘rules’ see J. M. Carey. ‘Parchment, equilibria, and institutions.’ Comparative Political Studies 33 (6-7): 735-761. See also Pippa Norris. 2004. Electoral Engineering. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

34 For the previous development of this theory, see Pippa Norris. 2004. Electoral Engineering. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


36 The ‘proximity model’ is also known as the ‘least-distance’ model. This model is adopted for the study, rather than the alternative Rabinowitz and McDonald directional model, in part given the absence of suitable issue scales in the datasets under comparison. George Rabinowitz and


38 See, for example, the trends in attitudes towards gender equality, women’s roles, and sexual liberalization, documented in Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Worldwide. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


45 The distinction between ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ parties is derived from the literature on social capital, as originally applied to social groups and associations. See Robert D. Putnam. Democracies in Flux. New York: Oxford University Press. P. 11. The term ‘bridging party’ is similar to the use of the term ‘catch-all’ developed by Kirchheimer, except that these concepts


