

## Extreme right and populism: a frame analysis of extreme right wing discourses in Italy and Germany

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# **Extreme Right and Populism**

A Frame Analysis of Extreme Right Wing  
Discourses in Italy and Germany

Manuela Caiani and Donatella della Porta



INSTITUT FÜR HÖHERE STUDIEN  
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

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# **Extreme Right and Populism**

## A Frame Analysis of Extreme Right Wing Discourses in Italy and Germany

Manuela Caiani and Donatella della Porta

July 2010

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Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share “work in progress” before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department’s teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

## **Abstract**

This paper addresses the interactions between the extreme right and populism, looking at right wing discourses in Italy and Germany, focusing on different types of extreme right organizations (political parties, violent subcultural/young right wing groups, and political movements), and adopting a social movement perspective. Through a frame analysis conducted on several types of organizational documents (newspapers, websites, online guest books and forums, and other forms of publications), covering a period from 2000-2006, for a total of 4000 frames, it explores empirically the aspect of the conceptualization of the populism by the extreme right, showing the bridging of the appeal to the people with some traditional frames of the extreme right, such as nativism and authoritarianism, and stressing how the central populist frames (the people versus the elite) are linked to the extreme right definition of the 'us' and the 'them', when developing diagnoses, prognoses and motivations to action. A political opportunity and discursive approach will be useful in explaining the different configurations of populist frames depending on country and organizational type.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Interaktion zwischen Rechtsextremismus und Populismus durch eine Analyse rechter Diskurse in Italien und Deutschland. Die Studie fokussiert sich auf verschiedene Typen von rechtsextremen Organisationen (politische Parteien, gewalttätige subkulturelle/junge rechtsextreme Gruppierungen und politische Bewegungen) aus der Perspektive der sozialen Bewegungsforschung. Anhand einer Frame-Analyse diverser Dokumente (Zeitungen, Internetseiten, Online-Gästebücher und -Foren sowie andere Veröffentlichungen) wird über einen Zeitraum von 2000 bis 2006 für insgesamt 4000 Frames empirisch erforscht, wie die extreme Rechte Populismus konzeptionalisiert. Dabei wird die Verbindung von Bürgeraufrufen mit traditionellen Begrifflichkeiten der extremen Rechten wie Nativismus und Autoritarismus dargestellt und herausgestrichen, wie zentrale Populismus-Frames (die einfachen Leute gegen die Elite) mit rechtsextremen Definitionen von „wir“ und „die anderen“ verlinkt sind, wenn Diagnosen, Prognosen und Handlungsmotivationen entwickelt werden. Diskursive Ansätze und die Analyse politischer Gelegenheitsstrukturen erscheinen als geeignet, um die je nach Land und Organisationstyp unterschiedliche Konfigurationen populistischer Frames zu erklären.

## **Keywords / Schlagwörter**

Right wing extremism, Italy and Germany, Frame analysis, Populism  
Rechtsextremismus, Italien und Deutschland, Frame Analysis, Populismus

**General note on content**

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the IHS Department of Political Science

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## 1. Extreme right and populism: an introduction

Populism and the extreme right have been discussed, sometimes as interrelated syndromes, in various (academic and political) interpretations of nowadays challenges to liberal democracies (e.g. Ignazi 1997, Mény and Surel 2002). In his book on the *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cas Mudde writes that ‘the populist radical right is the only successful new party family in Europe’ (2007, 1). Even though its presence is discontinuous in time, heterogeneous in space and all together relatively weak—slightly rising in Western Europe from 6.5% of electoral support in average in the 1980s to 8.3% in the 1990s (Wilcox et al. 2003), with similar scores also in Eastern Europe (Mudde 2007, 2)—its main (negative) effects have been singled out in their capacity to spread xenophobic and populist positions in the European party systems (Art 2007).

In this paper, we address the interactions between the extreme right and populism, with some descriptive, some theoretical and some methodological aims in mind, looking at right wing discourses in Italy and Germany. From the empirical point of view, research on the populist extreme right has focused on political parties (and often on the most successful ones), ‘leaving aside highly important developments within non party organizations and subcultures’ (Mudde 2007, 5). Our research includes instead non party organizations and subcultural groups. A first aim is to see to which extent the ‘populist’ elements found in right-wing political parties are present also in non-party organizations.

From the theoretical point of view, we shall address these issues adopting and adapting some main concepts coming from social movement studies. Recent academic attempts to define the (new) extreme right have tended to shift attention from ‘old’ fascism to ‘new populism’. ‘Old’ extreme right referring to Fascism has been identified with ultra-nationalism, the myth of decadence, the myth of rebirth and conspiracy theories (Eatwell 2003, Merkl 1997, Ignazi 1997, Nolte 1966). Today populism is considered as a main trait of the extreme right, together with nativism (combining nationalism and racism) and authoritarianism (Mudde 2007, 11-31; Dietmar 2009). Populism has been conceptualized as a political *rhetoric*, that appeals to ‘the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment’ (Abt and Rummens 2007, 407), or an *ideology*, ‘that considers society to be ultimately separated in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* (general will) of the people’ (Mudde 2004, 543). Specific elements are the references to antagonistic relations between the people and the elite; the idea of restoring popular sovereignty; a conception of the people as a homogeneous body (Norocel 2009). In our research we made use of a concept developed especially (but not exclusively), in social movement studies: *interpretative frame*. Following Erwin Goffman, frames are defined as cognitive instruments that allow making sense of the external reality (Snow and Benford 1988). As Snow and Byrd (2007) have recently observed,

ideology is too monolithic a concept to address the broad ideological variations among different groups, and lacks of the flexibility required in order to link ideas, actions and events. In particular, *diagnostic* frames allow for the conversion of a phenomenon into a social problem, potentially the object of collective action (Snow et al. 1986); *prognosis* framing also involves the suggestion of future developments that could solve the identified problems; and motivational frames are needed to produce the *motivations* and the incentives needed for action. In order to convince individuals to act, frames 'must generalize a certain problem or controversy, showing the connections with other events or with the condition of other social groups; and also demonstrate the relevance of a given problem to individual life experiences. Along with the critique of dominant representations of order and of social patterns, interpretative frames must therefore produce new definitions of the foundations of collective solidarity, to transform actors' identity in a way which favours action' (della Porta and Diani 2006). In doing these, framing processes allow for the definition of the self and the opponents, in short for the definition of the 'us' and the 'them' category (Tilly 2003, 139).

In this paper, we shall address empirically the question of the conceptualization of the *populism* by the *extreme right* by investigating the bridging of the appeal to the people with some traditional frames of the extreme right, such as nativism and authoritarianism. We will do that by analyzing how the central populist frames (the people versus the elite) are linked to the extreme right definition of the 'us' and the 'them', when developing diagnoses, prognoses and motivations to action.

Social movement studies will also be useful in developing some explanatory hypotheses about the presence and characteristics of populist frames in the discourse of the extreme right. Typically, explanations for the development of populism have stressed the negative consequences of economic globalization, in terms of the mobilization of the 'losers' as well as ethnic competition (Rydgren 2005), political discontent towards liberal democracies that have emphasized constitutional counterweights over electoral accountability (Mény and Surel 2002), but also a mix of modernization crisis, insecurity and authoritarian legacy (Mudde 2007). Without denying the presence of grievances, social movement studies tend however to give more leverage to the capacity of social movement actors to adapt to contextual resources and constraints. Particularly relevant for a study focusing on frames is the analysis of the discursive opportunities and constraints, that is the 'political-cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be 'legitimate' by the audience' (Kriesi 2004, 72). Instrumentally or culturally, collective actors would tend to make their discourses resonant in the publics they want to address, by bridging (i.e. linking) their own traditional frames with those present in the environment (Snow and Benford 1986). For similar reasons, we expect however a resilience of the historical discourse of the extreme rights, as this would define which frames can resonate better with deep-rooted traditions. In our cross-national comparison, we hypothesize that the populist frames of the extreme right involve more of a criticism of the corruption of the political elites in Italy, where the wounds of the

political scandals of the early 1990s are not healed yet than in Germany, where we expect to find a stronger emphasis on the (racial) definition of the people. Beyond this, however, we also expect organizational framing to be constrained not only by the general cultures in which extreme groups develop, but also by the organizations' own culture. In developing their frames, organizations try in fact to make their discourses appealing for different circles of potential supporters—the culture of which therefore constrains the range of potentially useful arguments. On the basis of the existing literature (Zimmermann 2003, Merkl 1997), we can expect to find different configurations of frames concerning the concept of populism, depending on the type of right wing organizations. In particular, we expect to find some differences between political parties, even of an extreme type, and subcultural groups, with a more 'political' type of populism among extreme right political parties and a more 'militant' and 'elitist' one in the non party subcultural organizations.

Focusing on the meso, organizational level, we will describe the discourses of some selected extreme right organizations, chosen from the political party and non party extreme right milieu, applying frame analysis to the written production of these different types of organizations in each country. Inspired by Franzosi's (2004) idea about a (story) grammar (taking into account subject-action-object-connections), we have devised a coding scheme which allows us to relate every diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frame to the relevant identity or oppositional actors and the issue area the frame deals with.

After having discussed, in the next part, our methodological choices (section 2), we shall explore the extreme right wing discourse, looking in particular at the role played by the categories 'the people' and the politicians, the way they are pictured, the issues, the main allies and opponents they are related to. We will suggest that in the frames of the extreme right, there is a rather *exclusive* vision of the people, which refers to a strongly *hierarchical and elitist* conception of the society. Indeed, not only corrupt political elites but also other groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, political adversaries, supranational actors) are excluded from this conception of 'the people' (section 3). The specificities of the usage of the 'populist' paradigm by extreme right organizations will be analyzed and linked to other issues of their discourse. The conceptual homogeneity of 'the people', the dichotomous relationship between 'the people' and 'the elites', and the concept of popular sovereignty and subsequently that of charismatic leadership are scrutinized, underlining similarities and differences between various extreme right groups (section 4). In the conclusion (section 5), we discuss the concept of populism, arguing that it can be interpreted as a 'frame', which can be present at a different extent and with different characteristics in various groups and movements. Only in some of them it becomes a 'meta-frame', which bridges different frames, discourses and issues (such as patriotism, traditions, etc., on this point see Mény and Surel 2000).

## 2. Research design, method and sources

Within a ‘most similar research design’ (Przeworski and Teune 1970), we look at the extreme right in Italy and Germany, two countries that share an authoritarian past, but also show some differences in the political and discursive opportunities (Koopmans and Statham, 1999), that we assume have an influence on the populist frames. Italy has been the first European country in the last 50 years, in which the extreme right reached a full political and institutional recognition, with the stable presence in the center-right governments after 1994 (Caldiron 2001, 15). In Germany, the extreme right is completely marginalized, it has never entered the national Parliament, if not at the sub-national level in some electoral occasions, and there is a high level of public sensitivity towards the issue of right-wing extremism, which is broadly stigmatized as unacceptable (Kersten 2004, 186). Not only the ‘degree of acceptance’ of the extreme right is different in the two countries, but the (favorable) opportunity structure for the extreme right in Italy has also been related to the political crisis of 1992–1994 ‘when the clientelistic rule by parties—the *partitocrazia*—dominated by the CD (Christian Democrats) since the late 1940s’ resulted in the *tangentopoli* corruption scandal (Fella and Ruzza 2006, 180; Baldini 2001, 2). As for the cultural context of German right-wing extremism, this cannot be discussed without a reference to the German Nazism past (Wagemann 2006). Right-wing extremists promote an ‘exclusively ethnic understanding of the German nation’ (Minkenberg 2002, 264, Wagemann 2006).

For the frame analysis of written documents of selected extreme right organizations in Italy and Germany, we have used a formalized codebook. Our unit of analysis (the statement) was broken down in the following analytical categories: ‘subject actor’, ‘issue field’, ‘action’, ‘object actor’ and ‘ally actor’. Around 200 pre-defined categories were used in the codebook for the variable ‘type of actor’ of the statement (e.g. domestic politician, Green political party, union, etc.)<sup>1</sup>. The differentiation between ‘subject actors’, ‘object actors’, and ‘ally actors’ mainly refers to the grammatical position of an actor within a syntax; ‘ally actors’ are those actors who are mentioned as supporters of the ‘subject actors’. For the ‘subject’, ‘object’ and ‘ally’ categories we also coded a further going specification (e.g. the name of the extreme right group) or description (the so called ‘linguistic qualifiers’, such as adjectives or adverb(ial)s). As for the variable issue field we identified 76 possible issue sub-fields of the discourse of the extreme right organizations (e.g. economy, politics, etc.), tested through a pre-test. Furthermore, for the ‘action’ dimension, a category (‘is’/‘will’/‘should’ category) was

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<sup>1</sup> The categories from 100 to 499 were used for those actors who are part of the identity frame of the right-wing activists (‘us’), differentiating further between ‘more proximate’ and ‘more remote identities’: the peer group itself (actors 100 – 199) (e.g. ‘skinheads’, ‘extreme right political parties’, ‘generic references to extreme right individuals’, etc.), the wider (racial, national and social) groups to which the activists belong (actors 200 – 399) (e.g. ‘the occidental’, ‘the Europeans’ or ‘the Nordic race’, etc.), and ‘unwilling testimonies’ (399-499), e.g., judges, media, etc. Similarly, the categories from 500 to 999 were used to codify the oppositional actors of the discourse. They are: (500-599) ethnic ‘adversaries’ of the extreme right (e.g. foreigners, immigrants, etc.); (600- 699) social (e.g., the homeless, homosexuals, etc.); (700- 799) domestic political actors; (800-899) international and foreign political actors; (900- 999) other societal actors (e.g. business, mass media, the Churches, etc.).

used, which was recorded if the statement described a situation in the present (or the past); if it made a forecast for the future; or if it was an (explicit or implicit) call for action—thus referring to the three stages of the process of framing.

In the selection of the sources for our analysis we aimed at covering the different types of organizations that, in the two countries, compose the extreme right, choosing, in each country: a political party, a political neofascist/neonazi organization and a subcultural skin-head group. Taking into account relevant constraints in terms of accessibility of sources, in Germany we have selected: the party newspaper of the NPD (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), the *Deutsche Stimme*, because of its recent growing success in German elections; the online guestbook of the NBD political movement (*Nationales Bündnis Dresden*), and the documents on the websites of two *Kameradschaften*. In Italy, we have selected: the newspaper *Foglio di Lotta* of the party *Forza Nuova*, which is broadly recognized as the most rapidly growing right-wing extremist party currently in Italy (Caldiron 2001); the online discussion forum *Camerata Virtuale* of a network of political groups; and the magazine *L'Inferocito* of the skinhead organization *Veneto Fronte Skinhead*, that is the main, still active and oldest organization representative of the skinhead movement in Italy (EUMC 2004: 15). Selected years (according to the availability of sources) from 2001 to 2006 were coded from the chosen sources. In particular, we analyzed the '*Foglio di lotta*', '*l'Inferocito*' and the *Deutsche Stimme* from 2001 to 2006. For these sources, we sampled four issues per year for the Italian sources, two issues per year for the German one. All articles in the first three pages of the paper were checked<sup>2</sup>. We analyzed the online Italian forum of discussion *Camerata Virtuale* and the NBD guestbook for all the contributions which were possible to find in the years 2005 and 2006, and the German websites as of late 2006<sup>3</sup>. The *frame analysis* is based on a total number of around 4000 statements (2460 for Italy, 1353 for Germany)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> This resulted in a sample of 623 articles for the Italian case and 402 for the German case, which constituted the texts for our frame analysis.

<sup>3</sup> For the two online sources (the forum of discussion and the guest book), all contributions found were taken as texts for the frame analysis, without sampling. The length of the articles found in the newspaper and magazine sources could vary from 1 to 3 columns, whereas the contributions in the on line forum and guest book on line could vary from 1 to several sentences.

<sup>4</sup> Abbreviations for documents' sources: (Italy) FN = Forza Nuova; VFS = Veneto Fronte Skinhead; CV = Camerata Virtuale; (Germany) NPD = National Democratic party of Germany; NBD = Nationales Bündnis Dresden; Kam = Kameradschaften.

### 3. The elitist populism of the extreme right: the ‘people’ in the discourse of extreme right organizations

Definitions of the populist discourse generally converge in seeing as a core aspect of populism the attempt to create a direct connection between ‘the people’ and the political power, bypassing the electoral process (Ruzza 2009). Indeed, people aspirations are seen as betrayed by corrupt political elites (Ruzza and Rydgren 2008, 1). According to the populist paradigm, politics should be an expression of the *volontée general* of the people (Mudde 2004, Rydgren 2007). Consequently, the charismatic leader is the one who embodies the will of the people and is able to speak on its behalf.

If the concept of populism refers to a direct relationship between the ‘pure’ people and the leader (against the ‘corrupt’ elite), it seems crucial to reflect about (a) who is the ‘pure’ people in extreme right wing vision of the society and (b) which is the kind of relations the extreme right sees between the people and the leader. Therefore, who are the people according to the extreme right? And who is the leader? Finally, and most importantly, what is the relation between the people and the leader in the discourse of extreme right organizations? This is what, investigating the frames in written documents of right wing extremist organizations in Italy and Germany, we are going to explore in this section.

Politics is a very prominent issue in the discourse of the extreme right in both countries and without strong differences between the different types of organization (if not for a minor interest in politics for subcultural groups in Germany). Political issues (including sub-topics such as the institutional system; the role of the state; political party competition; corruption, etc.) are treated in one fifth (19.8%) and almost one third (29.6%) of all the codified statements in Italy and Germany<sup>5</sup>. When looking at which are the main identity and oppositional frames that the extreme right organizations use in order to construct their identity and the universe of their ‘allies’ and ‘enemies’ (tab.1), a clear picture emerges from our data which characterizes the ‘pure’ people as an exclusive (in terms of ethno-national characteristics) and a not pluralist (in terms of pluralism of opinions) category.

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<sup>5</sup> Political issues are present in about 19-20% of statements found in the documents of all three different extreme right organizations in Italy. In Germany, they are present in 33-39% of all statements coded in the discourse of the political party and movement organizations and in 16% of cases for the skinhead sources.

Table 1. The 10 most quoted actors (identity and oppositional frames) in the documents of the Italian and German extreme right

Germany			Italy		
rank	Actor	%	rank	actor	%
1	'us' ('we')	5.4	1	The domestic political class	6.4
2	NPD	5.3	2	The European Union	4.5
3	The people	4.2	3	The immigrants	4.2
4	The Germans	3.4	4	The USA	4.0
5	The politicians	3.3	5	'them'	3.2
6	Political parties	3.0	6	Italy	3.1
7	Individual CDU politicians	2.9	7	The people	2.9
8	Individual SPD politicians	2.8	8	Forza Nuova	2.7
9	Foreigners	2.8	9	Corporate actors from the business world and banks	2.7
10	Mass Media	2.2	10	The Italians	2.4
	All 10 first actors	35.3		All 10 first actors	36.1
	(N=1353)	100%		(N=2460)	100%

First of all, we see that, in *the populist approach of the extreme right*, the category the 'people' represents in both countries an important component of the identity frames of these organizations, being, among 200 categories of actors, the third, and the seventh most frequently quoted actor—no matter if as subject, object, or ally of the subject—respectively in Germany and Italy (accounting for 4.2% and 2.9% of all codified statements). In the Italian case, the 'people' is equally prominent in the discourse of the political party group (representing the eighth most recurring actor category in its documents, 3.2% of statements) and of the subcultural skinhead organizations (being the tenth most important actor category, with 3.7% of statements), while it plays a slightly less important role in the discourse of the political movement group (accounting for 1.2% of statements coded in its documents).



Differently, in the German case, the identity category 'the people' is more emphasized in the political extreme right (parliamentary and extra parliamentary, recurring in 4.8% and 5.3% of statements respectively in the political party and political movement documents), than in the discourse of subcultural organizations (being only the eleventh most important category in the documents of the *Kameradschaften*, with 2.3% of statements).

Together with the 'people', other specific categories of more 'proximate' and more 'remote' actors are quoted among the most important identity frames of the extreme right groups—offering some further suggestions to clarify who they (people) really are. They all are categories of actors *territorially-ethnically* and *culturally* specified. The similarities between Germany and Italy are striking in this respect. In the discourse of the German extreme right they are the categories 'we'/us' (referring to the extreme right itself) (5.4% of all statements), the 'NPD' (5.3%), 'the people' (4.2%) and 'the Germans' (3.4%) for Germany. They are 'Italy' (3.1%), 'the Italians' (2.4%), 'the people' (2.9%) and 'Forza Nuova' itself (2.7%) in the Italian extreme right discourse. This suggests that these categories of actors form a cluster of identity frames in the conceptual map of right wing discourse.

Many other frames stress the *exclusive character of the people*. In the discourse of the German extreme right, for example, the people are mainly characterized as those who 'want to be Germans also in the future' (NPD, July 2005), that is, 'they do not want to be deprived of their (national) identity' (NBD, May 2006). In the Italian right wing discourses, a number of expressions put emphasis on the national identity of 'the people', 'who are characterized by Italian culture and traditions' (FN, September 2003). In sum, it appears from our data that extreme right groups, in both countries, refer to ethno-national characteristics to identify the people with the (ethnic) nation. Thirdly, we see also that, if it is true that the political elites are, in both countries, the main oppositional actors in the discourse of the extreme right organizations analyzed (the 'domestic political class' is mentioned in 6.4% of all codified statements in Italy; the 'politicians' in 3.3% of all codified statements in Germany), however, the opponents of the extreme right and the people are not only represented by the domestic establishment, but also by supranational and non national actors and institutions, stressing the centrality of the dichotomy *national–non national* for the identification of the out-group and the in-group. This is especially evident in the Italian right wing discourse (e.g. 'the EU' is the second most quoted oppositional actor, being mentioned in 6.4% of statements).

A process of 'frame bridging', through which different frames are related to each other (Snow and Benford 1988), seems therefore at work in the discourse of the extreme right organizations analyzed, linking *populism* with the *ethno-nationalism*, typical of the (old) extreme right. This emerges also when looking at the other most frequently mentioned oppositional categories (e.g. 'foreigners' in Germany, 2.8%; 'immigrants' in Italy, 4.2%) which, as the politicians, are grammatically opposed to the people—as we shall see below—in right wing frames. Not only, the political elites (national and supranational), but also 'political

adversaries' in general, as well as other religiously defined groups and ethnic minorities are excluded from the 'in group' composed by the extreme right and the people.

An exclusive meaning of the people is confirmed when looking more in details (with our grammar analysis and analysis of adjectives) at the way in which extreme right organizations describe themselves, the people and the relation they have with them (tab.2). Although in the discourse of right wing organizations the extreme right is *identified with the people*, at the same time, the frames used point also to a *rather hierarchical relation with it*. The 'pure' people is identified as 'sovereign' and opposed to the (corrupt) political elites.

Table 2. 'The people' in the documents of the Italian and German extreme right

Variables	Frames description
Actor category	'The people'
Grammatical position	Mainly as 'object actor' (passive role)
Adjectives	<p>(DE/IT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Adjectives: 'hopeless', 'powerless', 'reduced as simple producers-consumers', 'with no more vitality, values and spirit', 'unhappy', 'angry', and 'poor', 'not heard' [by politicians].</li> <li>✓ 'Sovereign', 'Naturally free', 'who have the right to rebel', but also as 'ingenuous', 'illiterate', who 'are not aware of their own condition', 'easily manipulated', 'in need of a guide'.</li> <li>✓ They are 'dissatisfied' with the domestic political class and 'critical' of it, they 'will react', 'will rebel', 'still timorous', 'needing to be encouraged in this direction'.</li> <li>✓ The people who '<i>want to be Germans also in the future</i>'; who '<i>are characterized by [Italian] culture and traditions</i>'</li> </ul>
Subjects actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ (DE) 'The domestic political class' (13.6%), 'political parties in general' (8%), 'we'/'us' (9.1%)</li> <li>✓ (IT) 'The domestic political class' (13.4%), 'Right wing organizations' (6.3%) (e.g. <i>Forza Nuova</i>).</li> </ul>
Actions	<p>(DE/IT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ (people as object actor) [people are] 'betrayed', 'exploited', 'neglected', 'prosecuted', 'not respected', 'given promises', 'not helped', even 'robbed'.</li> <li>✓ (people as subject actor) 'the people should wake up', 'should get out of the flock', 'should start the struggle', 'take back its sovereignty', 'take back its power', 'determine own future'.</li> </ul>

The extreme right identifies itself with the people ('we are the people', FN Sept.2004), but, at the same time, according to an elitarian vision to society, the pure people is presented as rather stupid and in need of a guide (explicitly indicated in the right itself. Indeed, in term of attributes, in both countries, the 'people' is defined frequently as being 'hopeless', 'powerless', 'subjugated by the invaders', 'desperate', 'unhappy', 'angry', and 'poor', 'with no more vitality, values and spirit'. It is said to be strongly 'dissatisfied' with the domestic political class and 'critical' of it. It 'ineffectively asks' the political class for 'urgent interventions'; it 'calls for help', but receives none.

In fact, the people is also presented as an actor 'naturally free', 'who has the right to rebel' in order to improve its life situation, nevertheless they are also described as timorous and as 'needing to be encouraged'. It is considered by extreme right organizations to be 'ingenuous', 'illiterate', 'unaware of its own condition', 'easily manipulated', 'in need of a guide', with a 'moral and intellectual level [which] is decreasing day by day'. It is not a case that, in both countries, the 'people' are mainly presented as an object of action (namely of the grammatical sentence, in 53.3% of statements in the German case and in 44.1% of statements in the Italian one), less so as a subject, suggesting a rather passive role of this actor in the discourse of right wing groups. Among the actions which are attributed to the people as subject actor, we find many calls ('should' statements) that invite the people to 'wake up', to 'get out of the flock' and 'to start the struggle', to 'take back its sovereignty', 'its power', to 'determine its own future'. In the Italian case, it is said that they 'should go against the political class, they 'should reduce the power of the political class'<sup>6</sup>.

However, the discourse about the people is very often combined with yet another aspect, namely the action of resistance of the extreme right groups. It becomes clear that the role of the ordinary people in the envisaged 'change'/'revolution' is very limited, namely to a supportive role, whereas the actual actions are undertaken—in a rather hierarchical style—by rightwing activists. A frequently recurring idea in the extreme right wing documents is that an 'historical change' (e.g. a 'new phase in the history of Italy') is going to happen and that the extreme right organizations themselves are the political actors able to lead the country toward this change. Following this line of argumentation the extreme right presents itself as made of 'valiant combatants who do not bow their own's head' and as the 'only force that manages to protect the victims of the complot'. A potentially revolutionary change is presented in both countries as a result of the present day 'desperate condition' of the people and their need to have a 'guide' leading this change is suggested. Indeed, three main issue fields are often related to the people (as subject actor of the statements) in extreme right discourses. In the Italian extreme right sources they are: the 'form of the state, revolution' (e.g. dictatorship vs. democracy) (in 11.1% of statements), the 'domestic and international economic system' (11.1%) and the 'crisis of society' (8.3%). Similarly, in Germany, the topics

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<sup>6</sup> Future scenarios of a lack of reaction by the people are also often presented: they will be 'a simple aggregation of individuals ruled only by the laws of consumerism'.

which most frequently recur in the frames of the extreme right when the people appear as subject of the statement are 'political life in general' (37.1%), followed by 'form of state, revolution' and 'National identity' *ex aequo* (14.3%).

#### 4. Bridging populist and anti-establishment frames

In line with an *antiestablishment interpretation of the new extreme right*, when Italian and German extreme right organizations talk about the domestic political class, they characterize politicians for their misbehavior in relation with politics as well as with moral norms and values. Political elites (both from the left and the moderate right) are pictured as corrupt and only focused on own personal (or political parties) interests and not really caring about on the country and ordinary people. Also traditional conspiracy theories which are typical of the extreme right ideological framework (Simmons 2003) are referred to when presenting the political class, which according to the extreme right is part of a 'secret economic-political agreement whose goal is to dominate the country, make money and subjugate the people' (Kam, Oct. 2005).

The opposition between the extreme right organizations and the politicians is also evident grammatically, since, when 'us' is presented as a subject actor (as it happens in the majority of the statements), the actions can be mainly of two types: either reactive-defensive (against the ruling political class) or protective (for the people). Indeed, the most frequently corresponding object actor which recurs when the 'us' are subjects of the statements are, on the one hand, the domestic political class, and on the other (various categories of) the people (Table 3).

Table 3. The 'us' in the documents of the Italian and German extreme right

<i>Variables</i>	<b>Frames description</b>
Actor category	<i>The 'us'</i>
Grammatical position	Mainly as subject actor (active role)
Adjectives	(DE/IT) ✓ Adjectives: 'being present', 'being disciplined', 'generous', 'proud', 'brave', 'the only true Germans/Italians', 'the power', 'strong hearts', 'prepared for a civil war', 'naturally allergic to any form of power', 'loyal to the historic memory', 'thirsty of social justice'. Actors who 'find the solution', 'do not just simply speak [as other political forces], 'alternative to the system', 'fundamental opposition', a 'political movement', 'tell the true', 'a force of the life and of the re-birth'
Objects actors	✓ Object Actors: (DE/IT) 'Domestic political class' (8.9%), 'The politicians' (5.7%) ✓ Other object actors: (DE) 'the Germans' (7.1%), 'the German people' (7.1%), 'young people' (7.1%), 'the family' (5.4%) and 'the women' (5.4%), (IT) 'Italy' (6.6%), the 'Italians' (5.7%), 'the European peoples' (5.7%), 'the workers' (3.8%), the 'young people' and the 'unemployed people' (1.9%).
Actions	(DE/IT) ✓ Actions 1: 'defend the interests of Germans/Italians', 'interpret the will', 'protect', 'work for', 'save', 'create jobs', ✓ Actions 2: 'fight against the arrogance of power', 'fight for freedom of thought', 'oppose', 'criticize', 'condemn' the domestic political class, 'disdain', 'should (or will) replace', (DE) 'win the hearts', 'give the feeling of comradeship', 'overcome loneliness', 'will fight for the common good'

The us is in fact described as 'the Germans', 'the German people', 'young people', 'the family' and 'women' in the German extreme right discourses. Similarly, in the discourse of Italian extreme right organizations, they are 'Italy' and the 'Italians', 'the European peoples', 'the workers', the 'young people' and the 'unemployed'. These categories (apart from stressing again the exclusive nature of the people) describe actors in favour of whom the 'us' is active. Indeed, looking at the actions of the extreme right, we see that the subject actor 'us' is connected to the people with a protective argumentation in the sense that the analyzed

sources tend to present the extreme right movements as ‘caring’ about ‘the people’, ‘defending the interests of Italians/Germans’.

To the contrary, the actions frequently found in our coded statements which connect ‘the extreme right’ and the domestic political class (see table 3) stress that the extreme right ‘should replace’ the domestic political class ‘in order to form a new political elite for the country’, or, more strongly, ‘should lynch on the street’ the domestic political class, or the need of defense and action against the political class is underlined. The political elites have indeed a strongly negative connotation. In term of adjectives, politicians are described as ‘cartel politicians’, ‘behaving improperly’, ‘only oriented towards power’, ‘highly paid’, ‘alien to the people’, ‘not credible’, ‘not linear’, ‘not courageous’, ‘corrupt’ and ‘easily corruptible’, ‘focused on money’, and even, in the most critical statements, ‘anti-Germans/Italians’. From the point of view of their political action, especially in the Italian right wing discourse, they are characterized as ‘cowards’, ‘short-sighted’, ‘narrow-minded’, ‘electoral tricksters’ and, with references to their private lives, as ‘drug addicts’.

*Table 4. The ‘politicians’ in the documents of the Italian and German extreme right*

<i>Variables</i>	<b>Frames description</b>
Actor category	<i>‘The politicians’</i>
Grammatical position	Mainly as subject actor (active role)
Adjectives	(DE/IT) ‘Corrupt’, ‘only interested to power’, ‘focused on money’, ‘rich’, ‘highly paid’, ‘a caste’, ‘an oligarchy’, ‘cowards’, ‘short-sighted’, ‘narrow-minded’, ‘electoral tricksters’, ‘scribblers and gas-bags’, ‘cartel politicians’, ‘behaving improperly’, ‘alien to the people’, ‘not credible’, ‘not linear’, ‘not courageous’, ‘corrupt’, ‘afraid of saying the truth’, ‘good doers’, ‘responsible for social deprivation’, ‘anti-Germans/Italians’
Objects actors (%)	✓ (IT) ‘the Italians’ (19.1%), ‘Italy’ (10%), ‘the ordinary people’ (6.4%), ‘the workers’ (3.6%) ✓ (DE) ‘the people’ (17.3%), ‘the Germans’ (6.2%).
Actions	✓ (De/IT) ‘break laws systematically’, ‘tell lies’, ‘do not ask’, ‘do not help’, ‘do not think to the problems’ [of the Italians], ‘move [the people] away from politics’, ‘give false information’, ‘profit’ of the people, ‘destroy’, ‘create social tensions consciously’, ‘profit’, ‘sleep’, ‘celebrate the cult of being guilty (with regard to the holocaust)’, ‘latently dissolve democracy’, ‘destroy the country systematically’, ‘sell the [German] people to Turkey’, ‘not respect’

Political parties are said to be ‘hostile to human dignity’, ‘decoupled from the people’s will’, ‘no longer have political personnel’, ‘not interested in finding solutions’, ‘responsible for social deprivation’ and, with references to the German past, ‘hysterical with regard to the German history’. We frequently found expressions such as ‘cartel parties’, in which the qualifier is meant to underline how closely mainstream political parties collaborate with each other in order to exploit their ‘clients’, i.e., the electorate. In a very negative tune, it points to the inappropriate behavior of political parties which is aimed at enriching them at the expenses of the ordinary people. In the German extreme right discourses, we also find frequently the term ‘block party’ assimilating the parties system in the Federal Republic of Germany with that of the German Democratic Republic: all parties collaborate with each other (in exploiting the people); their ideological differences are substantially meaningless (Wagemann 2006). Political parties, in both countries, are also often identified as ‘old parties’, which indicates that the currently existing model of a political party is a matter of the past, and that those ‘old’ political parties should be replaced by new ones—of course, the implicit reference is to the extreme right. Politicians are said to ‘systematically break the laws’, ‘tell lies’, ‘drive [the people] away from politics’, ‘destroy the country’ and in few words, ‘latently dissolve democracy’. Also, focusing in particular on ‘political parties’, the extreme right stresses that they ‘steal’, ‘do not respect’, ‘promise too much’, ‘occupy’ and ‘pretend’.

The important role attributed to the extreme right in defence of the people against the political elite is confirmed by the adjectives used in documents to describe the ‘us’, that all stress the positive qualities of the ‘us’, even virtues, such as ‘being present’ and ‘being disciplined’, a ‘political movement’. Indeed, the extreme right characterizes itself as an actor ‘naturally allergic to any form of power’ and ‘loyal to the historic memory’. Identifying the extreme right with the people, synonyms which are used for ‘us’, are ‘the only true Germans/Italians’ and ‘the power’. Their main characteristics are to be ‘strong hearts’ and ‘prepared for a civil war’. Especially in the discourse of the subcultural skinhead groups (in both countries) the opposition between extreme right organizations and the domestic political class is often framed in a very generic and evocative form, as a ‘fight against the arrogance of power’, for the ‘freedom of thought’, while references to concrete contents are more present in the parties’ discourse. Accordingly, in terms of actions that link the extreme right to the political class it is frequently said that extreme right organizations as ‘political militant movements’ ‘oppose’, ‘criticize’, ‘condemn’ the domestic political class. The definition of the self identity of right wing organizations through the opposition to the domestic political class is particularly present in the discourse of the Italian right wing organizations. The extreme right actors are presented here as a group of activists ‘motivated by passion to do politics’ and ‘ready to run risks for their ideas’. Also the description of the strategies used by the extreme right against the domestic political class recalls this type of argumentation: indeed the fight against the domestic political class is carried on ‘in the streets, in the squares, in the pages of the newspapers, through public meeting’ (FN, Dec.2002), it is carried on through ‘the support of the people’, the ‘popularity’. It is an extreme right that defines itself as ‘antagonist right’, that stresses its ‘distance from the moderate right’. *Forza Nuova* in



particular describes itself as an actor who 'tells the true', 'is ahead of the times', is 'a movement', 'a force of the life and of re-birth', 'generous', 'proud', 'brave'.

In line with the picture that the extreme right constructs in its discourse by linking the 'poor people' to the 'corrupt political elite' and, then, to a 'needed guide', the calls for action concerning the 'us' are relatively strong (e.g. 'there is the need for a national movement that provoke an extreme change for Italy', we 'will re-model Germany into a new, a truly German and a socially fair Germany'), presenting the extreme right as an active and hard-working part of the society. For example, in the Italian case, the political party Forza Nuova, when talking about the issue field 'political life' (which frequently correlates with the extreme right as subject, in 9.8% of all statements), the emphasis is put on the 'novelty' and 'modernity' of *FN* against the traditional parties. *FN* is presented as an organization that 'accepts [as own sympathizers] also people that are little politicized and little ideological', 'aggregates the discontent that emerges from the country and in the other parties', 'makes militant activity also after the election', and 'wants to be a militant structure, always in movement'. More in general (especially in the skinhead source) it is said that in order to provoke a change in the country it is necessary to 'distinguish between the state [the Italian institutions] and the nation [Italy]', and to 'straighten the national and cultural identity of Italy'. Italy needs someone who can carry on 'a politics characterized by big aims', launching 'a project of national re-birth at 360° for Italy'. The extreme right thus presents itself as the only force that can 'save' the country.

Also in German right wing discourse, the description of the extreme right itself is made through opposition against the politicians, however in the former case also with many references to the internal life of extreme right groups. In the German case, especially the classical 'virtues' of Germanic nationalism, such as honor, nation, and comradeship, are over-emphasized. The 'us' category is presented as a group of actors who 'help each other' and 'are an example for others'. They 'find the solution', 'unite those who think as should be thought' and 'do not just simply speak, but act'. The intention is to 'overcome the system'. With regard to the means which should be used, the necessities of 'fighting', 'working for the vision', 'standing up' and 'joining forces' are repeated several times. When the framing of the own identity goes beyond issues of the own group it is mainly concerned with the revolutionary aspect of the (political) action (Wagemann 2006). The 'us' actor, that is, the peer group, is the strong actor of these processes. This aspect underlines the hierarchical character of the argumentation.

A characteristic of the fascist rhetoric is the self-definition of the fascist party as a 'new epoch' (Härmänmaa 2002, 897). Also the extreme right organizations we studied pointed at an historical change (a 'new phase in the history of Italy') they shall produce. In Italy, this is even stronger than in Germany and takes the form of criticism against the mainstream political parties (both from the moderate right and the left side). In Germany, the populist paradigm is adopted by right wing organizations, and combined more often with references

to history and the national identity, that is perceived as not adequately defended by the domestic political class.

## 5. Conclusion: the extreme right and the populist frame

The recent development of the extreme right has been often addressed by reference to the concept of populism, inconsistently defined as an organizational form, a rhetorical style or an ideology. Referring to social movement studies, we suggested instead to analyze populism as a frame, which can be bridged with others (in some cases, more traditional) frames of the extreme right discourse. We argue that it is more useful to conceptualize populism as a 'frame', instead of as an ideology, which seems too rigid a concept in order to account for the variation of the configurations that it can take in different extreme right groups and in different countries. Looking at populism as a 'frame' we were able not only to map the presence of references to 'the people', but also to locate them—in a grammatical analysis—in a complex configuration of different frames. If the corruption of the political class is the diagnosis, the prognosis is not to return the power to the people, but to advocate it to an exclusive (more or less heroic) elite.

In our empirical research, we have first of all observed that 'the people' is indeed often referred to in the discourses of different extreme right organizations, both party and non party ones, in Italy and Germany. The people are defined as suffering from the misdeeds of the elite, and in need of protection by the extreme right itself. In this sense, there is a strong emphasis (not usually stressed in the analysis of populism) on the role of an alternative elite—the militants of the extreme rights—in the protection of the people. The references to the people were also bridged with two traditional frames of the extreme right: exclusive nationalism (or nativism) and anti-establishment positions.

As for explanations of the presence and characteristics of a discourse on 'the people' in the extreme right, our cross-national perspective allows to develop some hypotheses on the determinants of the extreme right discourse, or at least to single out some causes-to-the-effect (Goerz and Mahoney 2006). First of all, some differences between Germany and Italy can be explained by the larger or smaller resonance of some frames in the public opinion. As it has been underlined, in developing their frames actors have to try to get resonance, which is a function of the consistency of the frame, of its empirical credibility or cultural compatibility, and of the degree of centrality (or relevance) of addressed issues (Johnston and Noakes 2005). In particular, the more frequent reference to the corruption of politicians in Italy than in Germany reflects the profound mistrust in political parties and representative institutions that followed the political scandals of the early 1990s. Second, the specific versions of extreme right populism in the two countries are resonant with the historical traditions within the extreme right itself. In this sense, the more frequent bridging of populism and nationalism in Germany than in Italy reflects the stronger presence in the traditional discourse of the German extreme right of nationalist reference to past history (Wagemann 2006). Some difference emerged also from the comparison of different organizations, with

more reference to 'the people' and specific criticism of the establishment in the political parties, and instead more emphasis on the heroic action of the 'us' in the subcultural groups.

In sum, we could observe some tensions in the conceptualization of 'populism' when applied to the extreme right. Indeed the frames of the extreme right regarding politics, the leader and the people are still characterized by elements which resonate with the discourse of the old fascism (e.g. conspiracy theory, revolutionary dimension). On the one hand, there is a hierarchical (elitist) and exclusive conception of the people, according to which the extreme right identifies itself as with the people ('we' are the people, the people are 'sovereign') but allocates to itself the task of protecting a passive people. Within an elitarian vision of the society, the 'pure' people are in fact presented as unable to (re)act politically, and in need of a 'guide' (explicitly indicated in the right itself). The extreme right discourse on the people is not only elitist, but also exclusivist, as not only corrupt political elites but also other groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, political adversaries, supranational actors) are excluded from it. On the other hand, the strong criticism of the existing elites recycles the traditional anti-establishment frames of the 'old' extreme right.

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