Charisma and the Rise of New Right-wing Parties in inter- and post-war Europe

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Abstract

This paper considers charisma and the rise of new right-wing parties in the context of both inter-war fascism and the more contemporary period. Whilst it is important to note differences between eras and leaders, this paper will present two main broad theses:

i) I will argue that charisma is an important concept in understanding support for right-wing parties if we think in terms of four faces of the charismatic personality and three dimensions of charismatic support. First, right-wing charismatic leaders are characterised by a range of traits, especially: i) a sense of great mission; ii) a discourse of leader-follower symbiosis; iii) Manichean demonisation; and iv) a sense of presence, which in the contemporary era involves media-centric skills. Secondly, I will distinguish between what I term: i) coterie charisma, appealing to a small number, especially an inner party core; ii) centripetal charisma, in which the personalisation of politics helps spread the appeal across a broad range of supporters; and iii) cultic charisma, whereby dictators are almost deified through a pervasive cult of personality.¹

ii) Secondly, I will argue that it is important to add another agency dimension analysing the rise of new right-wing parties. An often neglected aspect concerns the parties themselves. Focusing on fascism in the inter-war era, I will argue that whilst charismatic leadership was central to the quest to forge a movement/regime which transcended sectional party politics, fascist parties in many ways anticipated traits later to be associated with catch-all and electoral-professional parties. Turning to more recent new right-wing parties, I will argue that whilst media-centric leaders are considered an important asset, such parties are in some ways a deliberate throwback to earlier forms of cadre and notable party, with a particularly strong emphasis on specific forms of campaigning in a localised and group context.

NB First draft: not to be cited without permission.

Introduction
Most historians and social scientists, reflecting the professional dominance of structure over agency, have stressed socio-economic factors when seeking to explain the rise of fascism in the inter-war era and extreme right and populist parties more recently. In the inter-war period common explanations have included ‘mass society theory’ (stressing the dislocating effects of rapid change and impact of war), or the economic crises and depression which afflicted Europe in the inter-war era. In the more contemporary period, common explanations have included the reverse ‘post-material’ (a reaction to the new politics of ecologism, feminism, etc.) and ‘losers in the process of modernisation’ theses.

However, such explanations are notably blunt instruments when it comes to explaining cross national variations and especially the tendency of some new parties to make sudden breakthroughs in the electoral arena. For example, why did Mussolini, whose Fascist movement had only been founded in 1919, come to power in 1922 at a time when the economic crisis and threat from the left seemed to be receding? Or why did Nazi support increase from 2.8 to 37.2 per cent between 1928-32, giving the Nazis almost twice as many votes as the next largest party. What do structuralist theories tell us about the exact forces which led to the sudden rise of the Front National (FN) in local and European elections during 1983-4, over ten year’s after the party’s formation? And can socio-economic explanations fully account for the sudden rise of the Lega Nord in Italy in the 1990s, or the fact that the Austrian Freedom Party (FPO) had by 1999 become the second largest party in a relatively wealthy and apparently stable society?

These opening questions are not meant to imply that structuralist approaches are incapable of offering important insights into these questions. For example, Germany suffered major economic depression after the late 1920s. And whilst Italy in the early 1990s was highly prosperous, there were clear signs of problems both in the state sector and in the once-dynamic northern small business community. Nevertheless, the crucial argument underpinning this paper is that agency matters - both in the form of leadership and the party more generally.

In spite of structuralist dominance, there have been historians and social scientists who have stressed the importance of agency in explaining these trends. For example, Juan Linz has suggested the fertile concepts of ‘political space’ and fascism as a ‘latecomer’ to the party game, approaches which highlight the need to situate the rise of fascism within the party system generally as both Nazism and Italian Fascism grew rapidly in party systems characterised by notable based right-wing parties, which were weakly implanted in civil society. More recently, a variety of social scientists have stressed ‘Political Opportunity Structure’ approaches, which in part highlight the

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2 Sometimes the last two terms are used as synonyms, though more typically ‘populist’ is used to depict a style and/or a more moderate form of party. As this paper is not concerned with entering into the contested field of party family terminology, I will adopt as a convenient shorthand the term ‘new right-wing parties’. For an introduction to my views on how to define the fascist, extreme right, and populist party families see R. Eatwell, ‘Introduction: the New Extreme Right Challenge’, in R. Eatwell and C. Mudde (eds.), Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge (Routledge, London, 2004).

response of other parties. For example, the FN made its first breakthrough in Dreux after forming a local electoral alliance with the catch-all Gaullist party, and later mainstream parties helped to legitimise many of the FN’s policies by adopting them in more moderate ways (though more generally such tactics can help to defuse new right challengers).

Arguably the most common agency explanation concerns the role of allegedly ‘charismatic’ leaders. Firstly, historians have often adopted a form of Weberian perspective in which messianic leaders at times of major crisis are seen as exerting a highly affective appeal over a section of the population. For instance, Ian Kershaw specifically refers to Max Weber’s conceptualisation of charisma in his account of Hitler’s appeal and Roger Griffin has grafted his much-cited explicitly Weberian ‘ideal-type’ definition of fascist ideology on to the ‘political religion’ approach which has recently revived notably in fascist studies. Secondly, political scientists have tended to analyse the rise of more contemporary new right-wing leaders and parties in rational choice rather than Weberian terms (a trend which has also recently entered pre-war fascist studies). This typically sees their leaders as political entrepreneurs who manage parties whose voters are attracted by single or a relatively limited number of issues - most commonly hostility to ‘immigrants’ or hostility to the Establishment.

In this paper, I seek to underline the importance of agency, whilst critiquing both the Weberian and narrow rational choice approaches. More specifically I will argue two broad, linked theses:

1. That the Weberian thesis diverts attention from the way in which fascism was a new form of movement/regime, which whilst seeking to transcend party sectionalism in other ways anticipated many of the concerns of later ‘catch-all’ and ‘electoral professional’ parties. Conversely, recent rational choice influenced approaches miss important ways in which new right-wing parties encompass elements of older forms of party, especially cadre and notable ones with a strong focus on local and group campaigning.

2. Secondly, that the Weberian approach to charisma is neither the key to understanding the appeal of charismatic leaders in inter-war Europe, nor in more modern times. Rather, it is important to conceive of the charismatic personality as having four main faces and exerting three dimensions of the charismatic bond with supporters:

1. Fascist Parties and the New Politics in the inter-war Era
Prior to 1900, European political parties were mainly based on local and/or national notables, who were often brokers of power more than ideologists. However, by the turn of the twentieth century new types of party were emerging, including socialist ones which were sometimes based on small activist and often violent cadres, but

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4 For example, see several of the contributions in R. Koopmans and P. Statham (eds) Challenging Immigration and Ethnic Relations Politics (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).
which increasingly attracted a mass membership, and which fought on relatively clear programmatic lines.\(^7\) The last trend in part reflected the emergence of a new form of electoral politics, in which parties had to come to terms with the onset of universal franchise (though often only for men). For instance, in Italy only 2 per cent had the vote in 1870, whereas by 1919 all adult males were enfranchised.

Although there has been a long tradition of seeing fascism as un-intellectual, it is now increasingly recognised that fascism was a serious ideology and that some of its leaders like Mussolini were relatively well read and/or aware of new thinking. In the context of party organisation, three thinkers who came to prominence around 1900 tend to be stressed: Le Bon, whose early works stressed the power of leaders to sway the emotional crowd; Sorel, who is best known as the advocate of the power of political myths; and Robert(o) Michels, one of the leading new ‘elite’ theorists (and later Professor of Sociology at the Fascist University of Perugia).\(^8\)

However, it is important to note strands in their thinking which are normally ignored. For instance, Sorel was unusual among socialists in that he stressed productivism as much as redistributivism: he was vitally concerned with the need to achieve high levels of national wealth to appeal to the workers. Even more important in the context of party organisation, Michels wrote not just about the necessity of elites, but even before 1914 he was commenting on the way in which socialism in France, Germany and Italy was based on the personalisation of socialism, with parties and factions taking the names of leaders who attracted almost messianic worship.\(^9\) It is also important to note other influences, especially the neglected Gabriel Tarde, who stressed the existence of different ‘publ ics’ and ways in which they might be influenced by new forces including the media and parties, for example by the manipulation of tradition.\(^10\)

Turning briefly to the Nazis, Hitler by 1914 appears to have read voraciously and schooled himself in the attributes needed for a new type of popular speaker, learning especially from turn-of-the century Austrian politicians such as the anti-semitic nationalist, Schönerer, who broke with elitist political cant for the language of the streets in order to strengthen leader-follower identity. He was also unquestionably influenced by the belief that Allied propaganda, including a vicious demonisation of Germans, had played a major part in Germany’s 1918 defeat. Revealingly, Goebbels in 1933 possessed in his personal library a copy of *Crystallising Public Opinion* (1923), by E.D. Bernays, who had played a major part in establishing the pre-war American public relations industry and in wartime propaganda itself.\(^11\)

Thus what was emerging in the decades immediately prior to the 1920s was a new conception of the nature of parties, or to be more precise of movements/regimes as fascism was in many ways a critique of sectional party politics. Although it is

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\(^7\) For more on this classic analysis of party types, see M. Duverger, *Political Parties* (Methuen, London, 1954).


\(^9\) For this argument and wider thoughts about parties in English see R. Michels, ‘Some Reflections on the Sociological Character of Political Parties’, *American Political Science Review*, XXS1, 4, 1927.


doubtful whether many leading fascists were familiar with original sources, key ideas were disseminated widely on the right. The days when politics could be based largely on appeals to tradition by parties led by notables were seen as over. In their place, fascists after 1918 believed that it was vital to develop para-military parties (often initially based on veterans) which could counter the threat from organised and often violent left-wing groups. However, fascists also held that it was vital to counter the rise of the left by developing counter-myths to socialism and by promising an alternative vision of economic and social welfare. Arguably most importantly of all, this new form of party thought stressed the importance of a leader characterised by traits such as:

i) a messianic mission;
ii) leader-follower identity
iii) Manichaean demonisation
iv) a sense of presence, especially as a speaker.

2. The Three Dimensions of Charisma

Although the ‘great man’ is a feature of politics which can be traced back into antiquity, many have argued that the post-1918 era saw a new style of leader emerge. For example, the leading Italian historian of Fascism, Emilio Gentile, has claimed that Mussolini was ‘the prototype of twentieth-century charismatic dictators’, basing his power ‘on the model of the Catholic Church’. In his much-cited analysis of the Nazis, Franz Neumann depicted a charismatic Führer who exerted a deep secular religious appeal over a people overcome by circumstances with which they could not cope.

The way in which charismatic leaders played on deep rooted traditions, especially religious ones, and the socially disorienting impact of major crisis undoubtedly point to major structural factors which need analysing in order fully to understand the rise of new right-wing parties in the inter-war era. However, it is important also to look at the activities of the parties themselves and to appreciate that the appeal of charismatic leaders was based on far more complex sentiments than the quest for a new secular religion.

The evidence about the exact basis of support for fascism is problematic, but it is now relatively widely accepted that fascism did not simply appeal to the middle class or atomised masses. For instance, in Italy Fascism took off in rural areas like the Po Valley. In Romania, the Iron Guard attracted support across groups broadly. The Nazis were a Volkspartei, which attracted support across all classes, though with a particular appeal to groups such as veterans and the young. However, this is much less agreement about how fascist parties managed to achieve broad support. Indeed, two of the most notable recent interpretations – rational choice theory with its emphasis on economic motives and political religion approaches which tend to point more implicitly to the role of anomie – highlight very different motives.

One key answer to this conundrum lies in the way in which the programme disseminated by fascist parties needs to be understood in terms of an ideological matrix, which allowed fascism to be notably flexible. In particular, the claim to transcend left and right and/or to be pursuing a new ‘third way’ often figured prominently in fascist propaganda. However, for some fascists a new ‘third way’ state involved a significant redistribution of resources towards the workers, whereas for others it was more a question of creating window-dressing corporatist institutions to tame class conflict. This ambiguity was skilfully exploited by Mussolini especially in appealing both to elites and the poor during his rise to power.

It is also vital to consider how ideology was disseminated. Early Italian Fascism relied heavily on street meetings and rallies - although previously during the war the nationalist press had helped spread Mussolini’s name, which was already well-known as a result of his pre-war socialist journalistic and activities. Similarly, a notable factor in the rise of the Nazis was the publicity which the nationalist media baron Alfred Hugenberg gave to Hitler after 1929 as part of a campaign against reparations. The Nazis achieved arguably even more through the re-organisation of the party following the disappointing 1928 result. Existing ‘civil’ society groups, such as völkisch ones, were targeted for penetration; specific Nazi groups for important opinion makers such as doctors, lawyers, and students were set up. Others were formed for what were identified as key constituencies, such as farmers, to whom new policies were addressed. Additionally, there was the deployment of new campaign technology: by 1932 the Nazis were distributing gramophone records of speeches and films, while Hitler was the first politician to use a plane regularly to fly to meetings.

In spite of the 1932 slogan ‘Hitler over Germany’, much campaigning remained highly localised, so the Nazis could disseminate different messages in particular areas. For example, anti-semitism was played down in some areas, but in others figured prominently. During its rise to power, Italian Fascism could differ notably in local contexts too, mainly siding with groups such as landowners and the Church but in some areas taking on a notably more radical hue in line with its initial 1919 programme (which had included taxes on war profits, abolition of church privileges, etc.)

Like Mussolini in 1922, Hitler by 1932 had become a well-known politician, with the Nazis often known as the ‘Hitler party’. This has led many commentators, following the classic social formulation of the charisma thesis by Max Weber, to argue that the rise of fascism owed much to the appeal of charismatic leaders at moments of great social crisis (with the failure of fascism, as in France, reflecting the absence of one or both of these factors). I want to argue that whilst charisma remains an important concept for understanding fascist support, it is necessary to reconfigure the concept and theory of charisma in a way which places much less emphasis on Weber’s focus on the rise of mass affective support.

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A full analysis of this question would need to look at the broad theoretical issue of what forms of crisis make such leaders attractive to followers? However, in this paper I consider more the magnetism of the leaders than the magnetisability of the masses. Firstly, crisis is not an entirely objective category. The problems stemming from structural or institutional factors can be inflated by charismatic leaders, as Mussolini did at the time of the March on Rome and Hitler did with his rhetoric of a terminal ‘Endsituation’ after 1929. Moreover a central part of my argument in this article is that we should not understand charisma simply in terms leaders and masses: we need to look too at a crucial intermediate group of activists.

_Coterie Charisma_

Firstly, it is important to consider leadership in relationship to organisation. There seems little doubt that by 1928 Hitler had come to exert what I term ‘coterie charisma’ over both his inner court, such as Goebbels or Himmler, and a large number of key activists in the country. This served to avoid splits in the party and helps explain the remarkable levels of activism which was important to creating a sense of Nazi movement in targeted areas. A similar point can be made about Italian Fascism, where in spite of doubts about Mussolini’s policy after the mid-1930s, especially the Axis with Germany, most of the party inner core remained faithful until the coup which led to the Duce’s overthrow in 1943. Even then, many remained faithful in spite of clear signs that Italy would lose the war. Another excellent example of the devotion of the inner core can be found in the Iron Guard, which idolised Codreanu.

_Centripetal Charisma_

Although evidence about mass support is not conclusive, it seems clear that Hitler and Mussolini exerted a highly affective appeal over some supporters, while fascist economic and welfare policies appealed for more rational reasons to others. Hitler’s charisma is especially important in helping to explain the strong attraction of the Nazis to those with low levels of interest in politics, including former non-voters and women, who by 1932 they made up over half the Nazi vote. Put another way, we can hypothesise that what I term ‘centripetal charisma’ needs to be understood as a form of low cost signalling which was important in appealing to a particularly broad range of supporters. Moreover, many voters’ focus on politics through the prism of leaders like Hitler or Mussolini made it easier to avoid the dissonance which might have come had they paid more attention to the notably different appeals made in some circles and districts by fascists.

_Cultic Charisma_

During the regime phase of Fascism and Nazism and partly imitative regimes like Franco’s Spain, a strong form of almost god-like ‘cultic charisma’ was developed around the Duce and Führer by state, party and other agencies using a wide range of media. Although there are dangers in talking about ‘consensus’ support, there is little doubt that this aura combined with policies such as the reversal of the Versailles Treaty humiliations and achievement of full employment made the Führer, though revealingly not the Nazi Party, widely revered by 1939. However, I will not expand with the same editors in book form as Charisma and Fascism in inter-war Europe (Routledge, London, forthcoming 2006).
on this dimension of charisma, as the linking theme of this paper is concerned with the rise of new parties in democratic systems in both the pre and post-war era – not with the operation of dictatorial regimes.

3. The Changing Form of Late 20th Century New Right-Wing Parties

By the turn of the 1970s, fascist parties hardly existed as an electoral force in Europe. The main exception was the Italian Social Movement (MSI), but this was mainly a southern Italian anti-system party, which typically polled under 5 per cent of the vote. As well as the damning legacy of historic fascism, new right-wing parties were hampered by a variety of factors. There were important structural changes, such as the full employment economies which characterised Western Europe for decades after 1945. However, it is important also to consider the way in which mainstream parties after 1945 tended to adopt new forms which made them more resistant to challenges. In the immediate post-war era, catch-all parties like the Christian Democrats attracted widespread support in many countries. Later, other forms of party emerged, especially the ‘cartel party’ and the ‘electoral professional party’.  

However, during the next generation a variety of extreme right and populist parties were to emerge which attracted significant votes, and in some cases even entered government (in coalition with others). In order to fully understand these developments it is necessary to consider a variety of structural changes, including the emergence of post-industrial society, the increasing impact of globalisation and especially the arrival of various waves of immigration which increasingly produced forms of multicultural society in Western Europe. However, it is also important to consider the way in which new right-wing parties adapted to these changes and conceived the role of party.

The new right party which made the first significant electoral breakthrough after the 1970s was the French FN, which subsequently became a model for many other parties. The key groupuscule behind its foundation was the neo-fascist Occident, although a variety of other right-wing notables and intellectuals influenced the development. There was a growing realisation that the classic fascist para-military parties alienated rather than attracted support, whilst the events of May 1968 illustrated both the power of the state to withstand (lefist) coups and of the personal appeal of leaders like de Gaulle. The FN was thus based on a threefold strategy. Firstly, it was based on a coming together of different right-wing coteries, including neo-fascist, Algérie française, Catholic fundamentalist and others. Each had its own leaders and information networks which could by-pass mainstream media and target specific appeals. Secondly, there was a quest for specific issues which could transcend these divisions and exert a wider appeal: by the turn of the 1980s the FN had found this in its increasing opposition to ‘immigration’ and related themes. Thirdly, Jean-Marie Le Pen was chosen as leader both because it was thought he had the skills necessary to keep the different factions together and because, after leaping to prominence as a young Poujadist député in the 1950s, he seemed to have the persona which would appeal to an increasingly personality-centred media.

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18 NB too the role of ‘Nouvelle Droite’ intellectuals in pursuing a form of Grascism of the right: see for example, A. de Benoist, *Vue de droite* (Copernic, Paris, 1976).
These lessons were clearly picked up by parties which later copied aspects of the FN. For instance, the Lega Nord initially placed great emphasis on building up a network of local cadres and attracting prominent opinion makers. The British National Party (BNP) provides an even better example of the way in which the FN offered lessons.

One concerns the way in which the BNP as early as 1992-3 concentrated on a small group of activists using ‘community politics’ in Millwall, exploiting highly localised issues (a tactic which had tended in the past to be rejected by many among the British extreme right as a form of ‘populism’ which diverted attention from seeking to develop a wider ideological platform). It is important here to note that the FN’s first electoral breakthrough came in Dreux, which had seen extensive local electoral work undertaken by Jean and Marie Stirbois. A second concerns the way in which the party changed its leader in 1999 from the bombastic and relatively ageing John Tyndall to the younger, confident, Cambridge University graduate, Nick Griffin who clearly saw Le Pen as offering important lessons. One concerned the way in which Griffin has sought to court national media publicity, and has used his limited exposure on television and radio relatively forcefully.19

4. The Four Faces of Charisma (Revisited)

But does this mean he is charismatic? Indeed, can any of the more recent new right-wing leaders be considered charismatic given notable changes in the nature of politics and society? For example, can charismatic leaders emerge in a world dominated by the ‘cool’ medium of television; can Manichean discourse exert a broad appeal in a world where there is no longer a major threat from the left, both internally and externally in the shape of the USSR; do not charismatic leaders need some form of major social crisis in which to flourish; and given the widespread decline of religion, is there scope for forms of politics which have a quasi-religious dimension?

In order to begin seriously answer this question it is necessary to revisit the brief fourfold definition of the charismatic leader given at the end of the first section of this paper, and apply it specifically to contemporary examples while briefly highlighting opinion poll and other evidence about the nature of support for contemporary new right leaders.

Before expanding on these four faces, it is important to stress that a full analysis of charisma would require not only more detail about the nature of contemporary support – though even this would not fully answer questions about charisma, for a variety of methodological reasons. For example, it is possible to hypothesise that the charismatic appeal operates only on a relatively small number of followers, but that they act as messengers who disseminate the message more widely, especially through local or group networks. Certainly there is evidence that key opinion makers like pastors or doctors in Schleswig Holstein, the area in which the Nazis were most successful prior to coming to power, were important in bringing communities/groups over the Nazis (the converse was also true).

It would also require a systematic diachronic and synchronic perspective. This would highlight both how appeals can change through time and how leaders can target

19 On the new BNP see R. Eatwell, ‘The Extreme Right in Britain: the Lond Road to Modernisation’ in Eatwell and Mudde (eds), op. cit.
appeals at different groups even at the same time. For example, Mussolini could portray himself as both revolutionary and conciliator, while as time passed his macho image softened and he took on almost a father role image. A major problem with existing analyses of charisma is the tendency to homogenise leaders’ appeals and/or to fail to realise that charisma and political entrepreneurship are not necessarily polar opposite types of leader. To take an example of the last point, whilst Hitler was possessed by a genuine sense of mission to save Germany, he clearly studied propaganda technique including body gestures while speaking (including being photographed to test suitable poses).

1. A special mission
Charismatic leaders embody a special mission and are typically characterised by prophetic visions. Thus the Front National’s (FN) website at the time of the major 2005 riots proclaimed that: ‘Immigration, the Explosion of the Suburbs – Le Pen had already warned us’. Such leaders may at times make compromises, but ultimately true charismatics are driven by some form of mission. Le Pen has also deliberately adopted quasi-religious language and imagery, especially after 1988 when he visited the US and studied both political campaigning and the techniques of the television-evangelist, Billy Graham. Le Pen’s mission has not always been accompanied by detailed policies, but the broad programme has been clear since the early 1980s, by which time the FN had established itself as the pre-eminent party on the extreme right - with immigration and related issues as its signature theme. Mission is also often linked to a foundation myth, where leaders are portrayed as the founder of the movement. Bossi is a good example of this trait in relation to the Lega Nord. As part of their strategy, charismatic leaders frequently seek to portray elements of their life as part of a wider narrative which they are trying to develop about mission. For instance, the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who was brought up in poverty on margins of society in Kazakhstan, sought to restore the borders of a Greater Russia which would pursue a form of ‘National Bolshevism’.

Assessing the impact of messianic language on followers is difficult. Nevertheless, such techniques do seem capable at times of arousing in voters the belief that a leader is special. For example, research based on interviewing FN party cadres indicates that prior to a major split in 1998-9, Le Pen aroused strong loyalties among party cadres. Specially commissioned opinion poll and focus group research in Russia has also shown that Zhirinovsky certainly exerted this form of appeal over some supporters, although it could be argued that Russia after 1989 exhibited stronger similarities with systems like Weimar Germany than contemporary Western Europe.

2. Leader-follower identity
Although charismatic leaders seek to portray themselves as the embodiment of a special mission, they can also portray themselves as an ordinary man of the people.

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21 For example, many cadres in the FN saw Le Pen in terms of having a special mission, even referred to him in terms of charisma. See Declair (1999, especially p.215, note 34); Mayer (2002).
22 For example, in 2000 35 per cent stressed his sense of mission, and 32 per cent his powers of persuasion. In focus groups many supporters specifically referred to his ‘charismatic’ appeal—a term was not used for any other Russian leader. Research project on charismatic leader, project leader the author, funded by INTAS, 2000-2.
Charismatics, therefore, employ a complex discourse and imagery of both obedience and empowerment. Le Pen has frequently talked of his humble Breton background: images of his youth have featured prominently on the extensive FN website. One of his most-cited aphorisms holds that Le Pen only says out loud what ordinary French people think in private. A common technique in attempting to create a sense of a sense of leader-follower identity is the use of a ‘low’ rather than ‘high’ language. Bossi is a good example of someone who clearly sought to break with the cant and grandiloquence of traditional Italian political discourse. At times Bossi has even employed a machismo language of the streets: ‘the Lega has a hard on(e) he once infamously told supporters. However, whilst historically charisma has been a male form of narrative/symbolism associated with action and heroics, the modern tendency to view politics in terms of and economics offers opportunities for females. For instance, Pia Kjaesgaard, the leader of the Danish People’s Party (DFP), has courted the image of an ordinary housewife (-superstar).

Again, it is difficult to assess exactly how attractive this face is, but it is worth noting that in many cases supporters of the extreme right list hostility to what is seen as a distant Establishment as their main reason for Supporting such parties. For example, whilst in 1986 the person/image Haider came top of the reasons given for voting FPO with 54%, by 1999 rejection of the Grand Coalition/desire change came first at 22%, with immigration policy second at 14% and the personal image of Haider third at 12%

3. Friend-enemy (Manichean) categorisations.

An important part in the rhetorical armoury of charismatics is the targeting of enemies - the demonisation of the ‘Other’. In some cases, these can be internal enemies, today frequently non-white ‘immigrants’, who are portrayed as at best alien and at worst as criminal, welfare spongers, etc. Mainstream parties are another major target. For example, a common theme in Bossi’s speeches has been an attack on ‘partitocrazia’ – the corrupt linkages between parties and business interests which had come to alienate many Italians by the turn of the 1990s. Foes can also be external. Anti-US themes have also become common recently in Western Europe; another external enemy, which can linked be to internal threats, is the European Union. Thus Le Pen sought to portray the Maastricht Treaty as ‘one of the keys of this truly global and internationalist plot’. Especially since 9/11, Islam has become key target posing both internal and external threats. Fortuyn, whose eponymous party list in 2002 included non-whites, specifically sought to reject charges of racism by stressing that it was the backward and unassimilable aspects of Islam which were his primary target. The BNP too, especially Griffin, has recently targeted Muslims as Public Enemy No. 1.

Certainly opposition to immigration/multi-culturalism and related themes such as law and order and welfare (chauvinism) figure prominently when analysing poll evidence of support for leaders such as Le Pen. Indeed, in the 2002 Presidential elections, programme was placed as the main reason for voting Le Pen, well ahead of his image. Moreover, there does seem to be growing hostility to mainstream parties, a trend both exploited and exacerbated by new right parties.

24 Présent, 30-1 August 1991.
4. Presence

Charismatic leaders are typically seen as having great personal presence or 'magnetism': indeed, this often lies at the core of contemporary expositions. Traditionally, this magnetism was seen in terms of speaking ability at mass rallies. More recent studies have tended to stress more the leader's ability to create the correct image especially via television. Partly as a result, many leaders have used image consultants. These have helped push Le Pen towards a softer and more varied appeal. For instance, in an attempt to pursue votes from older females he has issued signed pictures of himself in the style of 1950s’ film idols. After the 2002 presidential elections he clearly used his daughter, Marine, to develop policies which would help further extend his appeal to female voters, for instance on abortion. Although Le Pen at times has retained a sharper edge, most notoriously in his 1987 reference to the Holocaust as a detail of history, some commentators have seen this as part of a wider strategy to appease hard liners as well as courting the more moderate. Such developments have led some to argue that the term 'pseudo-charisma' is analytically helpful – pointing to the essentially contrived nature of the modern party leader’s image.

If the focus of analysis is specifically on the leader, then the term 'pseudo charisma' can be useful to help distinguish the true believers from the manufactured messianic. However, if the focus is more on voter motivation then the issue is less central: the point is more to explain why such leaders appeal? Again, this poses difficult problems of analysis, but a crucial insight comes from noting the way in which leaders like Le Pen have particularly appealed to those who are least interested in politics. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that they see politics through the lens of the leader

Conclusion

To return to the question posed as the end of the third section above – namely, are contemporary leaders like Nick Griffin and Jean-Marie Le Pen charismatic? In answering this it is helpful to distinguish between what might be termed the charismatic personality and the charismatic bond. Griffin can be considered charismatic in the personality sense, as he exhibits in varying degrees the four defining characteristic listed above, including media presence in his limited opportunities on radio and television. However, it is highly doubtful whether many BNP activists accord him any serious form of coterie charisma, especially as some of the key changes in the party cannot be attributed directly to him. Moreover, it is clear that there exists little if any form of Griffin-based centripetal charisma exists among general voters. The point can be put briefly another way by looking at why the BNP has rapidly gained support in Barking in recent years, becoming the second largest party on the local council in 2006. The answer at the agency level to this lies much more in the nature of local campaigning than in any national factor.

However, this is not to imply that all contemporary ‘charismatics’ are in some ways ersatz, incapable of attracting any semblance of the charismatic bond which was analysed above in the context of the inter-war era. Le Pen offers an excellent example here. Whilst there is no doubt that he exerts a strong counter-charisma, leading to high levels of dislike in polls, Le Pen has exerted significant coterie and centripetal

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26 See also R. Eatwell, ‘Community Cohesion and Cumulative Extremism in Britain’, *Political Quarterly*, 77, 2, 2006.
charisma. Before a major split took place during 1998-9, Le Pen was arguably the major factor holding the FN together. After the split, it was his personality more than anything which allowed him to come second in the 2002 French presidential elections, whereas the grey Mégret, who had taken most of the party cadres with him at the time of the split, performed much worse.  

This paper has, therefore, argued two main theses:

1. That charisma, suitably divorced from its Weberian theses, is an important tool to understanding the rise of new right-wing parties both in the inter-war and more contemporary eras. Whilst there are clear differences between the period in terms of issues such as both charismatic style and socio-political trends, it is useful to conceive of charismatic as exhibiting four faces and exerting three broad types of appeal (though the cultic has little or no relevance in contemporary Western Europe).

2. However, it is important to understand other dimensions of agency, especially the role of parties themselves. It is especially important not to neglect the impact of campaigning in local and group context, a crucial factor is explaining the rise not only of the BNP but also of more important parties like the FN.

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