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POLITICS AT THE FRINGES?

Eastern Europe’s populists, racists, and extremists

Cas Mudde

Eastern Europe has long been associated with nationalism, more specifically nasty “ethnic” or “racial” types of civil wars and pogroms. As soon as the Berlin Wall came down, the discourse on post-communist Eastern Europe was divided between the optimistic “return to Europe” and the pessimistic “return to the past.” Although the divisions were never as clear-cut as in these simplistic narratives, this chapter mainly focuses on the forces associated with the return to the dark past of ethnic nationalism. It will chronicle the most important developments within the East European far right, introduce and critically assess the scholarship on the topic, and lay out avenues for future research.

As Minkenberg (2002, p. 361), the prime scholar on the topic, noted at the turn of the century, “studying the radical right in transformation countries in Central and Eastern Europe not only resembles shooting at a moving target but also shooting with clouded vision.” Almost 15 years later, his observation still rings true. Particularly compared to Western Europe, there is remarkably little academic research on the far right in Eastern Europe. Moreover, existing scholarship quickly becomes out of date, as parties come and go with blistering speed. Most East European far-right parties that were relevant at the time Minkenberg made this observation are no longer relevant, while the two most successful parties today, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) and the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE), were both founded after 2002.

Despite the continuing electoral volatility of the region, there is one important constant with regard to the topic at hand: far-right politics have always been much more important than far-right parties. With few exceptions, far-right parties have been relatively small and isolated, but many other political actors have promoted far-right politics, including established political parties and rogue mainstream politicians. This was so in the turbulent days of the democratic transition of the early 1990s and it is so in the turbulent days of the Great Recession and the “refugee crisis” of today. Understanding the differences and similarities of far-right parties and politics has profound importance for gaining a better understanding of politics inside and outside of the region.

History

While far-right groups were marginal under communism, they were not completely absent. In Soviet Russia, groups that claimed to help “preserve Russian culture” had existed since the
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1970s, with the most well-known being Pamyat (Memory). One year before the breakup of the Soviet Union, in 1990, Vladimir Zhirinovsky founded the Liberal Democratic Party of the Soviet Union, later renamed Liberal Democratic Party of the Russian Federation (LDPR). Both were at least protected by high-ranking members within the Communist Party and tolerated by the communist regime. Despite significant state repression, small neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups existed in several satellite states, particularly in the German Democratic Republic (see Wagner 2002).

With the fall of communism a plethora of new far-right groups emerged within the region, taking their main inspiration from a variety of historical periods (see Mudde 2000; also Shafir 2000). Pre-communist far-right groups located their identity in the pre-communist period, most notably in the local or international fascist organisations of the early twentieth century. These groups often profited from far-right elements within émigré communities in the West, who provided expertise and money at a time that most other groups lacked both. However, with the exception of some parties and organisations in Croatia and Slovakia, most notably, pre-communist far-right groups remained fairly irrelevant and have, by now, largely ceased to exist. Even the two parties that continue to exist, the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) in its many varieties and the Slovak National Party (SNS), use their historical identity mainly as a veneer of authenticity, as their political programme addresses primarily contemporary issues.

So-called communist far-right groups based their identity on the nationalist streams of some communist regimes, most notably in Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, and Serbia. They were sometimes referred to as “red-brown” alliances (see e.g. Ishiyama 2009, 1998; Vujačić 2003), even though the communism was much more of a personal than ideological nature – with the notable exception of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), but there the far-right aspect has become much less relevant with time. Parties like the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR) and the Bulgarian Fatherland Party of Labour (OPT) were led by people who had been active within the communist party and wanted to return to the communist regime’s repressive policies towards ethnic minorities (Hungarian and Turkish speakers, respectively). The communist far right was a marginal and transitional phenomenon, which had largely disappeared from the region by the late 1990s.

Today virtually all far-right groups are post-communist and, increasingly, post-post-communist. The post-communist parties are new organisations, not claiming an institutional identity or link to a past period, and addressing contemporary issues. For much of the first two decades, the issues were mostly related to the post-communist transformation process, including the ethnic make-up of the (new) state, the (alleged) corruption of the privatisation process, and membership of the European Union (EU). A unifying discourse of post-communist populist groups throughout the region was centred on the “stolen revolution,” which claimed that the former communist elite and the new democratic elite had made a secret deal to divide the national riches at the expense of the people (see Mudde 2001).

Table 19.1 provides an overview of the main far-right party of each East European country for the period 1989–2015, listing the year and score of the highest electoral results as well as the results in the most recent national parliamentary elections (both in percentage of the national vote). What stands out are the following: (1) far-right parties have been relatively small in most East European countries; (2) most far-right parties had their highest result many years ago; and (3) the far right is almost completely absent from the region today. In fact, compared to Western Europe, far-right parties are much less successful. Hungary is the only country with a really successful far-right party (Jobbik), whereas Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland have parties with similar levels of support in Western Europe – while far-right parties in France, Netherlands, and Sweden poll at comparable levels.
A similar story can be told about the far right’s participation in national government in the region (see Table 19.2). Whereas these parties were involved in various national governments in the 1990s, this has become increasingly rare and short-lived in the twenty-first century. At the end of 2015 no far-right party was part of a government coalition. In Latvia the National Alliance (NA) has been an official member of the coalition government since 2011. While the NA

### Table 19.1 Electoral results of main far-right parties in Eastern Europe in percentage of national vote, 1989–2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Highest Result (year)</th>
<th>Latest Result (year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)</td>
<td>45.2 (1995)</td>
<td>n/f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Croatian Rights Party (HSP)</td>
<td>7.1 (1992)</td>
<td>3.0 (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Coalition for Republic – Republican</td>
<td>8.0 (1996)</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ)</td>
<td>6.9 (2013)</td>
<td>6.9 (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dawn – National Coalition (Dawn)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP)</td>
<td>8.8 (1992)</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP)</td>
<td>5.5 (1998)</td>
<td>0.0 (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>People’s Movement for Latvia (TKL)</td>
<td>15.0 (1995)</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Lithuanian Nationalist Union (LTS)</td>
<td>2.0 (1992)</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>League of Polish Families (LPR)</td>
<td>8.0 (2005)</td>
<td>n/c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)</td>
<td>22.9 (1993)</td>
<td>11.7 (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Serbian Radical Party (SRS)</td>
<td>29.5 (2008)</td>
<td>2.0 (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>Slovene National Party (SNS)</td>
<td>10.2 (1992)</td>
<td>n/f</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

n/c = did not contest last election (in some cases no longer exists)

n/f = no longer a far right party

### Table 19.2 Participation in government by far-right parties, 1989–2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Period(s)</th>
<th>Coalition Partner(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Ataka</td>
<td>2013–2014¹</td>
<td>BSP + DPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>HDZ</td>
<td>1990–2000</td>
<td>Isamaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>LPR</td>
<td>2005–2006</td>
<td>PiS &amp; Samoornona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>PUNR</td>
<td>1994–1996</td>
<td>PDSR &amp; PSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRM</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>PDSR &amp; PSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>SRS</td>
<td>1998–2000</td>
<td>SPS &amp; JUL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>1994–1998</td>
<td>HZDS &amp; ZRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006–2010</td>
<td>HZDS &amp; Smer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Minority governments in which far-right party functions as the official support party.
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itself is not a far-right party, and seems to defend relatively mainstream right-wing positions in the government, one of its constituent parties, All for Latvia! (VL), was a far-right party.

The year 2015, Europe’s *annus horribilis*, might be a turning point for the far right in Eastern Europe. The Greek crisis, terrorist attacks in Paris, and particularly the so-called refugee crisis have significantly shifted the far-right landscape in the region. First and foremost, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance have become the main voice of far-right politics in Europe, even eclipsing Marine Le Pen and the French National Front (FN) in their zeal to defend Europe’s “Christian values” against an “army” of Syrian refugees (e.g. see Mudde 2016; Müller 2015). Second, the EU plan to resettle refugees more or less proportionately across the Union has led to an unprecedented anti-Muslim backlash in the region. In all Visegrád countries, leading politicians (including premiers and a president) have spoken out against the refugees in often Islamophobic language, while thousands of people have taken to streets to oppose “Islam” and “Muslims.” These mostly spontaneous protests could give birth to new far-right groups, ranging from new single-issue organisations like the Bloc against Islam (BPI) in the Czech Republic to older far right parties like the National Movement (RN) in Poland.

**Major works**

Given the association of Eastern Europe with “nasty” nationalism in much of the academic and popular understanding of the region, there is a remarkable lack of systematic scholarship on the far right in Eastern Europe. While academic articles and books on the far right in Western Europe number in the thousands, those on Eastern Europe do not go much beyond one hundred.

Early scholarship on the far right in Eastern Europe took a very broad approach, focusing on an amorphous phenomenon captured by the vague and ominous term “ultranationalism,” which was believed to be dominating the region. A popular myth was that the communist regimes had been able to repress the natural destructive nationalist urges of the Eastern Europeans, but with the fall of the Berlin Wall, “ultra-nationalist feelings are back with a vengeance, like genies from the bottles in which they were so long confined” (Merkl 1997, p. 6). In short, the region had returned to the pre-communist period, in which nationalism was once again “the sine qua non for political success” (Fischer-Galati 1993, p. 12). This broad-brush approach focused not so much on far-right actors per se, but on anything that could be related to (ultra)nationalism, most notably alleged communist-nationalist hybrids like Serbian-Yugoslav dictator Slobodan Milošević and Slovak strongman Vladimír Meciar. Consequently, the far right was both everywhere and nowhere in Eastern Europe.

Most studies published in the 1990s were anecdotal and pessimistic, considering Eastern Europe more or less historically determined towards “ultranationalism” and seeing the far right as a major threat to democratisation in the region and even security in the world (see Braun and Scheinberg 1996; Hockenos 1993). The most influential book in this tradition was Tismaneanu (1998), which was already quite outdated by the time it finally came out. It was more a contribution to the (essayist) literature on democratisation, rather than to far-right parties in Europe, and was (too) strongly influenced by the rather unique situation in Romania in the early 1990s (see also Shafir 2000).

Ramet (1999) was the first book that more or less mirrored the many edited volumes on the far right in Western Europe. It consisted mainly of country chapters, preceded by a conceptual and theoretical chapter that merged democratisation and far-right literature, and ended with a somewhat esoteric afterword by fascism scholar Roger Griffin. Given the warp-speed of the life cycle of East European parties in the 1990s, many chapters were already completely or partly
outdated by the time of publication, but the book did at least identify the main far-right movements and parties of the first decade of post-communist politics. Moreover, it discussed the far right not exclusively in the framework of democratisation, making it more accessible to scholars of the far right in Western Europe.

Mudde (2005) was the next comprehensive study of the far right in the region, although its approach and origins were not strictly academic. The book originated within the Open Society Foundation and includes chapter by both academic and non-academic authors. Following a strict outline, each chapter identifies the key “extremist groups” (that is, political parties, organisations, and subcultures), legal framework to deal with “racist extremism,” racist extremist incidents, and state and civic responses. While the scope of the book is very broad, spanning all East European countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, many of the groups covered were or are now marginal. Still, for almost 10 years, it remained the only (English language) book on the topic.

Ironically, at a time that the electoral success of far-right parties in the region is at a post-communist low, scholarship is finally increasing and improving. Just in the past few years the *Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy* has published three volumes on the far right in Eastern Europe. Pirro (2015) looks at the ideology, impact, and electoral performance of far-right parties in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia, while Pytlas (2016) focuses on the interaction between mainstream and far-right parties in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Both studies extend the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the study of far-right parties in Western Europe to the East, without losing sight of the region’s unique character and history. This is also the case for Stojarová (2013), who applies a theoretical framework inspired by Mudde (2007) to her comparative study of far-right parties in the Balkans – a region reduced to Bulgaria and Romania in many other studies of the far right in Eastern Europe.

Finally, the edited volume by Minkenberg (2015) is the most comprehensive political science study of the topic to date. It combines country studies of East Central Europe, the Balkans, and the post-Soviet space with comparative and theoretical chapters, introduced and concluded by an updated version of Minkenberg’s powerful conceptual and theoretical framework. The volume is not just comprehensive in approach and scope, but also in its inclusion of many younger scholars from the region, who have so far lacked a voice in much of the English-language debate.

**Principal contributions**

Given the rather limited scholarship on the far right in Eastern Europe, there are not too many major contributions to report, let alone those with consequences for different, related, fields of study. Much of the early scholarship was merely an extension of the broader democratisation literature (e.g. Tismaneanu 1998), while more recent work is deeply rooted in the literature on far-right parties in Western Europe. If there is anything specific to the literature on Eastern Europe, compared to the dominant work on the western part of the continent, it is a much bigger focus on the non-party far right and on the far right’s relationship to democracy/democratisation and religion.

Some of the best scholarship of the early period tried to integrate the far right into the democratisation paradigm, seeing it, unsurprisingly, as a hindrance or threat. Williams (1999) developed a remarkably elaborate and complex theoretical framework, building upon both fascism and democratisation literature, which was unfortunately ignored by most other scholars. In a range of articles in English and German Minkenberg (2002, 2009) adjusted his earlier theoretical framework to explain the far right in Western Europe (2000) to the specific post-communist conditions of Eastern Europe (also Beichelt and Minkenberg 2002). This framework was applied, to some extent, in case studies by his colleagues and (former) PhD students, which were published
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in special issues of Osteuropa (March 2002) and Communist and Post-Communist Studies (December 2009), as well as the edited volume mentioned earlier (Minkenberg 2015).

Minkenberg’s theoretical framework is an updated version of modernisation theory, seeing the far right in Eastern Europe as a response to the economic and social changes of the post-communist period. Going beyond the simple “losers of transformation” paradigm, he includes historical legacies that distinguish different types of post-communist societies and explain both the electoral success and the ideological sub-type of the far-right party in a country (see, in particular, Minkenberg 2009, p. 452). Of particular interest is the conceptual framework, which distinguishes far-right actors on the basis of both ideological and organisational features. While Minkenberg developed this framework initially for the far right in Western Europe, his application to Eastern Europe has been much more influential. Ideologically, three types of far-right groups are distinguished: fascist-authoritarian, racist-ethnocentrist, and religious-fundamentalist. Organisationally, he again differentiates between three types: party/campaign organisation, social movement organisation, and subcultural milieu. In various publications, he has categorised the main far-right groups in the region on the basis of this three-by-three grid (see, for example, in Minkenberg 2002, p. 347). The combined theoretical framework is both comprehensive and complex and will require a long-term, integrated, multi-author research project to be fully tested – ideally at a pan-European, rather than merely East European, scale.

Reflecting the bigger emphasis on historical legacies (see also Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009; Ishiyama 2009; Pirro 2015), studies of the far right in Eastern Europe have put more emphasis on the relationship with mainstream society in general. Of particular interest is the issue of religion, largely ignored in the scholarship on the far right in Western Europe. Unsurprisingly, all work on the far right in Poland focuses on the close relationship between nationalism and religion, exemplified in the strong ties between the far-right party League of Polish Families (LPR) and the Catholic-nationalist subculture around Radio Maria (e.g. De Lange and Guerra 2009). Despite decades of (more and less) enforced atheism, religion seems to play a more important role in the far right in Eastern Europe than in the West. There are strong ties between Orthodox Christianity and myriad far-right groups, for example, in Romania (Andreeescu 2015) and Russia (Verkhovsky 2002).

For quite obvious reasons, there is more attention paid to anti-Semitism, Romaphobia, and conspiracy theories in the scholarship on the far right in Eastern Europe (Dymerkaya-Tsigelman and Finberg 1999; Mudde 2005; Schnirelman 1998). Most studies on the far right in Western Europe create an artificial distinction between the far right and the political mainstream, consistent with the “normal pathology” thesis (Scheuch and Klingemann 1967), which holds that the far right constitutes a pre-modern aberration in contemporary Western societies. In sharp contrast, most studies of the far right in Eastern Europe highlight the similarities with the political mainstream, particularly with regard to anti-Semitism and Romaphobia (see, for example, Shafir 2002; Stewart 2012; Volovici 1994), consistent with the “pathological normalcy” thesis (Mudde 2010). Interestingly, Pytlas’s new comparative study of the strategic relationships between mainstream and far-right parties in East Central Europe also explicitly works within the pathological normalcy paradigm.

While research on the far right in Eastern Europe has become increasingly influenced by concepts and theories of the much more voluminous scholarship on Western Europe, it is still less dominated by quantitative studies of electoral success of political parties. Moreover, one of the few cross-national quantitative studies published in a major mainstream political science journal to date, goes well beyond the narrow approach so common in studies on far-right parties in Western Europe. Bustikova (2014) introduces and tests an original theory that sees the success of far-right parties in Eastern Europe as a backlash against the political successes of minorities and
concessions extracted on their behalf. This theory could also make an important contribution to
the literature on the far right in Western Europe, which so far has not paid too much attention
on this particular backlash (though see Dancygier 2010; Koopmans et al. 2005).

Main criticisms

Given the limited scholarship on the far right in Eastern Europe, much of the criticism is aimed
at what is not done rather than what is done. Like most literatures, including on the far right
in Western Europe, there is much too much focus on only a small group of countries (notably
Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Russia). This notwithstanding, even in these countries we know
relatively little about the key far-right actors, including the political parties, which tend to be
described in fairly general terms in most studies. Some countries and parties lack almost any
scholarship, most notably the Baltic countries. While there is an obvious positive correlation
between the political relevance of the far right and the scholarship on it, it is far from perfect.
Overall, we simply do not know much about the far right in Eastern Europe, parties, social move-
ment organisations, and subcultures alike.

Moreover, research on the far right in Eastern Europe is rarely embedded in a broader the-
etorical framework or comparative approach. Hence, we are left with either broad and vague
essays on “nationalism” in a specific country or the region as a whole, or with narrow case
studies of specific far-right groups, such as neo-Nazis in the Czech Republic (Vejvodová 2014),
skinheads in Hungary (Kürti 2003), the Slovak National Movement in Slovakia (Malová 2003),
or Alexander Dugin (Ingram 2001) and the Eurasian movement in Russia (Laruelle 2015). This
is particularly problematic, because the far-right scene in Eastern Europe is even more fluid
than that in the West, making many studies dated, if not largely irrelevant, by the time they are
published.

Much of this criticism is a consequence of the lack of infrastructure in the study of the far
right in Eastern Europe. There are very few scholars on the topic, in sharp contrast to the abun-
dance of scholars of the far right in Western Europe. This is not just the case in the region itself,
but also among Western scholars of Eastern Europe. In addition, the few scholars cannot profit
from the same academic infrastructure, being marginal(ised) within the scholarly communities of
both East European politics and far-right politics. In fact, there are only a few places that have a
critical mass of scholars of the East European far right, most notably at the International Institute
of Political Science at Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic) and the Mirovni Institute at
the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and they have very limited resources.

Future developments

Paradoxically, there are many good reasons to assume that the real success of the far right in East-
ern Europe is yet to come. As Greskovits (1998) already argued more than twenty years ago in his
original but not much cited comparative study of political protest in democratising Latin Amer-
ica and Eastern Europe, populist politics tends to only become successful after a transformation
process has come to an end. This is in line with insights from Western Europe, where far-right
parties have, on average, done better in more affluent countries and during economically good
times (see Mudde 2016). Moreover, the various political crises of 2015 have shaken the European
continent to its core, and nowhere more so than in Eastern Europe, particularly the Visegrad
countries. All of this should make Eastern Europe of particular interest to students of far-right
politics. I will discuss four specific issues that deserve much more academic study, preferably from
scholarly collectives rather than individual scholars.
The first major issue is the fundamental differences and similarities between the far right in Eastern Europe and Western Europe. While this question has been at the forefront of virtually all concerted studies on the far right in Eastern Europe, dividing those who believe they are essentially similar (e.g. Mudde 2007) and different (e.g. Minkenberg 2002, 2009; Pirro 2015), it needs, at the very least, clarification and updating. Most East European countries are more than twenty-five years “post” communism, of which more than ten were spent within the EU, which makes the post-communist framework increasingly dated. After all, the majority of East European citizens have not been socialised during communism. This is not to argue that there are no “Leninist legacies,” which after all are constantly created and recreated, but these legacies compete with contemporary narratives and practices, many of which are shared with the rest of the continent. Consequently, scholarship should try to more accurately determine the precise relevance of the Leninist legacies for the far right in Eastern Europe: which aspects of far-right politics are post-communist and which are post-post-communist?

Related to this is the second issue, which is the impact of the annum horribilis 2015 on the far right in Eastern Europe. The combination of two favourite issues of the far right, European integration and immigration, in the ill-conceived policy of forced distribution of refugees across the continent, has profoundly impacted the politics of all EU member states. However, whereas Euroscepticism and anti-immigration sentiments have been part and parcel of the far right, as well as the broader population, in many West European countries for many years now, they are more recent phenomena in many Eastern European countries. It is likely that the popular resentment will strengthen the support of the few more or less established far-right organisations and parties in the region, like in Western Europe, but will it also give way to new far-right parties, which will resemble their brethren in the West even more?

Again connected to this is the third, and most important, issue that confronts Eastern Europe even more profoundly than Western Europe: the radicalisation of mainstream politics. While the effect of far-right parties on mainstream parties has been studied for over a decade now (e.g. Bale 2003; Minkenberg 1998; Schain 2006), and recently also in East Central Europe (Pytlas 2016), recent developments point to a more fundamental issue: the differences between far-right parties and far-right politics (see Mudde 2016). Essentially, how relevant is it if a political party or politician meets the various criteria to be labelled far right, if it not just advocates but even implements far-right policies? This is most acutely relevant to Hungarian premier Orbán and his Fidesz party, but the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland and Slovak premier Robert Fico (Smer) have also expressed nativist, authoritarian, and populist tendencies that go well beyond mere strategic countering of far-right challengers.

Rather than citing regional exceptionalism, as is too common in East European studies, scholars should look for insights from studies on Western European countries as well as comparative studies across the East-West divide. While there might be a broader acceptance of populist radical-right politics in Eastern Europe, although this has not really been empirically proven, it still needs to be explained under which conditions it becomes prevalent within a political system (that is, the early 1990s and the current period). Related to that, more in-depth and systematic studies of “borderline parties” like Fidesz, PiS, and Smer are necessary to establish in which party family they truly fit – the new category of “national conservatism” seems mainly a cop-out to avoid having to classify them as far right.

Finally, studies of the East European far right have to be much more sensitive to the huge variety of far-right actors and successes in the region. Some countries had only successful far-right parties in the 1990s (e.g. Slovenia), while others only in the twenty-first century (e.g. Bulgaria). Some have weak parties and strong subcultures (e.g. Czech Republic and Poland), while other countries have strong parties, social movement organisations, and subcultures (e.g. Hungary and...
Russia). It is particularly in this cross-national and cross-temporal diversity within the region that scholars can find deeper insights into the complexity of the far-right phenomenon in Eastern Europe.

Note

Although the observation holds true for all scholarship, I will focus almost exclusively on English-language studies of the far right in Eastern Europe in this chapter. To be fair, few important studies have been published in other languages, not even in the various local languages of the region.

Bibliography


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