CHAPTER

1   The Radical Right: An Introduction 🔓

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of the resurgence of strong radical right-wing parties and movements during the past decades. An overwhelming majority of books and papers published on the contemporary radical right focus on party politics and electoral politics. This handbook includes chapters covering all major theoretical and methodological strands in this literature. This chapter first discusses the defining characteristics of the radical right, including their ideology and political program, nationalism and ethnic exclusion, populism, and fascism. It then attempts to explain voter support of radical right-wing parties and movements, the radical right as social movement and in the non-party sector, and the impact of the radical right.

Keywords: radical right, right-wing parties, political movements, social movements, voter support, populism, nationalism, ethnic exclusion

Subject: Political Sociology, Sociology

Series: Oxford Handbooks

Collection: Oxford Handbooks Online

THE resurgence of strong radical right-wing parties and movements constitutes one of the most significant political changes in democratic states during the past decades. This process has been particularly pronounced in Europe but is also significant elsewhere, such as in Australia, Israel, Japan, and the United States (see Chapters 22–34 in this volume).

An overwhelming majority of books and papers published on the contemporary radical right focus on party politics and electoral politics. This handbook includes chapters covering all major theoretical and methodological strands in this literature. At the same time, however, there has been considerably less focus on the instances when the radical right manifests itself as social movements rather than as political parties. The interaction between the party sector and the non-party sector of the radical right has similarly received little attention in previous research, with the result that we still have scant knowledge about the extent to which other organizational forms of the radical right (e.g., think tanks and more informal circles of intellectuals, the party press, Internet sites, radio stations, and civil society organizations) enhance or

restrict radical right-wing parties' chances to mobilize an electorate (e.g., Rydgren 2007). This handbook makes an important contribution to the field by covering these important issues (see Chapters 15 and 17 in particular).

The Ideology and Political Program

Radical right parties and movements share an emphasis on ethnonationalism rooted in myths about the past. Their programs are directed toward strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and—for most radical right-wing parties and movements—by returning to traditional

values. They also tend to be populists, accusing ↳ elites of putting internationalism ahead of the nation and of putting their own narrow self-interest and various special interests ahead of the interests of the people. Hence, the radical right shares a core of ethnonationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism. In their political platforms, this ideological core is often embedded in a general sociocultural authoritarianism that stresses themes such as law and order and family values (Rydgren 2007; see also Minkenberg 2001 and Mudde 2007). The radical right claims the right of national majorities to protect their cultural identity. According to the radical right, there are several threats against their nation's identity, of which immigration is the most important. Immigrants from Muslim countries are singled out as particularly threatening, allegedly because they have the least in common with the native population, are the least inclined to assimilate, and are potentially tied to Islamist terrorism. Other threats include supranational entities such as the European Union (see Vasilopoulou, Chapter 7 in this volume) and—for some but not all radical right-wing parties and movements—multinational corporations, economic globalization, and other processes believed to foster universalism and homogenization (Betz and Johnson 2004; Griffin 2000).

According to Powell (1986, 359), an extremist political organization "represents a demand for major transformation of the society, either towards some future vision or back to an idealized past. Such demands diverge from the general, current policy consensus." It may also be useful to consider Lipset and Raab's more specific definition of political extremism as anti-pluralism or monism. The "operational heart of extremism," to follow their argument, "is the repression of difference and dissent, the closing down of the market place of ideas. More precisely, the operational essence of extremism, or monism, is the tendency to treat cleavage and ambivalence as illegitimate" (1970, 6). Political monism of the extreme right is expressed in two ways: as a rejection of the democratic political system and/or as a rejection of universalist and egalitarian (sometimes called democratic) values. We should here distinguish between two different subtypes of right-wing extremism: one that is opposed to democracy and one that is not explicitly opposed to democracy but nonetheless is hostile to the way representative democracy functions in contemporary society (cf. Mudde 2000, 12). I will reserve the use of the term "right-wing extremism" for the former subtype, whereas the latter will be referred to as the "radical right" (see, e.g., Eatwell 2000, 410–411). The radical right does not usually oppose democracy per se, although they are typically hostile to the way existing democratic institutions actually work. In fact, radical right-wing parties argue that they represent true democracy (in contrast to the sham democracy that they believe characterizes contemporary societies). Hence, although the radical right rejects cleavages and division lines within "the people," they are extremists primarily because they reject pluralist values. Despite the radical right's acceptance of procedural democracy, its ideal society is ethnocracy, which in many ways runs counter to the pluralistic values of liberal democracy (Betz 2005; Minkenberg 2000).

As indicated by its name, this handbook deals mainly with the radical right, as defined above. Yet it is sometimes difficult to make a watertight distinction between the radical right and the extreme right. Many

of the radical right-wing social movements, in ↳ particular, are situated on the border between the radical right and the extreme right, and several representatives and activists of some radical right-wing parties and movements maintain contacts with the extreme right (Copsey, Chapter 6 in this volume). Moreover, the

counter-jihadist movement, for example, with its networks of bloggers and Internet sites, influenced Anders Breivik to mount his terror attack in Norway in 2011. And in at least some aspects there are ideological affinities, sometimes rather strong, between the extreme right and the radical right.

Let us then turn to the question of the manner in which radical right-wing parties and movements are right-wing. One common way to distinguish between "left" and "right" is to view the former as egalitarian and the latter as non-egalitarian (Bobbio 1996). Parties that actively work against inequalities are usually placed on the left, whereas parties that view inequalities as natural, or at least accept them without active political intervention, are placed on the right. Although economic politics has not been prioritized by radical right-wing parties and movements, it is fair to say that usually they have not been preoccupied with fighting class inequalities. More important, however, is their hostility to measures aimed at reducing inequalities based on ethnicity, immigration status, or even gender. Here their political program has been directed toward not only maintaining but also radically augmenting inequalities in favor of the "natives." More broadly, we should not place the radical right to the right primarily because of its position on socioeconomic politics, as here we find relatively large variations over time and across countries. Rather, we should look at its positions on sociocultural politics, which relate to value-laden issues such as national identity, "law and order," immigration policy, abortion, and so on (i.e., sociocultural liberalism versus authoritarianism).

Nationalism and Ethnic Exclusion

The radical right gives priority to sociocultural issues, in particular to issues related to national identity. Its central political program can be understood as "a response to the erosion of the system of 'ethno-national dominance,' which characterized much of the history of modern nation states" (Betz and Johnson 2004, 323). More specifically, the contemporary radical right builds on the idea of ethnopluralism, an idea that in modern times was elaborated by the French *nouvelle droite*. "*Nouvelle droite*" was an overarching term for intellectual groups that, inspired by Gramsci's notion of "cultural hegemony," formed in France during the late 1960s and 1970s in order to counter the intellectual and cultural dominance of the left. For the *nouvelle droite*, as for related groups in Italy and Germany, the principal aim was Kulturkampf, not party politics (Minkenberg 2000). Departing from the left's notion of *différence*, the notion of ethnopluralism states that in order to preserve the unique national characters of different peoples, they have to be kept separated. According to this perspective, mixing of different ethnicities leads only to cultural extinction (see Griffin 2000; Minkenberg 1997; ↳ Taguieff 1988). Moreover, in this doctrine culture and ethnicity are seen as deterministic and monolithic; the likelihood of individual change and of in-group variation is believed to be slight. Yet, contrary to the traditional conception of racism, the doctrine of ethnopluralism, as such, is not hierarchical: different ethnicities are not necessarily superior or inferior, only different, incompatible, and incommensurable (Betz and Johnson 2004; Taguieff 1988). Hence, whereas "old" racism, common in colonial settings, aimed at subordination, the ethnopluralist doctrine basically aims at expulsion (Fennema 2005).

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The French Front National adopted this notion from the *nouvelle droite* and made it the core of the party's political program and rhetorical profile (see Rydgren 2003b). Today it is one of the most distinctive ideological characteristic of the radical right-wing party family (Rydgren 2005; see also Betz 2005). By using the ethnopluralist ideology, radical right-wing parties claim the right of national cultures to protect their cultural identity. According to the radical right, there are several threats to their national identity, of which the alleged "invasion" of immigrants is the most important.

Also, more generally, anti-immigration issues are the core message of the new radical right, in particular in Western Europe but increasingly also in Eastern Europe (see Buštíková, Chapter 28 in this volume). These

parties and movements have framed immigrants as problems in four different ways: first, as implied above, as a threat to ethnonational identity; second, as a major cause of criminality and other kinds of social insecurity; third, as a cause of unemployment; fourth, as abusers of the generosity of the welfare states of Western democracies, which results in fewer state subsidies and other benefits for "natives" (see, e.g., Rydgren 2003a). In addressing the third and fourth frames, the new radical right-wing parties have promoted the idea of "national preference," that is, giving "natives" priority when it comes to jobs, housing, health care, and so on. Their proposals can be characterized as a sort of "reverse affirmative action" (e.g., Zaslove 2004; Rydgren 2003b).

The resonance for anti-Muslim messages grew after September 11, 2001, and in connection with recurrent Islamist terror attacks around the world (see Kallis, Chapter 3 in this volume). In fact, September 11 can be seen as an important turning point in the rhetoric of the radical right—and in the resonance of this rhetoric. After this date, as Arzheimer notes (Chapter 8 in this volume), criticizing "Islam abroad and at home has become the socially acceptable alternative to more openly xenophobic statements." More generally, there is a trend that radical right-wing parties and movements increasingly mobilize in terms of not only national identity but also religious identity, defending what they call the Judeo-Christian identity against the threat of Islam (see Minkenberg, Chapter 19 in this volume). At the same time, however, the radical right has continued with their exclusionary rhetoric—and, in some places, also practices—against other groups as well, such as Roma. In addition, although antisemitism is not as central for the contemporary radical right as it was in earlier generations—and still is among neo-Nazi groups and related extreme right-wing

organizations—it is still visible within some parties and movements (see Wodak, Chapter 4 in this volume).

Populism

Some scholars (e.g., Betz 1993, 1994; Taggart 1996, 2000) have argued that populism is a defining characteristic of the new radical right. This is true insofar as these parties tend to view society as "ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure' people versus 'the corrupt elite' "—a worldview that, according to Cas Mudde (2004, 543), is characteristic of populism—and also insofar as the populist anti-establishment strategy has been crucial to the success of the new radical right-wing parties. A party that uses this strategy tries to construct an image of itself as in opposition to the "political class" while trying actively not to appear anti-democratic. A party that is viewed as anti-democratic will be stigmatized and marginalized as long as the overwhelming majority of the electorate is in favor of democracy per se (Schedler 1996; see also van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005). In order to create distance between themselves and the established political parties (i.e., both the government and the anti-incumbent opposition), populist parties aim at recoding the political space, with its diversity of parties, into one single, homogeneous political class. One way of achieving this goal is to argue that the differences between government and established opposition parties are irrelevant surface phenomena. Part of this strategy may also often involve both criticizing the established parties for their focus on obsolete issues and at the same time suppressing political issues associated with the "real" conflict between national identity and multiculturalism.

The populist anti-establishment strategy makes it possible for the radical right to present themselves as the real champions of true democracy—as a new kind of party or movement that takes the worries and interests of "the common man" into account and that dares to speak up against the political correctness characterizing the establishment (see, e.g., Betz and Johnson 2004; Mudde 2004). Yet the Manichean worldview of the new radical right-wing parties makes the politics of compromise and bargaining, an element of liberal democracy, difficult (Eatwell 2004).

One can argue that populism is a characteristic but not a distinctive feature of the new radical right. Other parties use the populist anti-establishment strategy as well, and a number of parties of other political shades can be said to be populist in some way or another. More generally, it is the ethnic nationalism, not a populist ideology, that primarily defines the contemporary radical right (Rydgren 2017). And it is also ethnic nationalism that largely influences the radical right's populist message: these parties' and movements' anti-elitist message emanates primarily from the notion that an elite of established parties, media, and intellectuals have betrayed their country by embracing multicultural and internationalist ideas—or, in varying degrees, by selling out their country's sovereignty to the European Union or other supranational associations. As noted by Bar-On (Chapter 2 in this volume), to "advance a liberal multicultural perspective is to be [seen as] a 'traitor' to one's people." Hence, although the radical right put itself in opposition to the

elite in general, comprising not only political elites but ↳ also cultural and educational elites, its main enemy is cosmopolitan liberalism and the sociocultural left, which are seen as betraying the nation and corrupting the "natural" organic order and values within a society (cf. Canovan 1999; Saull 2013).

Fascism?

Some authors have claimed that the contemporary radical right is just a modern manifestation of fascism, whereas others see less historical continuity and claim that the radical right represents a political current distinct from fascism. I will argue for a middle position. If we take a look at the three mythic components that, according to Griffin (1991, 201), constitute the "fascist minimum"—the rebirth myth, populist ultra-nationalism, and the myth of decadence—we find similarities as well as differences between fascism and the new radical right-wing parties. First, although the populist ultra-nationalism (i.e., organic ethnonationalism) of the new radical right is less aggressive and expansive, and rather turned inward, it still constitutes the ideological core of these parties. The new radical right's longing for ethnic purity, homogeneity, and organic order places them in the same tradition as fascism. Second, while decadence has been a recurrent ideological and rhetorical theme of some of the new radical right-wing parties, it is less prominent in others. In any case, the ideological differences between fascism and the radical right-wing parties mainly concern the third point, the rebirth myth. According to Griffin, the fascist myth of rebirth, what he calls the palingenetic myth, refers "to the sense of a new start or of regeneration after a phase of crisis or decline . . . At the heart of palingenetic political myth lies the belief that contemporaries are living through or about to live through a 'sea-change,' or 'water-shed' or 'turning-point' in the historical process" (Griffin 1991, 33, 35). Although such a myth does exist among the new radical right-wing parties, it is considerably weaker, and it does not aim at replacing the democratic system with a new order (Griffin 2000). Equally important, whereas fascism was oriented toward the future (Sternhell 1986), these parties are oriented toward the past (or, in fact, toward an idealized idea of the past). Rather than movements create a "new society" rising "phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence" (Griffin 1991, 38), the new radical right-wing parties wish to restore the status quo ante (see von Beyme 1988).

Although the new radical right-wing parties are not fascist, they still have affinities to fascism. As argued by Copsey (Chapter 6 in this volume), we confront the problem of how to make a watertight demarcation between fascism and the radical right "in particular when it comes to activist cultures and organizational histories. It is an undeniable fact that within the activist cultures, there is a history of interaction between so-called radical-right actors and (neo)fascists. This interaction reveals itself in myriad forms, through such things as multiple membership and affiliations, joint mobilizations, transnational networks, social media, voicing support for particular election candidates, personal friendships, and so on." ↳

Explaining Support for Radical Right-Wing Parties and Movements

Few other topics within the study of the radical right have received as much attention as electoral politics: how to describe its voter constituency and how to predict or explain variation in voting results for the radical right. In Chapter 8 of this volume, Kai Arzheimer provides an up-to-date discussion on this literature, and there is no need to repeat that discussion in this introduction. But let me just mention a few key characteristics, which tend to be common across most or even all countries. First, anti-immigration sentiments are the single most important reason why voters support the radical right (Rydgren 2008; Arzheimer, Chapter 8 in this volume). Second, there are important sociodemographic patterns, in that male voters (see Coffé, Chapter 10 in this volume) and working-class voters (Rydgren 2013; Bornschier, Chapter 11 in this volume) are overrepresented among radical right-wing parties' electorates, whereas highly educated voters are underrepresented (Ivarsflaten and Stubager 2013; Kitschelt, Chapter 9 of this volume). As shown by Oesch (2008, 2012), these voters—including working-class voters—are attracted by the sociocultural program of these parties, nationalism and immigration politics in particular, and not because of economic policy preferences.

Previous research has identified several relevant demand-centered as well as supply-centered reasons for the emergence of radical right-wing parties (e.g., Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007). One influential strand in this literature has focused on realignment processes (see Bornschier, Chapter 11 in this volume): During much of the postwar period, party politics was dominated by a conflict between different socioeconomic positions. This dimension of conflict between socioeconomic right and left concerned issues such as taxes, economic redistribution, jobs, and the extent to which the state would finance and become involved in human welfare. As long as such socioeconomic issues predominate, radical right-wing parties find it difficult to mobilize voters (Kriesi 1999). In order to attract voters, the socioeconomic conflict dimension needs to become less prominent in relation to the sociocultural conflict dimension, which includes issues that touch on culture, values, and identity. When such issues become more prominent in the political discourse—and are placed higher in the preference order of voters—radical right-wing parties' chances for voter mobilization increase. What we have seen in recent decades is precisely a process in which the socioeconomic dimension has diminished in salience, while the sociocultural dimension has become increasingly prominent. One reason for this development is that the scope for an independent national economic politics has been reduced as a result of internationally established stability and inflation agreements, the establishment of independent central banks, and a general globalization of the economy (Mair 2013). This has contributed to increased convergence between the established parties regarding socioeconomic policy, and this convergence has—to varying degrees—been reinforced by a movement toward the center by, in particular, Social Democratic parties (Kitschelt 2007). As ↳ the differences along the socioeconomic scale have decreased, it has become harder to engage voters and, not least, the media, a development that in turn has contributed to a partial depoliticization of the socioeconomic dimension (Rydgren and van der Maiden 2016). Instead, sociocultural issues—issues that are often polarizing and that easily create conflict—have become increasingly prominent. It should be emphasized that it is not only advocates for a more exclusionary, authoritarian, or conservative view of culture, values, and identity who have contributed to the increased politicization of the sociocultural conflict dimension; a part has also been played by those who have campaigned for greater multiculturalism or a more liberal approach to issues relating to values and identity. In a certain sense, the rise of the radical right parties can be seen as a delayed reaction to the emancipatory politics that has its origins in the 1960s and 1970s protest movements and which the radical right now calls for cultural struggle against (see Ignazi 1992).

The politicization of the immigration issue is particularly important, especially in Western Europe. Radical right-wing parties tend to benefit when issues pertaining to immigration is placed high on the agenda. Generally, immigration gains importance for voters when a political party mobilizes around the issue.

Radical right-wing parties, once they are established in the political field, take part in this politicization. However, these parties may not have been the most important actors in the politicization of immigration (Meyer and Rosenberger 2015). Instead, as argued by Kitschelt in Chapter 9 of this volume, the politicization results largely from the way "conventional party politicization highlighted a new issue dimension, but also may have let a genie escape from the bottle that the established politicians could no longer control."

The role of the media—both traditional news media and the Internet—is increasingly recognized as an important factor for understanding radical right-wing mobilization. As Koopmans (2004, 8) has argued, for instance, the "action of gatekeepers [within the mass media] produce the first and most basic selection mechanism . . . visibility." The media play a role in their own right as well, by taking part in agenda-setting and framing of political issues. There also seems to be a growing tendency to personalize issues within the media, which may benefit parties, such as the new radical right-wing parties, that give the party leader a pronounced central role (Eatwell 2003, 2005). With the increasing struggle for readers and viewers that has resulted from new technologies and from the growing privatization of mass media in many countries, the media have exhibited a stronger tendency to focus on the most scandalous aspects of politics, which may contribute to anti-establishment sentiments (Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Mudde 2004; Ellinas, Chapter 14 of this volume). As noted by Ellinas (Chapter 14 of this volume), the media are "an important resource for all political actors but are even more important for smaller or new actors that lack alternative resources to communicate their program."

Over the past decade, alternative, online-based news media have become increasingly important, and the radical right has been successful in directly or indirectly launching such media that propagate its political program. As argued by Betz (Chapter 5 in this volume), "the Internet has been instrumental in creating the space for an alternative reality where conspiracy theories abound and ordinary people, often under the cover of anonymity, are given the opportunity (for instance, in the commentary section of the online edition of major newspapers and news magazines) to give vent to their anger and thus provide others the reassurance that they are not alone with their resentment."

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The Radical Right as Social Movement and Non-Party Sector

As stressed above, the literature on the radical right is strongly party-focused, whereas radical right-wing social movements have received less attention. Here the radical right is an even more diverse phenomenon than the radical right-wing parties, and the lines between the radical right and the extreme right are often more blurred (see, e.g., Caiani and della Porta, Chapter 17 in this volume). We also know less about the social characteristics of movement activists than we do about the voters (but see Klandermans and Mayer 2005). Yet there are a few things we do know. For example, research on the Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Pegida, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) demonstrators at the Berlin Social Science Center confirms the gender pattern found among radical right parties, with an overwhelming majority of male activists (see Coffé, Chapter 10 in this volume).

The lines between party politics and social movement activities are blurred as well, as when the radical right organizes local initiatives in order to provide social services such as helping the old, repairing housing, and supporting socioeconomically vulnerable (but native) segments of the population, as has been observed in Britain, Germany, and Greece (Art, Chapter 12 in this volume; Eatwell, Chapter 13 in this volume). This is an important mobilization strategy, as it signals to potential supporters that the radical right is taking over responsibilities that the state—due to its allegedly failed elites—no longer does.

The non-party sector of the radical right can be of varying kinds, ranging from circles of intellectuals and press and publishing houses to professional groups and other civil society organizations. Some of these are directly linked to a radical right-wing party, but others are a loose part of the wider radical-right-

sympathetic environment. Such groups and organizations may be important in several ways: they may function as bridges between the radical right and the political mainstream (Mudde 2007, 248); they may contribute to make the radical right's pet issues more salient, facilitating the chances for mobilization (Mudde 2007, 248); they may contribute to political socialization, causing its supporters to identify more deeply with the radical right; they may be foci for recruiting party activists; and they may provide an arena for keeping alive the collective memories that are important for the sense of belonging to a political cause (see Veugelers and Menard, Chapter 15 of this volume).

As argued above, the Internet—with its low entry barriers and its geographical compression—has become

p. 10   increasingly important for the radical right, and today many ↳ of the non-party activities play out on that area. This is something Veugelers and Menard address in Chapter 15 of this volume. As they argue, the Internet "has made it easier for the radical right to share ideas, coordinate activities, disseminate propaganda, form alliances, sell merchandise, and recruit members . . .. Online networks can [also] foster collective identity among participants with little or no connection to offline mobilization." It should be added that a substantial part of the violence associated with the radical right either takes place on the Internet (e.g., hate speech and threats) or is largely triggered by online mobilization (see Weinberg and Assoudeh, Chapter 21 of this volume).

On a more formal basis, party groups within the European Union may function as an important meeting place for radical right-wing parties, providing opportunities for them to make themselves "visible" and "accountable" and to "recognize each other and establish coordination" (Caiani, Chapter 20 in this volume). More generally, international contacts are important for the radical right, and a recent study of representatives of the most important radical right organizations in Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and the United States has shown that a large majority have frequent international contacts with similar organizations abroad or with umbrella organizations (Caiani, Chapter 20 of this volume).

Impact of the Radical Right

The impact of the radical right may be direct, as when radical right-wing parties are in government (as they have been in Austria, Finland, Italy, and—in the form of more recently radicalized right-wing parties—in Hungary and Poland)[1] or are striking long-term deals with ruling coalitions (as in Denmark). It may also be indirect, as when radical right-wing parties influence mainstream parties to adjust their political programs in the direction of the radical right's exclusionist nationalist program, whether in order to win back lost votes or to prevent losing votes to the radical right in future elections (see Williams, Chapter 16 in this volume). I think it is fair to say that the radical right has had some substantial impact in both ways, although perhaps especially in the latter way. Yet there is significant cross-country variation, which is to a certain extent systematic. As argued by Buštíková (Chapter 28 in this volume), for example, "Eastern European mainstream parties are, comparatively speaking, much more comfortable with their radical right cousins. Therefore, radical right parties operate in a much more permissive environment, where they are often incorporated into the governing coalitions."

More broadly, radical right-wing parties, social movements, and non-party organizations have been instrumental in influencing political articulation and thereby shifting focus to issues propelled by the radical right. As argued by Kallis (Chapter 3 in this volume), for example, the radical discourse against Islam and Muslims articulated by the radical right "has been touching much wider sympathetic mainstream

p. 11   audiences, thereby revealing a far deeper penetration of strands of Islamophobia in Western ↳ societies as a form of racial-cultural prejudice magnified by security concerns." Hence, in the words of Minkenberg (Chapter 19 in this volume), the radical right has increasingly established a political-religious master frame

with a large influence on the public discourse, far beyond the confines of the radical right voters and activists.

Note

1. And here we may add also Donald Trump in the United States, albeit not the Republican Party as a whole (see Parker, Chapter 31 in this volume).

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