

# Ukrainian Radical Right Movements: Explaining the rise and fall of the radical right in times of crisis

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## Introduction

Social scientists have for decades struggled to explain what accounts for the rise, expansion and influence of radical right nationalist organisations (RRN) in contemporary societies. Confronted with a recent pattern of political and economic crises concurrent to a seeming rise of RRN we are forced to ask: *What explains the rise and fall of Radical Right Nationalists in times of crisis?* Employing the case of Ukraine this thesis tests theoretical expectations that crisis contexts (political and economic) can result in political opportunity structures (POS) for the rise of RRN organisations.

The Ukraine crisis, starting with the EuroMaidan protests in the winter of 2013-2014, leading to the fall of Yanukovich's government, annexation of Crimea by Russia and culminating in conflict in Eastern Ukraine with Russian backed separatists, has opened up POS to previously marginal political forces. A number of new Ukrainian RRN organisations were founded during the first months of the Ukraine crisis. They have been able to capitalise on the crisis situation and POS to different extents. This research aims to explain how RRN organisations use times of crisis to increase their influence and standing, and recruit new members. Furthermore, this research aims to find the explanatory factor(s) for the differing levels of success between RRN organisations. It will do so by employing a most similar case study comparing Right Sector and Azov.

## Research Questions

- What explains the rise and fall of Radical Right Nationalists in times of crisis?
  - a) Or put otherwise: In Post-Maidan Ukraine, have we observed a rise of RRN organisations and their membership?
  - b) If so, can we expect all RRN organisations to similarly benefit?
  - c) If not, what accounts for the different outcomes?
  - d) Is this a geographically diffused phenomenon across all of Ukraine or does it follow a particular geographic pattern?

## Hypothesis

RRN movements are strongly leader-dependent. The leader occupies a key role, internally for the organisation's members and activists, and externally as a media personality and in strategic brand building to attract potential adherents and material support, as well as in developing and maintaining social network ties. Therefore the absence of a strong and charismatic leader can result in the organisation's inability to capitalise on political opportunities in times of crisis.

## Methodology

- Elite interviews
- Ethnographic observation
- Protest Event Analysis
- Social Network Ties Analysis
- Frame Analysis



Nationalist poster, Azov/National Corps 2016



Nationalist poster, Azov/National Corps 2017

## Case Study

Taking Ukraine as a critical case study I will employ a most similar case design analytical approach comparing two RRN organisations for which the explanatory variables are largely consistent across both organisations but the outcome variables, the extent of success – shown in size of membership, levels of public activity, representation in political structures and, elite allies and access to policy makers – are different, providing me with leverage to test different explanatory hypotheses that can account for this variation. The organisations chosen are Azov and Right Sector.

The resignation of Dmytro Yarosh, Right Sector's leader, in November 2015 debilitated the organisation and pushed it into its current precarious position. This seems to have weakened Right Sector's ability to capitalise on the POS that have become open to RRN organisations. At the same time, Azov, having similar origins, has not only maintained its position but has grown in strength, at least in part, thanks to its charismatic leader, Andriy Biletskiy.

## References

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