

## 12 Assessing impact: populist radical right parties vs. European democracies

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Minor parties that succeeded in passing the threshold of representation, even though they are electorally weak, function in various ways . . . They challenge either the ideological and symbolic aspects of the system or its rules of the game . . . Because of the ways they bypass obstacles, they are also initiators of new patterns of political competition. As such, they are relevant to the political system and to its understanding.

(Herzog 1987: 326)

On the surface nothing trembled, no walls collapsed, even the windows remained intact, but the earth moved in the depths.

(Epstein 1996: 20)

### 12.1 Introduction

Both inside and outside of the academic community, scores of claims are made about the political impact of the populist radical right party family on European democracies. According to various commentators populist radical right parties “poison the political atmosphere” (PER 2002: 11). While much speculation abounds about the alleged impact of populist radical right parties on European democracies, few commentators have addressed the other side of the coin, i.e. the impact of European democracies on populist radical right parties.

This chapter discusses the crucial issue of political *impact*, largely on the basis of the insights of the few academic studies on the topic published so far. The focus is on the impact both *of* populist radical right parties on European democracies and of European democracies *on* populist radical right parties. Despite the increased political importance of populist radical right parties, if anything in terms of coalition potential, the study of its political impact is still in its infancy and much of the following will inevitably remain speculative.

## 12.2 From electoral to political relevance: the impact of

According to Jens Rydgren (2003: 60), “the presence of a xenophobic RRP [Radical Right Populist] party may cause an increase in racism and xenophobia because (1) it has an influence on people’s frame of thought; and (2) because it has an influence on other political actors.” Indeed, there seems to be a broad consensus on the significant impact of populist radical right parties on certain policy terrains, most notably immigration (e.g. Schain 2006; Tschiyembé 2001; Minkenberg & Schain 2003; Husbands 1996). Some authors have even argued that the parties are responsible for the outbursts of racist violence in their countries (e.g. Marcus 2000; Van Donselaar 1993).

One of the main reasons for these bold assertions is probably the almost complete lack of (comparative) research on the impact of populist radical right parties on contemporary European democracies (Goodwin 2005). Only very recently have scholars started to study the impact of the populist radical right on different policy areas (notably Schain *et al.* 2002a). This section can provide only a provisional discussion of the insights from these first few studies on the impact of populist radical right parties on European democracies. It will try to assess the existing empirical evidence for some of the key assertions regarding the impact of the populist radical right and set out some paths for further research in this highly important and topical field of study. To structure the discussion, the section is divided into three subsections: policy impact, party impact, and social impact. This division is mainly of heuristic value given that the various fields of impact influence each other.

### 12.2.1 Policy impact

Particularly since the 1990s it has become widely accepted that the populist radical right weighs heavily on certain policy fields in European countries. In fact, many commentators see the recent “*verrechtsing*” (right-wing turn), which they believe can be observed in European politics, as proof of the mainstream parties’ attempts to compete with the populist radical right (e.g. Bale 2003; Heinisch 2003; Minkenberg 2001). But not only political opponents and scholars have argued this; various populist radical rightist leaders believe so as well. Quite bitterly, Miroslav Sládek, then leader of the SPR-RSĎ, complained to a German journalist in 1997:

The big parties have plundered everything. The referendum on EU membership, which was proposed by us. Our answers to immigration and foreigners. The problem of the Sudeten Germans. When I demanded five years ago that the

Benes decrees should be anchored solidly into Czech law, people still wanted to imprison me. (*Die Zeit* 25/2002)

Here we will discuss only the direct policy impact of the populist radical right party family; the more tricky issue of indirect policy impact will be addressed in the section on party impact.

For many populist radical right parties the local level provides the first and only experience of government participation. Moreover, whereas national government is mostly coalition politics, in which the populist radical right is usually only a junior partner, at the local level they can be the dominant or even the only party in government. Consequently, many parties will try to use local government as a showcase for the nation. In the words of Vojislav Šešelj, leader of the Serbian SRS and then chairman of the municipality of Zemun, a suburb of Belgrade: “For us Radicals, Zemun is conceived as a demonstration. Through the example of Zemun, we shall show what Radical government in the whole of Serbia would be like” (in Čolović 2002: 237).

Overall, it is impossible to distinguish one particular form of populist radical right local rule in Europe. Even the FN ruled relatively differently in the four municipalities that it controlled in the late 1990s (e.g. Davies 1999: ch. 4). However, one of the few points standing out among virtually all cases of populist radical right rule at the local level is the emphasis on symbolic measures. As the parties rapidly notice that local power is highly limited, particularly with regard to the nativist policies at the core of their program, and that they get little support from higher levels, they refocus much of their efforts on cultural policies and symbolic politics. Among the most important are the renaming of streets, the increase of national symbols in the cities, and the redistribution of local subsidies. In all cases the change is away from “alien” and “antinational” (e.g. left-wing and minority) individuals and organizations and towards “national” or “patriotic” actors.

There have been only a few instances where a populist radical right party had a chance to really implement its policies (see table 12.1). In fact, the only pure example of populist radical right government at the national level has been the HDZ one-party government under the presidency of Franjo Tuđman, which ruled Croatia in the 1990s. As such, it does not provide a particularly pretty picture: a fierce hegemonic nativist discourse, irredentist wars and ethnic cleansing campaigns, authoritarian rule (democratically legitimized in relatively free elections), populist attacks on opponents (including human rights NGOs), and perverse levels of corruption (e.g. Ottaway 2003: ch. 5; Malešević 2002: ch. 5; Pusić 1998). However, the Croatian case is highly specific, as the country was

Table 12.1 *Populist radical right parties in European national government since 1980*

Country	Party	Period(s)	Coalition partners (party ideology)
Austria	FPÖ	2000–02	ÖVP (Christian democratic)
		2002–05	ÖVP
	BZÖ	2005–	ÖVP
Croatia	HDZ	1990–2000	
Estonia	ERSP	1992–95	Isamaa (conservative)
Italy	LN	1994	FI (neoliberal populist) & AN (radical right)
		2001–05	FI & AN (conservative) & MDC (Christian democratic)
Poland	LPR	2006–	PiS (conservative) & Samoobrona (social populist)
Romania	PUNR	1994–96	PDSR (diffuse) & PSM (social populist)
	PRM	1995	
Serbia	SRS	1998–2000	SPS (social populist) & JUL (communist)
Slovakia	SNS	1994–98	HZDS (diffuse) & ZRS (communist)
		2006–	Smer (social populist) & HZDS

at war for most of that period, and many of the most negative aspects of the regime were at least in part a reaction to largely similar actions and attacks by Milošević's Yugoslavia/Serbia.

In most cases Eastern European populist radical right parties were junior partners in the national coalition government. The senior partner of the government would generally be large and ideologically diffuse movement parties of the transition phase, which tended to include strong nationalists and former communists (sometimes the same people). Given that the populist radical right parties were lacking both experience and power, their role in the governments was usually fairly limited. Moreover, the specific impact of the populist radical right party is not always easy to discern, if only because (more) influential populist radical rightists operated within the senior coalition party.

Generally speaking, populist radical right parties held weaker ministries and their leader would stay outside of the government altogether. Their wishes were often ignored by the leading party, and at times they were used as excuses for less popular policies (either in the country or abroad). Overall, it seems that their direct influence on government policies has remained fairly limited, which quite often also led to disappointment and withdrawal from the coalition. Their main "success" was the temporary delaying of pro-minority legislation and a pro-Western foreign policy, rather than fully defeating it, and even in these cases radical forces within the senior partner played at least an equally important role (e.g. Kelley 2004; Simon 2004; Melvin 2000).

In some cases the senior party forced its coalition partners to sign an agreement prior to entering the government in which the populist radical right parties by and large agreed not to try and implement certain aspects of their program. For example, upon entering the government in January 1995, the two populist radical right parties PRM and PUNR, together with their coalition partners PDSR and PSM, had to sign a protocol that “forbids any manifestation of racism, antisemitism, extremism and totalitarianism” (Shafir 1996: 91). Similarly, a precondition for the inclusion of the FPÖ into the Austrian government in 2000 was the signing of the declaration “Responsibility for Austria – A Future in the Heart of Europe,” which started with the following statement: “The Federal Government reaffirms its unswerving adherence to the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of the peoples of Europe and the true source of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, principles which form the basis of all genuine democracy” (Schüssel & Haider 2000).

In both cases, the senior partners bowed to substantial pressures from foreign countries, mainly the EU and US, but the effects were significant. In Romania, the PDSR used the alleged breach of the protocol as its official reason to oust the PRM from the government (Shafir 1996), whereas in Austria adherence to the coalition agreement became a main cause for the self-defeating struggle within the FPÖ leadership.

The few scholarly studies of populist radical right parties in government in Western Europe stress their impact on immigration policies. Andrej Zaslove (2004a), for example, has argued that the FPÖ and LN have been “instrumental” in introducing more restrictive immigration policy in Austria and Italy. Other authors have come to similar conclusions (e.g. Fallend 2004; Colombo & Sciortino 2003; Heinisch 2003; Minkenberg 2001). However, while there is little doubt that, when in power, populist radical right parties have played a crucial role in tightening the immigration policy, it can be debated whether the end result would have been much different if they had stayed in opposition. After all, various earlier amendments to the immigration policy, in the same direction, had been made under previous governments, such as the Austrian SPÖ–ÖVP coalition (e.g. Bale 2003).

Moreover, preliminary findings show that European immigration policies are increasingly converging, not least because of cooperation within the European Union (e.g. Givens & Luedtke 2005, 2004). One can seriously question the role of populist radical right parties in this whole process, given the weak position of the party family in European politics (see also chapter 7). Moreover, much of the pressure towards an EU-wide immigration policy has come from the Spanish former Prime Minister José María Aznar and his British colleague

Tony Blair, both from countries with no credible populist radical right contender.

A similar argument can be made with regard to the effect of populist radical right parties on law and order policies. There is no doubt that successful electoral campaigns of the populist radical right, in which law and order issues always feature prominently, have often been followed by a toughening of the positions and policies of the established parties (not only of the right-wing). The original “Black Sunday” of 1991, for example, was followed by the introduction of the so-called *Veiligheidscontracten* (safety contracts), which clearly were in line with the VB’s tough discourse and policy demands on crime and security (De Decker *et al.* 2005). But a toughening of law and order policies could be observed in many European countries in the past two decades, including those without a strong populist radical right party (e.g. the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

The (international) electoral successes of populist radical right parties have not always led to policy shifts in their preferred direction. In fact, in many cases at least some policies were introduced that went directly against their wishes. Good examples are progressive social policies (e.g. in housing and urban development) that explicitly included immigrants, the support for multicultural activities and organizations, and the toughening of antiracist and antirevisionist legislation. For instance, the same “Black Sunday” that brought the established parties to introduce the safety contracts also inspired them to install a Royal Commissioner on Immigration Policies, who became one of the most outspoken defenders of the multicultural society in Belgium and the fiercest opponent of the VB (De Decker *et al.* 2005).

In conclusion, it seems that Frank Decker’s observations on right-wing populists in power are also valid for the subcategory of the populist radical right: they are in general more influential (a) at the subnational levels than at the national level and (b) with regard to cultural themes rather than social, economic, and foreign policies (Decker 2004: 269–70). Moreover, as Lothar Höbelt has argued with regard to Haider, the policy impact of the populist radical right in general has been “that of a catalyst rather than that of an original contribution” (2003: 220). In other words, they have not so much set a new agenda, but rather pushed through and radicalized an older (largely national conservative) agenda – in line with the pathological normalcy thesis.

### 12.2.2 Party impact

The importance of the populist radical right in contemporary European politics is probably through their impact on other parties (which includes

indirect policy impact) far more than through direct policy impact. Populist radical right parties are said to have “contaminated” various aspects of the established parties in their party systems, such as their style of leadership, their type of political discourse, and the relationship between leaders and followers within established parties (Bale 2003; Mény & Surel 2002b: 19). Put shortly and simply, the other political parties are believed to have copied the charismatic style of leadership, the populist discourse, and the direct relation between leader and followers from the successful populist radical right parties in an attempt to keep or regain their electorate.

Studies point to contemporary developments in European party politics to substantiate their point. However, even if these different aspects can be found in most established parties in Europe, and this point itself is debatable, it does not directly follow that this is a *reaction* to the success of the populist radical right. In fact, both established and populist radical right parties are the product of earlier developments within party politics. To some extent, populist radical right parties are radical versions of the catch-all party type, defined by its small organization, central role of the leader(ship), and “catch-all” discourse (Krouwel 1999; Kirchheimer 1966). Additionally, they have reacted similarly to the rising influence of the mass media, and most notably (commercial) television, which has led to a more prominent role for party leaders and a more direct relationship between leaders and voters in all political parties (e.g. Katz & Mair 1995).

The strongest effect is claimed at the level of discourse (e.g. Decker 2003b; Bayer 2002), but even here the relationship is far from straightforward. We are currently experiencing a populist *Zeitgeist* in Europe (Mudde 2004), in which most political parties express some elements of populism in their discourse (e.g. Jagers 2006). However, this is true in countries with strong populist radical right parties, but also in those with no or weak parties. For example, within Europe populist discourse is particularly strong in Eastern Europe and the UK (e.g. Mair 2002; Mudde 2001), areas where populist radical right parties are not particularly successful in elections.

Somewhat related to the populism thesis is the argument that the populist radical right has repoliticized some countries, either by introducing new issues on the political agenda (e.g. immigration) or by breaking the party political consensus on old issues (e.g. crime). This process has also been observed with respect to the neoliberal populist LPF, which according to some authors transformed the Netherlands from a depoliticized into a centrifugal democracy (Pellikaan *et al.* 2003). Additional research will have to test whether this thesis holds true for other consociational democracies as well, notably Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, where the main populist challenge has come from the radical right.

Similarly, there is a widely held belief that populist radical right parties have had a significant impact on the policy positions of other parties (e.g. Schain 2006; Meguid 2005). So far, little empirical proof has been provided to substantiate this assertion. While a toughening of position in the fields of crime and immigration can be noted in many European countries, it is doubtful whether this is a direct effect of the competition of the populist radical right. In fact, both might react to the same cues from the media and society. Clearly, the situation in countries like Spain and the UK shows that the development is not limited to countries with successful populist radical right parties. Still, these countries might respond to the successes of populist radical right parties in other countries, notably the FN in France, by trying to pre-empt a similar development at home. At the same time, this could also be used as a convenient excuse to push through preferred policies which are known to be unpopular among the own support base.

Obviously, as elections are zero-sum games the rise of the populist radical right has also had electoral effects. This is not just the case with successful parties like the Belgian VB or the Romanian PRM, which have (at times) taken more than 20 percent of the electorate away from the other parties, but even with some fairly tiny parties. In the 2005 British parliamentary elections, for example, the populist radical right Veritas and the Euroreject UKIP are believed to have affected the outcome of twenty-seven seats (North 2005). The only victim of the participation of the two outsider parties was their most important right-wing rival, the Conservative Party, at least when one assumes that these voters were first and foremost inspired by Euroskepticism. Similarly, scholars have noted that the FN has played “an influential role in the left’s return to power” (Hainsworth 2000b: 22).

While center-right parties will have suffered electorally from the rise of populist radical right parties, although not necessarily more than their left-wing rivals, some authors argue that they have profited politically (e.g. Bale 2003; Heinisch 2003). However, this is only the case where the center-right has accepted the populist radical right as a (potential) coalition partner, thereby squaring the competitive position *vis-à-vis* the center-left parties, which had their coalition options increased by the rise of the Greens in the 1980s. But in parties where a *cordon sanitaire* has survived, notably in Belgium, the rise of the populist radical right has mainly strengthened the coalition position of the left, notably social democrats and Greens, which are now needed in every coalition. Moreover, the thesis mainly holds for Western Europe, as the postcommunist East tended towards so-called “red-brown” coalitions (Ishiyama 1998) between populist radical left and populist radical right parties.



Referring most notably to recent developments in Austria, Reinhard Heinisch (2003: 125) has argued that “conservative parties tend to be the main beneficiaries from the political fallout” following populist radical right government participation. This thesis seems to be supported also with regard to neoliberal populist parties like the Dutch LPF and the German Schill Party. However, current studies do not yet clarify whether conservative parties gain back the voters they lost earlier to the populist radical right (or neoliberal populists), or whether they actually gain new voters.

It might be the case that populist radical right parties (and neoliberal populist parties) function as halfway houses between the center-left and center-right. In other words, while voters might not change from a social democratic party to a conservative or Christian democratic party directly, they might do it indirectly, by voting once or twice for a populist party. Panel studies would be needed to research this complex process.

### 12.2.3 *Social impact*

Many scholars would agree with Seymour Martin Lipset’s observation that “radical right agitation has facilitated the growth of practices which threaten to undermine the social fabric of democratic politics” (1955: 176). But while this statement makes both intuitive and theoretical sense, very little empirical evidence has been presented to substantiate it. In most cases the observations are presented as so self-evident that further proof is deemed superfluous.

One of the most heatedly contested issues has been the impact of the electoral success of the populist radical right on the level of nativist violence in a country. Many authors argue that “the xenophobic rhetoric [of populist radical right parties is] often spilling over into violence” (Marcus 2000: 40). One of the few studies providing some empirical support for this relationship is a pilot study of the situation in Switzerland in the period 1984–93 (in Altermatt & Kriesi 1995). In other parts of Europe there also seems to exist a very slight positive correlation (cf. Mudde 2005b; Eatwell 2000; Björge & Witte 1993b), which is not the same as causation!

In contrast, some scholars believe that successful populist radical right parties actually channel the frustrations of would-be perpetrators of nativist violence (e.g. Minkenberg 2003; Wilensky 1998). In the most comprehensive study of racist and extreme right violence in Western Europe to date, Ruud Koopmans concludes that “[i]n general, strong extreme right parties serve to limit the potential for extreme right and racist violence” (1996: 211). Analysis of the comparative data of the

European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC 2005), particularly relating to the number of racially motivated murders and threats, confirms that the relationship between the levels of racist violence and populist radical right electoral success is inverse, if significant at all (see also in Backes 2003b: 364–5).

However, as all scholars in the field admit, serious comparative studies are at this stage impossible, given the huge inconsistencies in data collection between European countries. This problem is also acknowledged by the EUMC, which states in its annual report: “In general, the enormous difference across the 25 EU Member States in numbers of recorded incidents of racist violence and crime tells us as much about the inadequacy and inconsistency of data collection as it does about the actual extent of racist violence and crimes in the EU” (EUMC 2005: 15).

This problem can be somewhat undercut by using data from the same country but in different regions or at different times. However, these analyses seem to point in the same direction. For example, within Germany an inverse relationship between the levels of antforeigner violence and populist radical right voting can be found at the state level (e.g. Karapin 2002). And in the seven EU member states that have reliable data on the numbers of racist crimes and incidents, though only over the short period of 2001–03, the only significant increase is reported in Ireland (+88.4 percent), a country which never had a significant populist radical right party (EUMC 2005). In contrast, the two countries with the strongest such parties, Austria and Denmark, belong to those with the largest decrease (–17.4 percent and –55.2 percent, respectively). Interestingly, in Austria the FPÖ was part of the coalition government during that period, while in Denmark the DFP was a vital supporter of the minority government.

In an overview article on antforeigner violence, Peter Merkl concludes that “it would be difficult to overlook the vast preponderance of the unorganized, unpolitical, and less political outrages against asylum-seekers and other visible foreigners” (1995: 114). In fact, most national studies on nativist violence find that only a minority of (arrested) perpetrators are members of nativist organizations (e.g. Björge & Witte 1993a). Moreover, the perpetrators who are organized tend to engage overwhelmingly in small neo-Nazi groups rather than populist radical right parties. And even when official members of these parties are involved, they are very often passive members rather than activists, let alone leaders. Obviously, there are individual exceptions (e.g. BNP and CD), but in general the *direct* involvement of populist radical right parties in nativist violence remains very limited.

It has also become widely accepted that electoral and political successes of populist radical right parties increase the tolerance for intolerance (e.g.

Schain *et al.* 2002b). Empirical evidence for this belief is hard to come by, although some studies do point in this direction (e.g. Westin 2003). A comparative study of seven West European countries found that electoral success of populist radical right parties does correlate with ethnic prejudice within countries, but has fairly limited “impact” on other authoritarian values (Andersen & Evans 2004). Other studies find an increase in tolerance towards immigrants (e.g. Bjørklund & Andersen 2002). However, it might be more logical to assume that populist radical right electoral success not so much changes the attitudes of people as increases the salience of that attitude. It also seems plausible to argue this with relation to the alleged “cueing effects” of populist radical right parties regarding (exclusive) national identity and European integration (e.g. Netjes & Edwards 2005).

Another effect of electoral success of the populist radical right might be the increased mobilization of its opponents. There seems to be a clear relationship between highly publicized radical right events and antiradical right mobilization. Most mass mobilizations are direct reactions to either extreme right violence or populist radical right electoral success. Some studies even suggest that electoral successes of populist radical right parties “provoke a backlash among those with liberal attitudes” (Andersen & Evans 2004: 24; also Kitschelt & McGann 1995). The question is then which will be larger and more long-lasting. That this is highly dependent upon the strength of the populist radical right party can be shown by two recent examples: while the mass mobilization after the BNP’s election victory in Tower Hamlets largely ended the party’s chances in the area, the impact of the “republican front” against Le Pen in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections seems to have been more modest and temporary.

### 12.3 Democracy strikes back: impact on

Obviously, the relationship between European democracies and populist radical right parties is not one-directional. European democracies also have an impact on radical right parties. This section will not discuss the various concepts of “defending democracy” in detail, nor the highly important and interesting work that has recently been conducted in this field (e.g. Capoccia 2005; Eatwell & Mudde 2004; Pedahzur 2003; Van Donselaar 2003, 1995). Instead, the emphasis is on the impact that democratic reactions have had on the populist radical right parties and on the internal changes this impact has given rise to.

We hereby start from the assumption that there is an inherent tension between the populist radical right and liberal democracy (see chapter 6),

which will confront all populist radical right parties with an “adaptation dilemma” (Van Donselaar 1995); i.e. to function fully within a liberal democratic context the populist radical right party must moderate, but to keep its unique position and ensure the loyalty of its hardcore support it has to remain radical (also Dézé 2004; Heinisch 2003). However, different legal, political, and social contexts will lead to dissimilar impacts and dilemmas.

### 12.3.1 *Coalition vs. cordon sanitaire*

Given that European democracies are essentially party democracies, the most important responses are those by mainstream political parties. In fact, in his study of defending democracy in the interwar period, Giovanni Capoccia (2005) concludes that the behavior of party elites is the vital variable in explaining democratic survival. While the survival of the democratic system is no longer at stake, some of the key values underlying the system of liberal democracy are challenged. Consequently, much of the debate on how “the democratic parties” should respond to the populist radical right party challenge is still voiced in terms of defending democracy.

Until 1980 cooperation with radical right parties was almost universally rejected in Europe. There were few short-term exceptions, most notably with respect to the MSI in Italy (e.g. Dézé 2004). Particularly since the early 1990s the situation has changed significantly, leading to a wide diversity of approaches between and within European countries. At the two poles are coalition as the most accommodative, on the one hand, and a *cordon sanitaire* as the most adversarial, on the other (e.g. De Lange 2007b). Much more analysis is needed to be able to ascertain why some mainstream parties decide upon an accommodative approach and others on an adversarial one. Moreover, little is known about the impact of those strategies on the populist radical right parties (on the electoral effects, see Van der Brug & Van Spanje 2004).

As far as the issue is discussed, it is in terms of the best approach “to deal with” populist radical right parties, which has spurred debate inside and outside of academia. While many self-professed “democrats” tended to reject any cooperation (“collaboration”) before, some have changed their opinion in the light of the dismal performance of populist parties in government (i.e. internal splits and subsequent electoral defeat) – though this applies mainly to neoliberal populist parties like the Schill Party and the LPF, it also pertains to the FPÖ and, to a lesser extent, the LN (cf. Delwit & Poirrier 2007; Fröhlich-Steffen & Rensmann 2005a). Moreover, they

will point to parties like the FN and VB, which achieve long-term electoral successes despite a *cordon sanitaire*.

In fact, one could argue that populist radical right parties achieve these successes in part *because of* the cordon. The cordon not only helps these parties to keep the *Fundis* and *Realos* together, as the exclusion by the mainstream parties takes away the incentive to moderate, but it also helps the populist radical right parties to focus themselves fully on a vote-maximizing strategy. Unlike mainstream parties, which have to keep in mind possible coalition talks after the election campaign, pariah parties like the Belgian VB need not concern themselves with these kind of tactical considerations. Moreover, they can pursue the ideal vote-maximizing campaign of “overpromising” (Papadopoulos 2000: 6), uninhibited by concerns of how everything should be implemented. In other words, “[t]he extreme right can campaign continuously and does so. Meantime, the others govern or keep themselves ready to do so” (Deschouwer 2001: 84).

But political cooperation at the level of formal coalition addresses only one aspect of political relations between populist radical right and mainstream parties. Various authors have contended that most mainstream parties will exclude the populist radical right parties and include “their” issues and solutions in an attempt to defeat the outsiders.

The most effective strategy . . . appears to be a combination of cooptation, confrontation and marginalization. Established political parties seize on the themes of right-wing populist parties (cooptation) while simultaneously denouncing them as enemies of the system (confrontation) and refusing to cooperate with them, or even speak with them, at any political level (marginalization). (Art 2006: 8)

However, this is almost exactly what has been happening in Flanders since 1991, and in France since the late 1990s. Still, in both cases the populist radical right has not diminished in strength; in France not even despite the painful party split.

The problem is that this model (again) ignores the role of the populist radical right party itself. As argued in chapter 10, with regard to the Thatcher–Chirac debate, whether this strategy weakens or strengthens the populist radical right party depends to a large extent on the variable of issue ownership. Once a populist radical right party has established itself as a credible political actor that owns certain salient issues (e.g. crime and immigration), it is largely immune to counter-strategies of other political actors (including the media and social movements).

Similarly, the impact of the strategy of the established parties is largely mitigated by the populist radical right party itself. Both coalitions and cordons can lead to internal cohesion and strife. Much depends on the level

of institutionalization of the populist radical right. Less institutionalized parties will falter under both a cordon (e.g. CD and REP) and a coalition (e.g. LPF and Schill Party). However, more institutionalized parties can thrive under both a cordon (e.g. VB) and a coalition (e.g. SNS), or at the very least survive the latter (e.g. FPÖ and LN). Like nearly all measures of defending democracy, these strategies are most successful, in terms of breaking or transforming the populist radical right party, when applied in the early phase of party institutionalization. Once a populist radical right party becomes institutionalized, its role in determining its own future increases.

### 12.3.2 *Socialization into liberal democracy?*

Based on the experiences with the socialist parties in the early twentieth century, and some communist parties in the postwar period, scholars have come to believe that “in the long run, revolutionary parties lose their original impetus and accommodate themselves to the regimes they have been unable to overthrow” (Sartori 1976: 140). Although populist radical right parties are not revolutionary in the true sense, i.e. changing the democratic system by violence, they do claim to want to overthrow “the regime,” i.e. the dominant actors and values in their contemporary liberal democracies.

Husbands has argued that “[s]uccess tends to moderate,” but also that “it is a historical fact that most examples of such metamorphoses [from antisystem party to system party, CM] are reactions to persistent failure, not to growth and success” (1996: 113). Systematic research into the development of political parties leads to the view that moderation “is not the automatic response to electoral defeat . . . Normally, when moderation is observed, it is due to the fact that the party tempers its ideological rigidity through organizational reforms or leadership renovation” (Sánchez-Cuenca 2004: 325).

However, while correlation is one thing, causality is another. Does success lead to moderation or moderation to success? The answer is probably both: there are examples of populist radical right parties that moderated after (initial) electoral success (e.g. VB) and of those that gained success after moderation (notably Tudor and Le Pen in the presidential elections of 2000 and 2002, respectively). However, there are at least as many examples of parties that did not moderate after (initial) electoral success (e.g. FN, recent NPD, SNS) – some even radicalized in certain respects (e.g. LN, PRM) – or that did not gain electoral victories

#### 12.4 Conclusion

Despite more than twenty-five years of the third wave of populist radical right party politics, sporting unprecedented electoral and political successes (including several coalitions involving members of the party family), the academic study of the impact of populist radical right parties on European democracies and vice versa has hardly started. With a few notable exceptions (particularly Schain *et al.* 2002a), studies of populist radical right parties often claim significant impact upon policies (immigration) and society (violence), but provide very little empirical evidence for those claims.

Most such claims do not seem to hold up against serious empirical and theoretical scrutiny. While many of the noted changes in policies could be observed, particularly in the fields of immigration and law and order, the link to populist radical right influence seems weak at best. Most developments can be observed Europe-wide, not only in countries with a strong populist radical right party (whether in government or not). The same applies to the asserted changes in party behavior and organization; rather than the mainstream parties following the populist radical right, it seems more plausible that both are reacting to the same societal developments (notably the rise of (commercial) media power).

With regard to the alleged societal impact, the claim that electoral success of populist radical right parties leads to nativist violence cannot be substantiated. Indeed, an inverse relationship seems more plausible, although the lack of reliable cross-national data so far prevents any strong conclusion. What can be substantiated by empirical data, however, is that the direct involvement of populist radical right parties in nativist violence is very small. Finally, while more research is needed to assess whether electoral success of populist radical right parties has an impact on mass attitudes and, if so, what type of impact, it seems reasonable to assume that the effect will be more pronounced on the salience rather than the content of those attitudes.

The impact of European democracies on populist radical right parties has been even less addressed in the literature. Recent years have seen an increased academic and political debate on the effect of the behavior of the mainstream parties, i.e. coalition or cordon, in part resulting from some spectacular failures of populist parties in government. However, the impact of both coalition and cordon is strongly mediated through the populist radical right party itself, particularly through its level of party institutionalization. More institutionalized parties can be strengthened by both coalition and cordon, while less institutionalized parties can be weakened by both.

Finally, little is known about the impact of European democracies on the internal life of populist radical right parties. As we know from the socialist parties of the early and late twentieth century, as well as some contemporary former radical right parties (e.g. HDZ, MSI/AN, SPO), political parties can and do change their ideology. Under which conditions they moderate, rather than stabilize or radicalize, is a question still waiting for an answer. At first glance there doesn't seem to be a straightforward relationship with electoral or political success.