

Conservative and Right-Wing Movements

Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap

Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260;
email: kblee@pitt.edu, kac130@pitt.edu

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Key Words

extremism, racism, violence, scenes, xenophobia, anti-Semitism

Abstract

In recent years, the right has become a powerful force in many parts of the world. This review focuses primarily on the United States, with comparisons to rightist movements elsewhere. Our focus is movements, not political parties or intellectual trends. The article begins with terms and definitions and distinguishes conservative from right-wing movements. We then review changing theoretical orientations and the major findings on ideologies and characteristics of these movements. We also survey contextual factors that influence rightist mobilization and strategies used by rightist movements. We pay particular attention to New Right and New Christian Right conservative movements and to right-wing skinhead and white supremacist movements. A final section examines methodological and ethical concerns that arise in studies of the right. The conclusion recommends directions for future research.

Conservative movements:

movements that support patriotism, free enterprise capitalism, and/or a traditional moral order and for which violence is not a frequent tactic or goal

Right-wing movements:

movements that focus directly on race/ethnicity and/or promote violence as a primary tactic or goal

Rightist: either conservative or right-wing movements

INTRODUCTION

In the late twentieth century, the right became a political force in the United States. Conservative movements influenced public policy, elections, and public discourse on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, sex education, taxes, immigration, and gun ownership. Extremists with racist, xenophobic, and/or anti-Semitic agendas proliferated as well. Their violent potential became clear in 1995 when Timothy McVeigh, a traveler in the shadowy networks of organized racism, bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City.

The resurgence of the right in the United States has stimulated considerable attention in sociology. We focus on movements, not political parties or intellectual currents, which are reviewed elsewhere (Klandermans & Mayer 2006a, Nash 1998, Rydgren 2007). We open with terminological and conceptual issues. Then we review recent work on conservative and right-wing movements. A final section discusses the methodological and ethical issues of studying the right. We conclude by suggesting possible avenues for future research.

Terms and Definitions

There is little uniformity in how scholars characterize the right in modern Western societies. Some terms imply a political continuum, with far-right movements positioned to the right of right-wing movements and both more rightist than conservative movements. Others focus on a single or few criteria—disavowal of democratic processes, strategies of violence and terrorism, conspiratorial belief, intense nationalism, and/or support for criminal action—as what separates an extreme right from other rightists (Durham 2007, Eatwell 2004, MJ Goodwin 2006, Vertigans 2007). Descriptors can indicate political significance, so modifiers such as ultra or extreme cast some movements as more marginal or less influential than others (McGirr 2001), but the same terms are used to distinguish movements based on racist ideologies from other movements on the right (Durham 2000, Eatwell 2004). Some scholars

identify rightist movements as fundamentalist to underscore how they mirror religious fundamentalism in their dualisms of good and evil, millennialism, and sharp boundaries between believers and others (Joseph & Sharma 2003, Marty & Appleby 1991). Especially outside the United States, extreme right is used for social movements and right-wing for political parties, although some parties are also labeled extreme right (Giugni et al. 2005, Klandermans & Mayer 2006b). The label fascist is applied to European neo-Nazis and skinheads, evoking the continent's genocidal history (Mann 2004), but it is rarely used for similar groups in the United States. In the United States, radical right can denote movements that are conspiratorial but not race-based, extreme right as those committed to white/Aryan supremacy, and far right as including both radical and extreme rightists as well as ultranationalists (Durham 2000).

Scholars and the rightists they study use somewhat different vocabularies. Although conservatives embrace that particular label—conservative—they generally reject others, such as right-wing, racist, extremist, and far right, as negative or belittling (DeWitte 2006). Some racist activists prefer to be called white separatists, a practice adopted by some scholars (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 2000). Other scholars use white nationalist or white supremacist to underscore the centrality of racial domination in these movements (Blee 2002, Zeskind 2009).

To what these terms apply also varies. Definitions of the right, as Minkenberg (2003, p. 171) notes, often “resemble mere shopping lists of criteria.” Indeed, the scholarship we review labels as extreme, conservative, traditional, or fundamentalist a variety of movements as well as their ideologies, cultural doctrines, strategies, styles of organizing, and tactics (Berlet & Lyons 2000, Gamble 2007, MJ Goodwin 2006). We use conservative for movements that support patriotism, free enterprise capitalism, and/or a traditional moral order and for which violence is not a frequent tactic or goal. We use right-wing for movements that focus specifically on race/ethnicity

and/or that promote violence as a primary tactic or goal. We use rightist as a generic category.

In practice, movements are difficult to label as either right-wing or conservative. A single movement is likely to have conservative and right-wing aspects. Antiabortion movements are conservative in their support for traditional morality, but some practice violence against abortion clinics (Doan 2007). Patriot movements are right-wing on race but conservative in their embrace of free markets. Many right-wing and conservative movements use similar strategies and rhetoric of vulnerability, fear, and threat (Durham 2007).

Theoretical Orientations

Sociological work on the right has shifted substantially in recent years. Few sociologists today regard rightist movements as a collective manifestation of individual pathology and authoritarian families, a dominant theory in earlier efforts to explain German Nazism (Adorno et al. 1950). Factors such as fear, ignorance, psychological disorder, and status anxiety are rarely evoked in modern sociological studies because there is considerable evidence that rightist movements attract fairly ordinary and often middle-class people, not the frustrated, downwardly mobile, and socially marginal (Blee 1991, 2002; McGirr 2001; Vertigans 2007), although some studies find that psycho-developmental factors affect vulnerability to rightist recruitment (Edelstein 2003, Lio et al. 2008).

Sociologists today generally approach the right as a social movement, not as an outcome of personality disorders. This conceptual turn has not been without problems. Rightist movements fit awkwardly into the theoretical templates of social movements that were largely developed in studies of feminism, the New Left, and civil rights. Such progressive movements, based on “claim making by disadvantaged minorities” (McAdam et al. 2005, p. 2), are poor models for movements of privileged groups (Blee 2006, Wright 2007). Yet concepts from social movement theories have been valuable

for directing attention to how rightist movements originate with movement entrepreneurs, frame their messages, respond to external political opportunities, forge collective identity, develop strategies and tactics, and serve as a source of vision and voice (however destructive) for their adherents (Stein 2001).

Rightist movements tend to be known for what they are against, not for what they support (Durham 2007, Lo 1982). Antigay movements are mobilized by LGBT gains. The antiabortion movement fights legal abortion. Anti-immigrant movements are fueled by the advances of immigrants. As counter-movements, their rhetoric and tactics are influenced by opposing movements (Fetner 2005, 2008; Staggenborg & Meyer 1996). White supremacists borrow slogans from civil rights movements and claim equal rights for whites. British rightists adopt the tactics of boycotts from their progressive counterparts but direct them at businesses owned by nonwhites (Atton 2006, Berbrier 2000).

Right-wing movements are shaped by their interaction with the state (Karapin 2007). A disorganized network of self-styled patriots was transformed into a cohesive force of antigovernment warriors in the late twentieth century as they adopted military tactics and language used by federal agencies in the war on drugs (Hamm 2002, Wright 2007, Zeskind 2009). State action can weaken rightist extremism as well, evident in federal government efforts to end Ku Klux Klan (KKK) violence against the civil rights movement (Chalmers 2003).

U.S. CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENTS

U.S. conservative movements support anti-collectivist economic policies, fervent patriotism, and/or traditionalism and conventional morality.

Conservative economic movements include citizen tax revolts [such as ballot initiatives popular in California starting in the late 1970s (Burg 2004, Martin 2008)] and campaigns against government spending on social

LGBT: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

KKK: Ku Klux Klan

NR: New Right

PK: Promise Keepers

welfare programs [especially those that aid immigrants, poor people, single mothers, and people of color (Hardisty 2000, Reese 2007)]. Conservative economic beliefs also fuel anti-environmental movements, such as those that oppose measures to halt global warming (McCright & Dunlap 2000, 2003).

The conservative focus on patriotism finds expression in movements against supranational political entities, especially the World Court, United Nations, World Bank, and Trilateral Commission. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, conservative anti-internationalism was grounded in fear of worldwide socialism and communism (Minkenberg 2003), but now conservative nationalists promote the superiority of the United States over all other countries. Despite their expressions of nationalism, many conservatives chafe at government authority. They favor individual rights vis-à-vis the state, as evident in campaigns for parental choice in schooling and against regulation of business, professions, and private life (Durham 2000, Flint 2004b, Soule & Van Dyke 2002).

Conservative traditionalism is found in movements to ban the teaching of evolution and sex education in schools as antithetical to Biblical teachings and in movements that oppose state efforts to increase gender equality as a violation of the natural order (Irvine 2002, Jacobs 2006, Lienesch 2007, Rose 2005). Traditionalist movements also seek to limit access to abortion, pornography, gambling, and prostitution as violations of morality, and they support the death penalty and other forms of harsh punishment for criminals as essential for a moral social order (DeWitte 2006, McGirr 2001, Minkenberg 2003).

A particular kind of conservative movement known as the New Right (NR) emerged in the 1970s, a time when the right had little electoral or cultural influence. Fragmented groups of free market enthusiasts, libertarians, anticommunists, and social conservatives found common interest, shaping a movement that rapidly became a force in political life. The NR's explosive growth challenged long-held scholarly assumptions about conservative mobilization.

For one, the NR did not primarily attract social groups in decline, such as the status-insecure middle class and Protestant fundamentalists that Bell (1963) identified as the core of the Old Right. Rather, its campaign to return America to political, economic, and moral strength mobilized a wide range of social groups, including economically successful middle classes (Durham 2000, Johnson 2000, McGirr 2001). Too, the NR's success was not due primarily to its strong leadership, a common description of the Old Right (Ribuffo 1983). Instead, its leaders inspired grassroots action. For instance, antifeminist spokesperson Phyllis Schlafly fought against gender equity by mobilizing women fearful that they would be drafted into the military or that men would relinquish economic responsibility for their families (Critchlow 2005, Schreiber 2008).

Scholars are divided on the racial nature of the NR. Some argue that the NR relied on racially coded messages to mobilize white evangelical activists. Race, one scholar of the NR writes, was used to connect "recipes for national revival to racialized and often exclusionary images of the national community," particularly those of immigration, affirmative action, welfare, and traditional values (Ansell 2001, p. 189). Such racial ideology, unlike earlier forms of white racism, was not based on biological claims of white superiority. Rather, it rested on ostensibly nonracial values, such as disdain for government policies of equal opportunity (Ansell 1997).

Other scholars see the NR as more complicated on issues of race. Nonwhites, they note, have been involved in NR movements, such as Native Americans in evangelical movements for prison reform and against gendered violence (Smith 2008) and African Americans in pro-family movements (Lewis 2005). A well-studied example of a racially complex NR movement is the evangelical Promise Keepers (PK). PK began in 1991 as a small men's gathering in Colorado and within six years was able to bring a half-million men to Washington, DC, to march for traditional family values. Not only was PK multiracial, but it also declared racism a sin and

advocated that men undertake racial reconciliation by developing personal relationships with men of other races (Allen 2000, Bartkowski 2004, Diamond 1998, Hardisty 2000, Heath 2003).

Contextual Factors

Two historical shifts were instrumental in the rapid rise of the NR in the United States. One was the alliance of free market advocates and social conservatives, traditionally separate wings of U.S. conservatism. The other was the entry of large numbers of conservative Protestant evangelicals into secular political life.

Social and economic conservatives found common ground in the NR in part because of changes within the right itself. Social conservatives, especially in the South, had long embraced openly racist agendas that divided them from more libertarian free market conservatives. In the wake of the civil rights movement, however, white Southern political leaders were less inclined to explicitly support racial separation and white privilege. Instead, they espoused a discourse of freedom, rights, and individual liberty that nonetheless justified continued white economic and political dominance. The new rhetoric of Southern social conservatives cloaked racial politics as concern about federal intervention into local schools, residential patterns, and economic structures, an antigovernment message that resonated as well with supporters of free market economics (Crespino 2007, Kruse 2005, Lowndes 2008). Outside the South as well, social conservatives in the late twentieth century distanced themselves from extremists, rejecting overt forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism and forming coalitions with economic conservatives on issues such as crime, state spending, and patriotism (McGirr 2001).

The NR's growth was fueled too by the politicization of religious conservatives, especially evangelical Protestants. To a lesser extent, Catholics also became part of the NR, mostly in movements against abortion and LGBT rights. Once considered in decline in

postindustrial societies, religion became a powerful force for mobilizing new constituencies on the right in the 1980s as evangelical Christians sought to "evangelize and organize" by building pressure groups such as the Moral Majority and Focus on the Family (Jacobs 2006, p. 360). Ironically foreshadowing a later move by Islamic fundamentalists across the globe (Davidson 2003), this New Christian Right (NCR) decried the secularization of the West and urged a repoliticization of religion (Burack 2008, Fetner 2008). Despite evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell's claim that a "pervasive anti-Christian sentiment and religious intolerance" permeated U.S. society (quoted in Burack 2008, p. 111), the NCR grew dramatically in size, resources, and political strength through the 1990s. By supporting like-minded candidates for election, lobbying intensively for policy changes, and organizing rallies and protests, the NCR fought to wield moral authority through the state, bring Christian evangelical believers into positions of state power, and curb the actions and expressions of nonbelievers (Burack 2008, Smith 2001). NCR campaigns against secular and liberal influence in politics and cultural life ignited culture wars that raged for decades over issues as diverse as AIDS, sexually explicit art, and inner-city crime (Ansell 1997).

Mobilization Strategies

The NR was able to rapidly mobilize large numbers of grassroots activists, including those previously uninvolved in political life. How they did so has been the subject of considerable sociological interest. Two questions underlie much of this research. How did people become convinced that the agenda of the NR represented their interests? And how did the NR create a united movement with issues that ranged from states' rights and criminal sentencing to social welfare and family values (Lowndes 2008)? Sociological studies focus on three elements: culture, enemies, and gender.

Culture was a crucial factor in the NR's efforts to mobilize activists and set a

conservative agenda. Its music, family events, computer games, and amusement parks reached deep into mainstream America, bringing new social groups into politics (Diamond 1998). So did its media empire, which began with radio and extended to book publishing houses, bookstores, televangelist superstar preachers, and Internet social networking sites. Such cultural projects helped shape an identity for conservative evangelicals distinct from both mainline Protestantism and other evangelicals (Bartkowski 2004, Rogers & Goodwin 2008, Smith 2002).

Identification of enemies was another key to the success and growth of the NR. New enemies were needed to replace those that had become less relevant to conservatives, such as Soviet-era communists. Immigrants, liberals, working women, counterculturalists, abortion providers, welfare recipients, secular humanists, feminists, and later, global jihadists and Muslim terrorists became its new targets. A particular focus was sexual minorities (Burack 2008, Fetner 2008, Richardson 2006, Stein 2001). To some in the NR, sexual minorities were similar to Nazis and communists of the past. They were deviant and threatening, hidden, able to bring on chaos, powerful out of proportion to their numbers, and unstoppable unless confronted (Burack 2008). Others in the NR were more sympathetic, arguing for compassion toward gays and lesbians yet insisting that homosexuality was a deviant sexual practice (Burack 2008). Still others sought to distance themselves from the label of homophobic by arguing that they opposed homosexuality because gay men had been associated with World War II-era German Nazis (Durham 2000).

The NR's antigay efforts achieved notable victories. An antigay campaign in Cincinnati framed itself as opposing special rights for gays, while progay forces were bogged down in a confusing variety of symbols and rhetoric (Dugan 2005). In Oregon, a Citizen's Alliance stopped what it regarded as special status for gays, but ultimately widened public discussion of sexuality (Stein 2001). On a national level, the antigay movement won a number of legislative battles,

especially to prevent same-sex marriage, but also stimulated dramatic growth in membership and resources and the development of sophisticated tactics and campaign strategies by LGBT countermovements (Fetner 2008).

Not all antigay campaigns were successful, even in the short run. The ex-gay movement, which encouraged gay men and lesbians to return to their inherent heterosexuality by mimicking behavior it considered gender appropriate (Robinson & Spivey 2007), is an example. People who enrolled in ex-gay programs more often reported religious transformation than changes in sexual behavior or desire (Erzen 2006). More troubling for the antigay movement, it provided the opposing LGBT movement with a focus and model for advertising (Fetner 2005).

Gender, too, was key in the NR. Significant numbers of women were involved in conservative politics in earlier decades, such as the anti-women's suffrage movement, antiradicalism during the 1920s Red Scare, efforts to stop U.S. entry into World War II, and the anti-New Deal movement (Benowitz 2002, Marshall 1997, Nielsen 2001), and some of these women joined NR movements. Phyllis Schlafly, author of the widely read 1960s conservative tract, *A Choice, Not an Echo*, who became a leader in NR antifeminism, is an example (Critchlow 2005, Hardisty 2000, Schreiber 2008). The NR also brought significant numbers of women into conservative politics for the first time, especially religious evangelicals and suburban housewives; these women brought new tactics to the movement. Small groups of women assembling to write letters to politicians, for instance, created a model of kitchen table activism that became a mainstay of the NR (Hardisty 2001, McGirr 2001, Nielsen 2001).

Some conservative women worked primarily on economic issues. The Independent Women's Forum (IWF) was organized by supporters of the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court who saw the need for an institutional presence for women with conservative economic politics. The IWF

claimed to represent the interests of all women, but its members were largely socially well-connected, professional women. Its advocacy of economic self-sufficiency led the IWF to criticize federal regulation and social programs such as day care subsidies, violence against women laws, Title IX gender-equity measures, and broad claims of sexual harassment and workplace discrimination (Schreiber 2008).

NCR groups were more successful in attracting large numbers of grassroots activists, especially evangelical women. One of the largest, Concerned Women for America (CWA), was headed by Beverley LaHaye, wife of Moral Majority leader Tim LaHaye. Its dramatic growth reflected both its fusion of religion and gender politics and its avid embrace of the cultural trappings of modern politics. CWA conventions, according to one observer, were “bigger, more media savvy, more stage-produced, more fun, and more explicitly Christian” than the more stodgy gatherings of the Old Right (Hardisty 2000, p. 82). By opposing abortion, LGBT rights, U.S. funding for the United Nations, and stem cell research and by supporting the regulation of pornography, abstinence-based sex education, and prayer in public schools, CWA sought to “protect and promote biblical values among all citizens” (Schreiber 2008, p. 26).

RIGHT-WING MOVEMENTS

Right-wing movements in the United States openly and virulently embrace racism, anti-Semitism, and/or xenophobia and promote violence. They include long-standing racist movements such as the KKK; white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and white power skinhead groups; and racist and violent groups of nationalists and patriots (Gallaher 2004, McVeigh 2009, Zeskind 2009). Their historical orientations vary, with the KKK focused on the Confederacy of the Civil War era, neo-Nazis focused on World War II-era Nazi Germany, and nationalists/patriots focused on the 1776 American Revolution (Durham 2007). Their locations also vary, as the KKK is generally in the

South and Midwest, neo-Nazis across the country, and nationalists/patriots in the West and Southwest (Flint 2004a).

Most right-wing groups are viciously white supremacist and anti-Semitic, regarding nonwhites and Jews as inferior, destructive, and fearsome and seeking to preserve the power and privileges of white Aryans (Blee 2007b, Fredrickson 2002). Some are antielitist, populist, or even anticorporate (Berlet & Lyons 2000, Bhatia 2004, Zeskind 2009); others believe that invisible, powerful Jewish conspirators control the world’s economy and polity as well as the smallest details of daily life (Blee 2002, Durham 2000). Many regard whites as under attack and advocate the isolation or extermination of nonwhites and Jews by means of an apocalyptic race war (Berbrier 2000, 2002; Durham 2007; Vertigans 2007). These latter views are particularly prevalent among advocates of Christian Identity (CI), a racist pseudothology that regards Jews as the literal descendants of Satan and nonwhites as nonhuman (Barkun 1994, Gardell 2003). CI adherents reject traditional Christianity as overly influenced by Jews, and they tend to be atheist or follow precepts of Odinism, occultism, or paganism (Barkun 1994, Durham 2007, Gardell 2003).

Xenophobia is a long-standing characteristic of right-wing movements around the world (DeWitte 2006, Edelstein 2003, Fichter 2008, Giugni et al. 2005, Mudde 2005a). Historically, right-wing movements in the United States have been highly xenophobic and nationalist, working to stop immigration of nonwhites through law, force, and violence (Blee 1991, Flint 2004b, McVeigh 2009, Zeskind 2009). This may be changing with the spread of pan-Aryanism and the desire for transnational alliances with other white supremacists around the world (Daniels 2009). The nationalism of right-wing movements also is tempered by their antagonism to the U.S. government, which they describe as a Zionist Occupation Government that works on behalf of Jewish overlords to take away the rights and guns of white, Aryan citizens. Such ideas were solidified by episodes of disastrous violence between government agents

CI: Christian Identity

and citizens in the 1980s and 1990s, including a federal investigation of a residential compound in Waco, Texas, that ended in a siege in which 76 people died (Durham 2007, Vertigans 2007).

Violence is ubiquitous in right-wing movements as an action and/or a goal. Violence can be strategic, chosen among alternative tactical actions to achieve a goal, often by highly insular groups intently focused on their perceived enemies (Blee 2002, Crenshaw 1992, J. Goodwin 2006, Payne 2000). Strategic violence is targeted at enemy groups, such as Jews, racial minorities, or federal government installations. Other right-wing violence is more performative. Performative violence binds together its practitioners in a common identity, as when white power skinheads enact bloody clashes with other skinhead groups and each other (Blee 2002).

Contextual Factors

A number of studies examine how context matters for right-wing movements (Brustein 1996, Karapin 2007, McVeigh & Sikkink 2005, Soule & Van Dyke 2002, Widfeldt 2004). These generally stress competition/threat or opportunity as critical in right-wing mobilization.

Economic competition and threat are commonly studied in right-wing mobilization, at least in part because of their importance in the rise of German Nazism, often regarded as a prototype of right-wing mobilization. In the United States, national economic cycles do not correlate strongly with right-wing activity, although studies on a subnational level have found links between right-wing activity and economic conditions. In Indiana in the 1920s, for example, the KKK grew in areas dominated by corn farming, reflecting its support for government aid to farmers and opposition to high tariffs, big business, and labor unions (McVeigh et al. 2004). In the 1990s, right-wing patriot and militia groups appeared more often in places that were losing jobs, especially in farming and manufacturing sectors (Soule & Van Dyke 2002).

Right-wing activity can also emerge in response to threat and competition posed by the changing racial composition of a population. In the 1920s, the KKK was most popular among whites in areas with increasing populations of immigrants, African Americans, and Catholics, all targets of the Klan (McVeigh et al. 2004). Studies of today's right-wing movements find mixed results. Several find that racist groups or racist events are more likely when the population of racial minorities in an area is increasing, but the effect of the proportion of nonwhites in a population on racist activity is inconsistent (Beck 2000, Soule & Van Dyke 2002). In areas with proportionately high nonwhite populations, however, those with less racial integration are more likely to have racist groups perhaps because nonwhites are regarded by whites both as threatening and as strangers (McVeigh & Sikkink 2005).

Right-wing mobilization also responds to political opportunities. In the 1920s, political realignment spurred the growth of the KKK, which could point to the declining electoral influence of white native-born Protestant men in the face of women's enfranchisement and the surge in immigration (McVeigh 2009). Perceptions of a decline in the political influence of white male citizens have provided similar opportunities for right-wing groups in the United States in recent years (Gallaher 2004, Zeskind 2009).

Mobilization Strategies

What motivates people to join right-wing movements? One set of explanations focuses on the conditions that make people receptive to right-wing ideas and the trajectories that lead them into right-wing movements. "Pre-disposing risk factors" (Horgan 2008) include social class background, family environment, trouble in school, and neighborhood racial conflict (DeWitte 2006, Fangen 1999, Linden & Klandermans 2007, Milo 2005, Vertigans 2007). Another set of explanations emphasizes the importance of particular settings in right-wing mobilization. White power music

concerts and street clashes between racist and antiracist skinhead groups bring young people into contact with right-wing activists, sometimes for the first time. Neighborhood crime prevention meetings, environmental groups, gun shows, and prisons serve the same purpose for older women and men (Blazak 2001, Blee 2002, Durham 2007, Kimmel 2007, Virchow 2007). Studies vary regarding whether right-wing beliefs are the cause or the effect of right-wing activity. In some, people are assumed to join right-wing movements to act upon their rightist ideas. In others, people adopt right-wing ideologies by taking part in right-wing activity (Blee 2002, Lowndes 2008, Munson 2008).

Three aspects of mobilization into right-wing movements are the focus of much new scholarship. One is the increasing use of alternative media, a term generally identified with leftist movements (Atton 2006). Right-wing groups create virtual communities through Web sites, blogs, social networking sites, chat rooms, and online discussion boards (Adams & Roscigno 2005, Burris et al. 2000, Daniels 2009, Gerstenfeld 2003, Levin 2002, Reid & Chen 2007, Simi & Futrell 2006). These serve several purposes. Some researchers claim that right-wing groups use virtual means, especially the Internet, to recruit new members. Others argue that only personal contact can bring people into movements that are hidden from public view (Gerstenfeld 2003, Vertigans 2007). In any case, the Internet certainly has allowed right-wing movements to distribute propaganda to supporters and the general public. Right-wing sites often visually mimic more mainstream sites to make them familiar to viewers, while infusing racist and/or xenophobic rhetoric into their messages (Daniels 2009, Futrell et al. 2006, Gerstenfeld 2003).

Virtual means such as the Internet provide anonymity for movements that promote hate speech and violent actions. Interactive online forums allow people to be involved in radical or extremist movements with little risk to their reputations, jobs, or family relationships (Simi & Futrell 2009). They also permit

contact among right-wing activists that would otherwise be difficult because of geographical distance or fear of being observed and prosecuted (Blee 2002, Futrell et al. 2006, Gerstenfeld 2003, Levin 2002, Reid & Chen 2007).

Furthermore, virtual communities offer a sense of belonging, companionship, and social support networks (Gerstenfeld 2003, Simi & Futrell 2006). Because mainstream media tend to portray right-wing movements negatively, right-wing activists create virtual communities to control their images (Gerstenfeld 2003, Simi & Futrell 2009). In interactive forums, such as blogs and discussion boards, users shape “virtual identities,” which are “people’s online performances of who they want others to think they are” (Anahita 2006, pp. 143–44).

A second focus of new scholarship on right-wing mobilization is the subcultural scenes that surround white power skinhead and neo-Nazi movements (Futrell et al. 2006, Milo 2005, Minkenberg 2003, Mudde 2005a, Pankowski & Kornak 2005, Varga 2008). These scenes revolve heavily, but not exclusively, around music and media. Activists, bands, media and music fans (who are not necessarily activists, but may be sympathizers), and networks of their friends cluster in performance places, bars and coffee houses, radio stations, ‘zines, newspapers, and virtual communities that are, at least temporarily identified as right-wing spaces (Futrell et al. 2006). For committed activists, such scenes sustain involvement by creating fun experiences that vitalize their involvement. For younger, newer activists, these scenes revitalize a movement that may seem outdated (Futrell et al. 2006, p. 297). For fans and sympathizers, scenes are a low-risk way to be involved in right-wing movements, one that does not require as much time or commitment as planning demonstrations or producing media. They can also provide entrée into more committed forms of activism (Eyerman 2002, Futrell et al. 2006). Music and media scenes also create international links between movements through media distribution and concerts (Čačl & Wollmann 2005, Pankowski & Kornak 2005).

Scenes draw upon “particular cultural attitudes and emotions [to] draw participants into shared understandings of music, politics, lifestyle, and associated symbols” (Futrell et al. 2006, p. 276). They are free spaces where activists are encouraged to present themselves as white power activists or skinheads, which might be discouraged in other social contexts such as work or school (Fangen 1999, Futrell & Simi 2004, Futrell et al. 2006, Simi & Futrell 2009). In scenes, symbols of belonging are expressed through style. For racist skinheads, the markers of racist style include behaviors (Nazi salutes), appearance (shaved heads), body art (swastika tattoos), musical tastes (white power hardcore), and language (racial slurs). By such display, racist activists convey their authenticity (Brown 2004, Cooter 2006, Simi & Futrell 2009).

A third focus of scholarship on right-wing mobilization is the increasing participation of women in such movements (Blee 2002; Cunningham 2003, 2008; Ness 2008c). Although not historically unprecedented (Blee 1991), the incorporation of women into right-wing movements, including those that use violence, is somewhat surprising. Right-wing propaganda commonly depicts women as nonpolitical, as mothers and wives who support activist men and nurture their families, nations, and race (Bedi 2006, Lesselier 2002). Moreover, right-wing movements are generally highly masculinized, with all-male leaderships and a strong culture of white male dominance that excludes women (Anahita 2006, Ferber 2000, Ferber & Kimmel 2004, Hamm 2002, Vertigans 2007).

Despite the barriers, women are joining right-wing movements in increasing numbers worldwide, including in the United States. Why they do so is not fully understood. Studies from other countries suggest that women are mobilized into right-wing movements when their male intimates are threatened with economic harm (Bedi 2006) or when women feel victimized as women by external and racialized enemies (Sehgal 2007). The limited data on women in U.S. right-wing movements suggest a somewhat different pattern. U.S. women

generally enter right-wing movements by being recruited to work for seemingly mainstream causes such as school quality or community safety (Blee 2002).

Once mobilized, women face a complicated gender environment in right-wing movements. Despite their increasing numbers, right-wing men still view their women comrades as motivated by familial or maternal responsibilities and emotions rather than by ideological zeal (Lesselier 2002, Ness 2008b). In some movements, overt conflicts have erupted over the place of women (Blee 2002, Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 2004, Durham 2007). An analysis of an online skinhead community, for instance, found a widespread sentiment that true skinheads are hypermasculine, heterosexual men with shaved heads; questions in the online forum about whether or not women could be involved in skinhead scenes were dismissed because “only men are skinheads” (Anahita 2006, p. 153). Other studies find women skinheads who regard men as simply accessories to the cause of white power (Blee 2002, Milo 2005).

METHODS

Scholarship on the right faces unusual challenges of data and analysis. In contrast to progressive movements to which scholars often have access through personal contacts or their own participation, many rightist movements are so far from the political experiences of most scholars as to be “mysterious, frightening and irrational” (Wintrobe 2002, p. 23). They can be difficult to understand with categories and logic of analysis used for other social movements (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle 2000, Minkowitz 1998, Sehgal 2007). Rightist movements also are difficult to access. Even moderate conservative activists often regard researchers with skepticism, fearing that their projects will be depicted unsympathetically. Extremists want to hide their identities and obscure the activities and goals of their movements, wary of arrest or of being attacked by antiracist activists. Moreover, researchers who deal directly with rightist activists struggle to establish empathy

and rapport without implying sympathy for the goals or tactics of these movements (Berezin 2007; Blee 2007a, 1993; Sehgal 2009; Team Members 2006).

Scholars of the right, especially those who collect data through fieldwork, face a variety of physical risks. In highly confrontational groups such as fascists and racial/ethnic extremists, violence is often a possibility (Blee 2003, Sehgal 2009, Virchow 2007). The threat is not only from extremists themselves; simply attending right-wing gatherings “may be enough to make a researcher a target of counter-demonstrators, law enforcement activity or at risk of retaliation from other groups in society” (Jipson & Litton 2004, p. 156).

There are ethical dilemmas as well. Researchers are obliged to protect the privacy of those they study, but this is complicated when subjects are involved in illegal or violent activities. Whether such activists understand the legal consequences they might face from being studied is a concern, as are the issues of whether scholarship might publicize or even promote socially harmful groups (Blee 1998, Blee & Vining 2010, Cunningham 2004, Sehgal 2009).

Although covert research is uncommon today because of institutional review board regulations and ethical codes, scholars of right-wing groups commonly wrestle with the limits of self-disclosure in field research. A scholar of the Hindu far right in India reflected that her fieldwork was neither completely overt nor fully covert but based on “partial disclosure and partial secrecy” (Sehgal 2009, p. 336). Scholars of less extreme rightist groups face similar issues. A researcher of the antigay movement in Oregon, concerned about the effect that her identity as a Jewish lesbian might have on her study, decided not to reveal her identity unless directly asked (Stein 2001).

As a result of such problems, much scholarship on right-wing movements either focuses on the external conditions that nurture them or relies on publicly available information from Web sites, newspaper accounts, reports of antiracist organizations and government authorities, or the speeches and written propaganda of

self-proclaimed spokespersons of those groups (MJ Goodwin 2006). Data published by rightist groups are useful for understanding their self-presentation to outsiders but can be misleading as indicators of the beliefs or motives of activists (Blee 2002, 2005; Durham 2000).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the voluminous scholarship on U.S. rightist movements in recent years, there are significant gaps and opportunities for future research. One is the relationship of right-wing movements to the spaces, networks, and subcultures that surround them. There is considerable research on how conservative movements build on mainstream cultural and social life by organizing through churches or civic groups. To date, there are few studies of this dynamic among right-wing movements, although studies of Europe suggest that extremists recruit members and spread ideologies through a variety of social arenas, including those that are ostensibly nonpolitical. For example, European racist skinheads contribute to the violence of sports hooliganism with racist songs and chants at soccer matches (Milo 2005, Pankowski & Kornak 2005). In Germany, the right wing has made inroads into mainstream culture with Nazi-esque lyrics and violent references to Hitler in the music of mainstream hip-hop artists (Putnam & Littlejohn 2007). There is some evidence of comparable practices in the United States, such as racist skinheads who attend NASCAR auto races and other gatherings of whites they regard as likely to be receptive to their message (Cooter 2006). Whether such practices are widespread or increasing among right-wing groups is unknown. More broadly, more study is required of how right-wing movements draw from, and themselves shape, their social and cultural environments to serve political agendas.

Second, there is a need for more research on global connections among rightist movements. Significant right-wing movements exist in many places, from neo-Nazis in Western

Europe and the former Soviet Union (Eatwell 2004) to far-right Hindu nationalists in India (Basu & Roy 2007), but the extent to which these are linked across nations and continents is unclear. Certainly, right-wing movements are connected across borders through ideas broadcast on the Internet. But is there much actual collaboration among these movements? Some studies point to regional cooperation on the right such as when Eastern European skinhead groups stage white power concerts to raise funds and recruit members (Milo 2005, Pankowski & Kornak 2005). More research is required to assess the scope of such transnational efforts, including the circulation of money and weapons through right-wing networks. Additional studies also are needed on the globalization of conservative movements, especially given new efforts by the U.S. Christian Right to develop transnational religious alliances (Butler 2006).

A third valuable avenue for research is the relationship between U.S. right-wing movements and institutional politics. Studies of the European right find right-wing movements and parties to be synergistic, each facilitating the other (Art 2006, Berezin 2009, Mudde 2005a). In Russia, right-wing organizations, parties, and skinheads are connected through an implicit division of labor in which parties and organizations promote and instigate violent attacks on their enemies, which skinheads then carry out (Varga 2008). In several Latin American nations, uncivil movements use both violence and the institutions of democracy to secure their demands (Payne 2000). The extent to which right-wing movements in the United States similarly intersect with conservative electoral politics is not clear.

New avenues for research on the U.S. right also can be found in the extensive literature on rightist movements and parties in Europe that points to the importance of nonactivist sympathizers in bolstering the right (Berezin 2009). Research in areas of eastern Germany finds that significant minorities of young people support

the ideas and violent tactics of the right wing even if they are not committed participants (Art 2006, Miller-Idriss 2009). Similarly, rightist parties such as Le Pen's National Front in France and Haider's Freedom Party in Austria have found support among voters who do not regard themselves as rightists but nonetheless support the party's overt racist and xenophobic appeals (Art 2006). Findings such as these suggest that rightist movements can build on the overlap between their agendas and the beliefs of subpopulations of general citizens (Sniderman & Hagendoorn 2007); whether a similar situation is developing in the United States merits more study.

Finally, future studies of the right could be enriched by greater attention to two research literatures: those on terrorism and those on religion. Since the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the study of terrorism has expanded dramatically. Despite the growing tendency of some right-wing groups to adopt the organization, goals, and strategies that are commonly associated with terrorism, however, studies of the right make little use of the findings and concepts of terrorist studies (Blazak 2001, Blee 2005, and Hamm 2002 are exceptions). In particular, work on the strategic use of terrorism and political violence could be useful for studies of the right (Turk 2004, J. Goodwin 2006). Research in the sociology of religion, too, could benefit studies of the right because religions, like social movements, seek to establish alternative institutions and value systems. Literatures on religion and social movements have been used together in some studies of recent Islamic movements (Snow & Byrd 2007, Sutton & Vertigans 2006, Wiktorowicz 2005), but these efforts are complicated by the assumptions of democracy, autonomy, and civil society in social movement theory (Bayat 2007). Nonetheless, more attention to the dynamics of religious commitment and belief, particularly as these undergo change, could prove valuable for studies of the right.

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