



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Boekbespreking van: The Ideology of the Extreme Right

Maddens, B.

### Citation

Maddens, B. (2001). Boekbespreking van: The Ideology of the Extreme Right. *Acta Politica*, 36: 2001(2), 210-212. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450831>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450831>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, ISBN 0 7190 5793., xii + 212 pp., £ 40.00.

Although it is generally assumed by both political scientists and politicians that a family of extreme right parties exists, the question of how to distinguish the members from the non-members is seldom explicitly addressed. Of course, a broad consensus exists about a limited number of parties that are undeniably 'extreme right', but there are also a lot of borderline cases. For instance, there are those who prefer to label the Austrian FPÖ as a 'bourgeois nationalist' party, comparable to the Bavarian CSU, rather than as an 'extreme right' party. The 1999 electoral victory and continued government participation of the Schweizerische Volkspartei triggered a similar debate. Even though the Spanish Partido Popular and the Italian Alleanza Nazionale share fascist roots, it was only an extraordinarily short time before the former was accepted as a mainstream conservative party, while the latter is still generally viewed with suspicion, in spite of its 1994 transformation from MSI into AN.

Cas Mudde takes a straightforward approach to providing a litmus test of extreme rightism: he tries to find out what the parties actually have in common whose extreme right status is not debated. The most appropriate way to do so, according to the author, is by focusing not on the parties' specific policies, but on their ideologies, which are sufficiently abstract to allow for a cross-national comparison. More in particular, the author tests the proposition that an extreme right party family exists, which consists of a distinct group of parties that share a common ideological core. This ideological core includes a number of features that are generally defined as right wing extremist. In addition, empirical evidence is sought for the assumption that a further distinction can be made between a more traditional subgroup within the extreme right family, consisting of parties that reject democratic values, and a subgroup of more modern and moderate parties.

The hypotheses are tested on the basis of five cases: the Vlaams Blok (VB) in Belgium, the Centrumdemocraten (CD) and the Centrumpartij '86 (CP'86) in the Netherlands, and the Republikaner (REP) and the Deutsche Volksunion (DVU) in Germany. Each case study involves a brief discussion of the party's history and a detailed analysis of the ideological principles of the party as stated in both the official party programmes and the more internally oriented party papers. The latter are included in the analysis in order to obtain information about the 'back-stage' ideology, which might arguably be more radical than the 'front-stage' ideology used to attract voters.

Mudde employs a qualitative technique and analyses his cases on the basis of a preliminary list of possibly relevant ideological themes. His main conclusion is that the five parties share an ideological core built around the nucleus of nationalism. They aspire for congruence between the state, as a political unit, and the nation, as a cultural unit. Their stand for internal homogenization and mono-culturalism arises from this aspiration, as do their xenophobic views, involving a defensive attitude against anything considered as alien to the nation, such as immigrants and international organizations. The common ideological core also includes the themes of law and order

and of welfare chauvinism, which are both linked to the nationalist nucleus: on the one hand, the state should be able to enforce the law in order to defend the nation against its enemies, on the other hand, the state should ensure that those enemies do not benefit from its welfare policies.

The assumption concerning the distinction between a more traditional anti-democratic and a more modern democratic subgroup is not supported by the corpus, as it is found that all the analysed parties accept democratic pluralism. According to the author, the more relevant distinction is the one between state and ethnic nationalist extreme right parties. The former apply a more civic criterion to distinguish the foreigners from the nationals and accept that foreigners willing to do so can eventually assimilate. The latter employ a more rigid ethnic criterion, implying that the membership of an ethnic group is acquired at birth, precluding assimilation later on. Hence a more radical stand in favour of the expatriation of foreigners. Both VB and CP'86 can be considered as belonging to this ethnic subgroup, while only one clear case was found of a state nationalist extreme-right party, namely the CD.

It is perhaps somewhat unfair to charge Mudde with a certain superficiality and lack of depth in his analysis. After all, the author has investigated a vast corpus, consisting of no less than 25 party programmes, 30 books and brochures and 41 party papers. The immense scope of the study is partly due to the fact that it is not limited to a specific period, but spans the entire history of each of the five parties, two of which were founded in the seventies and three in the eighties. As this corpus of texts is simply too extensive to be discourse analysed with state-of-the-art techniques, one cannot blame the author for largely restricting himself to an inventory of ideological themes. Still, this does not alter the fact that the methodological approach is not elaborate enough to get hold of the complex interconnectedness of the various ideological themes.

It would have helped if the author had started with a more rigorous and extensive description of the ideological themes on the basis of which he analyses the material. Take, for instance, the rather fundamental distinction he makes between 'ethnic' and 'state' nationalism. The Vlaams Blok is considered to be ethnic because it rejects the possibility of assimilation. On closer look, however, the Vlaams Blok appears to be remarkably ambiguous about the assimilation issue. One of its earlier slogans was "Gastarbeiders, aanpassen of opkrassen" (guest workers, assimilate or get out). While the party has long maintained that assimilation is a realistic option for European immigrants only, it now accepts (as indicated in Mudde's study) that non-European immigrants can also adopt the Flemish culture. This inconsistency raises doubts about the thesis that the ethnic factor, as defined by the author, is at the heart of the Vlaams Blok ideology, and distinguishes the party from the 'civic' extreme right.

It is, for that matter, also somewhat surprising to read that the extreme right CD adheres to a more civic concept of the nation, while at the same time adopting an extremely defensive attitude towards non-nationals. The problem seems to be that Mudde defines the concept of 'ethnic nationalism' too narrowly. According to most authors, ethnic nationalism is an ideology that views the national identity as a static

cultural heritage that should be passed on to future generations and safeguarded from outside threats. The ideology does not rule out the possibility that foreigners obtain the nationality, but requires them to assimilate the national culture. In this sense, the 'ethnic' element is part and parcel of the mono-cultural ideal of the nation that is characteristic of the extreme right in general.

From this perspective, whether or not the assimilation of foreigners is described as 'possible' or 'realistic' appears to be more a matter of strategically fine-tuning the discourse, taking into account the specific sensibilities in a country. It could be argued that any extreme right party will try to raise the discursive threshold for assimilation as high as possible without running the risk of being perceived as blatantly racist. That the Vlaams Blok can afford to take a more overtly exclusionist stance than the other extreme right parties might well be due to the tradition of Flemish nationalism, which has given rise to a widespread attitude of cultural protectionism in Flanders.

Because of that, it has sometimes been argued by Belgian scholars that the Vlaams Blok rhetoric and the mainstream discourse on the immigrant issue are basically very similar and can be traced back to a common ideological core, involving the fundamental premise that the autochthonous culture takes precedence over the foreign one and that foreigners therefore have a duty to assimilate. This kind of reasoning obviously casts some doubts on Mudde's contention that the core ideology is the best criterion to determine whether or not a party belongs to the extreme right family. I would certainly not be surprised if an in-depth analysis of the discourse of mainstream parties like the British Conservatives or the Bavarian CSU would point at the very same core values that, according to Mudde, are typical of the extreme-right: nationalism, xenophobia, law and order, and welfare chauvinism.

Owing to his exclusive focus on ideology, Mudde does give serious consideration to the alternative hypothesis that extreme right parties are characterized by a specific campaign style and a more intense and explicit emphasis on issues like law and order and immigration, rather than by their ideology. In this sense, Mudde's study does not provide a conclusive answer to the politically highly relevant question of where to draw the line between the extreme right and the conservative party families. Nevertheless, thanks to its broad scope, it constitutes a valuable and probably even unique source of information about the political programme and the ideological profile of extreme right parties.

Bart Maddens

Frans van Waarden and Jan Simonis (eds.), *Deregulating Imperfect Markets: On the Role of Institutions in Markets*. Amsterdam: Thela Thesis, 2000, ISBN 90-5170-480-1, 144 p. Dfl. 29.50, \$ 20, £ 9.95.

Rules constitute markets. Indeed, even if markets could exist without rules, no one would want to participate in them. Nevertheless, a central tenet of contemporary economic policy-making is that markets should be liberated from regulatory

constraint. This is the paradox at the centre of the analysis by Van Waarden, Simonis, and their contributors. The resulting combination of theory and case studies makes for stimulating reading. The work took shape at a 1997 academic conference and its ostensible purpose is to inform the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Still its broader publication warrants attention, particularly from those not steeped in the new institutionalism of the social sciences.

Chapters 2 through 4 provide a useful survey of the role of economic institutions in modern society. In Chapter 2, Simonis emphasizes the constitutional and motivational idiosyncrasy of national economic institutions. Hence, even if institutional arrangements look the same from one country to the next, that should not be taken to mean that they were chartered for similar reasons or that their operation will yield similar results. Indeed, the same point applies to institutions within the same country but viewed across time. Institutions can best be studied from a comparative perspective and yet they are not always easily comparable.

Still, economic institutions do share a single underlying logic – the mitigation of uncertainty and the accommodation of risk. This is the argument made by Van Waarden in Chapter 3, and it is a useful reminder to those who view the process of deregulation as inherently cost-free. Regulations – and, more generally, belief in the rule of law – provide the basis for trust in modern societies. Therefore, not only does the elimination of rules threaten to increase uncertainty, but it may also result in behavioural changes that are detrimental to society as a whole.

Crucially, the process of deregulation is not predetermined, it is chosen. In chapter 4, Van Waarden demonstrates that there is no necessary correlation between deregulation and competition in goods or capital markets; neither is integration across nation states or through supranational organizations bound to lead to a race to the bottom. Where there is a threat, perhaps, it lies in the diffusion of ideas or the imitation of policies. Policy-makers may be too easily convinced by example in the merits of specific forms of deregulation without regard to their context of origin or to the problems their application might entail.

The remaining chapters, 5 through 7, provide case studies of deregulation as it relates to occupational safety, vocational training, and the special case of New Zealand. These are not explicitly organized around the principal themes set up in the theoretical chapters, but rather follow a more narrative structure. The concluding chapter, chapter 8, makes the connection between theory and case study through a reorganization and summary of main findings. The overall conclusion is that regulation remains important to market functioning and that deregulatory policies should be scrutinized for "unexpected – and largely undesirable – consequences" (p. 123).

The message that rules constitute markets and that politicians ignore this at their peril is salutary. That it should be directed at policy-makers in a government ministry responsible for a large corpus of market regulation is more promising still. Nevertheless, what is striking upon reading the book – and particularly the chapters by Van Waarden – is the strong echo of the 'conventional wisdom' established by the Great Depression. Arguments about the social embeddedness of market institutions,