

## Maverick Politicians, Subversive Ideologies, And The Emergence Of Radical Mass Movements.

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The future belongs to the masses, or to the men who can explain things simply to them.

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Consider the following cases: (1) In 1974, Greece made a successful transition to democracy and, under the leadership of moderate conservative Constantine Karamanlis, set out to consolidating her new regime. Karamanlis's governments provided a new democratic constitution, helped build new political institutions, and tried hard, and successfully, for Greece's accession to the (then) European Community. Meanwhile, maverick politician Andreas Papandreu created a radical mass movement in the form of political party – the *Panhellenic Socialist Movement* (PASOK) – that promised general change (*allaghi*). Although no one could ever tell with some precision what the promised “change” was about, PASOK grew spectacularly and, within only seven short years, it won in 1981 a stunning 48.2 percent of the national vote and captured state power. (2) In 1987, Slobodan Milošević, then President of the Serbian Communist Party, began using a distinctly nationalist rhetoric intended to achieve the opposite from Tito's communist regime, namely, to actively bring the masses into politics. Within only a few months, he orchestrated huge mass rallies, which took place in many cities of Serbia, Vojvodina, and Montenegro. Supported by an ever-growing movement of Serbs demanding justice for their brethren in Kosovo and Croatia, Milošević rose in December 1989 to the Presidency of Serbia after a referendum-type election in which 86 percent of Serbs expressed confidence in this person. (3) In 1998, Hugo Chávez, a failed coup leader and political outsider using a markedly anti-establishment rhetoric, became President of Venezuela after receiving at the polls an impressive 56.2 percent of the vote. To generate support for his candidacy, Chávez had created the *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (MVR), originally a military group now turned into a political party. In addition, he set up the so-called Bolivarian Circles, that is, citizens' self-help committees organized at the neighborhood level, which effectively functioned as propaganda and mobilization mechanisms. So massive and vociferous was the mass movement supporting the new president that, when Chávez was forced by his political foes to resign in April 2002, his supporters rioted in virtually every town of Venezuela and, in less than forty-eight hours, succeeded to restore him to power.

At first sight, the foregoing cases represent three different types of rulership that developed in remarkably dissimilar cultural, institutional, historical, and geographical settings. Papandreu was a parliamentarian and party founder who competed in a pluralist electoral arena; Milošević was a communist leader who rose to prominence after successfully outmaneuvering his internal party opponents; and Chávez is a soldier-turned-politician, but only after he failed to capture state power by military coup. Even more dissimilar are the political trajectories of the three leaders since they came to power in their respective countries. Papandreu enjoyed a long term of power as prime-minister (1981-89 and 1993-96) and, despite many shortcomings in his rule, he reinforced democracy and promoted the modernization of Greek society. Moreover, PASOK eventually became a highly institutionalized party, which succeeded to remain in power long after its founder's death in 1996. Milošević bears chief responsibility for the destruction of Yugoslavia, the ensuing wars, the impoverishment of Serbia, and the bitter loss of Kosovo. Today he stands trial for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia. Chávez, at the time of this writing, still is the unchallenged leader in Venezuela, and so his record book remains open. To be sure, several authoritarian characteristics already seem to have crept into his populist rule.

Their differences apart, however, all three cases tell a common story: that of leaders who rose rapidly to power by creating, and heading, radical mass movements.<sup>330</sup> In this article, I define as *radical*

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<sup>330</sup> Methodologically speaking, this paper utilizes Mill's “method of agreement” (Mill 1967; also see Skocpol and Somers 1980: 183-4) that focuses on seemingly dissimilar cases which, however, produce a similar outcome, namely, radical mass action. This method helps us examine the emergence of radical mass movements in a wide range of political and socio-economic contexts.

any mass movement aiming explicitly at the non-violent dismantling of an existing pluralist (or quasi-pluralist) political order and its replacement with a new and, presumably, better one. This is to draw a clear line on one hand between politically extreme movements, which seek the complete – and often violent – overthrow of democracy and, on the other hand, reformist movements, which aim just at the gradual transformation of existing democracy. In this sense, none of Papandreou, Milošević or Chávez stood against pluralist rule; each of them, however, without explicitly rejecting pluralism, proposed political arrangements radically different from the existing ones: Papandreou promised changes that were “inescapably linked with the socialist transformation of the Greek society . . . [and whose] basic and permanent aim should remain the change of the political system, and not its conservation” (Papandreou 1976b: 231-2); Milošević, by igniting Serbian nationalism, consciously undermined the foundations of the Titoist federal system that had been in place for several decades; as of Chávez, especially during the 1998 electoral campaign, he made quite clear his intention to pull apart the Venezuelan status quo by implementing such drastic changes as a new constitution, the redesign of the judicial system, and thorough economic reforms.

The point is that, unlike reformism, which is commonplace in democracies, mass radicalism entails high risks as far as outcomes are concerned. This, perhaps, explains the relative rarity of its occurrence in already established and sufficiently institutionalized political systems. At the same time, it also raises a number of puzzles: Why do people decide to take such risks? What do they expect to gain in the end? When, and where, it is more likely for radical mass movements to emerge? And, crucially, how radical mass movements are really made? In what follows, I first provide the necessary background information and sketch the emergence of radical mass movements in Greece during the mid-1970s, Yugoslavia in the second half of the 1980s, and Venezuela in the late 1990s. Then, I test the hypothesis of mass radicalism being related to the state of economic and political development in these countries; to this purpose, I compare each of my original three cases with sets of similarly conditioned countries including Spain and Portugal, Bulgaria and Romania, Colombia and Ecuador. In the last section, I offer an alternative explanation based on the role of political leadership, and check its plausibility against the available data. I also discuss how this analysis points to a theory of political charisma and charismatic leadership emergence.

### Three cases of radical mass movement emergence

*Case One: Andreas Papandreou and the rise of PASOK.* Without doubt, the event that more than anything else has determined modern Greek politics is the civil war that was fought in the 1940s between the nationalist and the communist-led forces. At the end of that war the latter suffered unconditional defeat, while the military victors went on to conquer the state apparatus, and set the new rules for the postwar politics. Although nominally democratic, Greece’s postwar political system thus came under the full control of an ultra-conservative social and political coalition, which was summarily termed “the Right,” at the expense of those who had sided during the civil war with the defeated Left (Close 1993; 1995). Besides outlawing the Communist Party, the postwar governments devised a quasi-legal framework consisting of emergency laws, parliamentary resolutions, and decrees in order to safeguard their absolute monopoly of political power, while at the same time keeping their foes under check (Alivizatos 1979). An attempt for political liberalization was made when centrist politician George Papandreou came to power in 1964 with the absolute majority of votes. That was a stillborn effort, however, as old Papandreou was soon forced to resign over a clash with the King. Sadly, the failure of the returning Right to regain broad legitimacy and contain society by parliamentary means led in 1967 to the imposition of military dictatorship. The dictatorship lasted seven repressive years before it collapsed, in 1974, for its failure to prevent the invasion of the Turkish army to, and occupation of the northern part of Cyprus.

When the dictatorship fell, Constantine Karamanlis, the old leader of the postwar Right was recalled from exile to lead the country to democracy. He immediately set out to demolish the postwar exclusionist system, and build a new pluralist order “with intent and by design” (Pappas 1999: 3). The new conservative government legalized the Communist Party, led the monarchy to its final defeat by referendum, provided a new democratic constitution, and set as its major goal the accession of Greece into the European Community.<sup>331</sup> Given the success of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, one should have expected state power to remain for a long time in the control of the established liberal parties

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<sup>331</sup> Largely as a result of a personal international campaign by Karamanlis himself, Greece became the tenth member of the (then) European Community on January 1, 1981.

and moderation to prevail in Greek politics. And yet, it was fledgling PASOK – a radical party founded by Andreas Papandreu shortly after the transition to democracy – that soon emerged as the real protagonist in post-authoritarian Greece.

Initially appearing as a radical Marxist party with a largely unrealistic program, PASOK performed rather poorly in the 1974 elections (13.6 percent). After that point, however, PASOK fully confirmed the accuracy of its designation as a “movement.” By the 1977 elections, it succeeded to double its popular support (25.3 percent) and then, in October 1981, to capture state power with an impressive 48.1 percent of the national vote. During that period, the organizational growth of PASOK was spectacular. Grass-root organizations became established throughout the country, as well as the trade unions, the professions, the universities, and even the secondary schools. Ideological indoctrination and mass mobilization were intensive, and contributed greatly to final electoral victory. How, then, can we account for PASOK’s precipitous rise? What drew Greek voters so massively to that novel political formation? Contrary to previous explanations, which have mostly focused on either structural preconditions (Papandreu 1975, 1976a, 1976b, 1979; Mouzelis 1978, 1986) or purely cultural determinants of such a radical political change (Diamandouros 1993, 1994), I propose that emphasis is placed on the role of political leadership and, more particularly, that of Andreas Papandreu. In this view, PASOK grew into a mass political movement able to capture state power because its founder and leader provided it with an ideology, organization, and sense of mission. To put it simply, without Andreas Papandreu’s abilities and massive personal popularity, the rapid ascent of PASOK to power is simply unthinkable.

As it often happens in similar circumstances (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 54), the 1974 end of authoritarianism in Greece provided an ideal setting for popular upsurge. With the return to pluralism, large segments of Greek society, until then excluded from the political process, were decisively brought back into it. Admission of all parties into political competition, however, not only made formal dissent possible; it also encouraged social excess and political extremism. A sense of social inequality was moreover felt by large segments of the population who had been upwardly mobile during the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s but now faced the dangers of stagflation and unemployment. Finally, the Cyprus debacle had dramatic consequences in the national psyche, and it was blamed on the Americans (who had backed the junta of Athens) and, more generally, the West. Blending old grievances with newly risen expectations, the emergent society thus clamored for all kinds of things and put new, and often onerous, demands on the (moderate) government. The situation is nicely depicted in the following passage:

In the midst of the events and actions of the period immediately following the fall of the junta, there emerged [in Greece] a vague representation of reality, a simplistic notion of history, a bipolar view of social conflict, . . . an equally utopian expectation of radical change, and a general messianic feeling. Demands . . . were being raised everywhere (Elephantis 1981: 118-19).

As the structure of political opportunities shifted to the advantage of the masses, new political leaders emerged who, speaking in the name of the people, offered novel political visions. Of those leaders, by far the most successful was Andreas Papandreu. Having realized that the best way to attract a mass following was through appeals to widely held sentiments, hopes, fears, and expectations (Laitin 1986: 11), he offered the Greek people both a new symbolic “master narrative” based on a comprehensive worldview and the promise of radical change (*allaghi*). This construction of the social and political universe was spread along two main axes. The first divided the world into “metropolis” and “periphery,” the latter being dependent upon the former. The second axis represented the ostensibly inherent struggle between an exploiting “establishment,” both foreign and domestic, and the “people” – that is, all “non-privileged Greeks” opposed to the establishment. This worldview included the theoretical construction of a ladder of subversion descending from the world capitalist center to the remotest Greek village, and was supported by a pair of simple binary oppositions – one between foreigners and Greeks, the other between privileged Greeks and non-privileged ones. Thus dividing the real world between two opposing halves, Papandreu succeeded to identify the movement’s opponents, while at the same time forge in-group solidarity. The success of his strategy was impressive. Promising no less than replacing the existing system with an entirely new one, Papandreu was able to come to power by October 1981.

*Case Two: Slobodan Milošević champions Serbism.* “In Yugoslavia,” as Ivo Banac (1992: 168) has promptly put it, “hate and anger [had] to do with nationhood.” As long as Yugoslavia existed, the national question in that country revolved around the fundamental conflict between federalism and centralization, “a

situation in which the largest nation's [i.e., the Serbs'] claims to power came up against the defense of the interests of the smaller nations and minorities" (Lendvai 1991: 253). After World War Two, Marshal Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia's communist leader, trying to build a multi-ethnic country on the principle of "brotherhood and unity," created a Soviet-styled federation of six republics with equal status and ample veto power. The largest republic was Serbia, which consisted of three parts: Serbia proper, or "inner" Serbia; the autonomous province of Vojvodina; and the autonomous region of Kosovo. The other five republics were Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Power decentralization was reinforced by the Constitution of 1974, which effectively shifted a large amount of power from Belgrade to the republics and autonomous provinces. Despite Serbia's protests, Vojvodina and Kosovo were given real autonomy rights, such as home rule and their own police. Tito died in 1980 and, as Banac (ibid.: 173) again has put it, "his legacy was mortification by grievance."

The grievances raised by the Serbian nation were the most serious. Their most elaborate expression appeared in the *Memorandum*, a seventy-four page document drafted by members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and which leaked to the press in 1986 (the full text is in Mihailović and Krestić 1995: 95-140). Echoing opinions widespread throughout the country (Silber and Little 1997: 33), the *Memorandum* authors lamented the dismal position of the Serbian nation, blaming it to three factors: the relative neglect and economic subordination of the Serbian economy to the economic priorities of the more developed republics, especially Slovenia and Croatia; the politically inferior status of the republic of Serbia within the federal state structures; and, more crucially, the attempted "physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide" of the Serbian populations in Croatia and Kosovo. At the same time as the grievances of venerated Serbian intellectuals became known, public feeling in Serbia was taking a distinctively nationalist twist. The following image of Serbia in the mid-1980s is as vivid as it is characteristic: "Belgrade theaters featured performances such as 'The Fall of the Serbian Empire,' 'World War I Veterans Speak,' 'The Battle of Kolubara,' 'Prince Miloš has been killed,' etc. The same revival of traditional national themes and heroes was also found in newspapers, exhibitions, lectures, and novels" (Cohen 2001: 80).

Among Serbian grievances, the gravest concerned Kosovo. The importance of this region to the Serbian nation cannot be exaggerated. In contemporary Serbia, the fateful 1389 defeat of Serb prince Lazar to the Ottoman Turks at the Field of Blackbirds, which is near the modern town of Kosovo Polje, is still constantly evoked, and its memory vividly recaptured by a myriad of tales, legends, poems, songs, paintings, and novels. Kosovo is considered by Serbs to be their sacred land, the cradle of their historical existence. As with any homeland, Kosovo is for Serbs "a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where [their] sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought" (Smith 1991: 14). It is for these reasons that, as the *Memorandum* authors asserted, "Kosovo's fate remains a vital question for the entire Serbian nation." What compromised that region's fate was the violent irredentism of the Albanian majority of its population. Already in 1981, shortly after Tito's death, a rebellion of ethnic Albanians broke in Kosovo demanding full independence from Serbia and the elevation of their region to the status of a federal republic. The federal police and army crushed the rebellion immediately, but this was not to stop the fast deterioration of the relationships between the two ethnic groups, which forced an estimated 25,661 Serbs to emigrate from Kosovo to Serbia between 1981 and 1988 (Woodward 1995: 485; Thomas 1999: 30). By the time the *Memorandum* came to public attention in 1986, processions of desperate Kosovo Serbs could be seen almost daily in Belgrade in front of the Yugoslav Federal Assembly.

Such was the setting, then, within which Slobodan Milošević, a rather grim communist apparatchik,<sup>332</sup> was to emerge as a charismatic leader, and perform his act of political legerdemain. Milošević's rise to political prominence is marked by an impromptu speech he gave at the very town of Kosovo Polje in April 1987 in front of a crowd of local Serbs and Montenegrins complaining for being discriminated against by the ethnic Albanian authorities. Under the enthusiastic jeers of his co-nationals, Milošević promised them that "from now on, no one will ever dare beat you," and concluded his speech with these words, which would become the basis of his nationalist ideological program:

Yugoslavia does not exist without Kosovo. Yugoslavia would disintegrate without Kosovo. Yugoslavia and Serbia are not going to give up Kosovo (cited, among other sources, in Judah 2000: 29).

<sup>332</sup> Among many accounts of Milošević's personality and political emergence, more important are Djilas (1993), Zimmermann (1995), Doder and Branson (1999), Stevanović (2000), Cohen (2001), Djukić (2001), Sell (2003), [ . . . . ]

Following that incident, Milošević turned into a fervent champion of “Serbism,” which is based on the idea of integrating all Serbs within a single state structure (Pavković 1998). This idea, which was anathema during Tito’s rule, amounted to a complete reversal of Yugoslav federalism, which had been premised upon the suppression of nationalism and the deterrence of active participation of the masses in politics. At any rate, Milošević’s message was able to express the nationalist yearnings of a large number of Serbs, address their accumulated grievances, and offer the promise of restoring the lost power of the Serbian nation. By violating Tito’s fundamental premises for the sake of Serbian nationalism, Milošević’s fame spread fast throughout Serbia. As an author has described the situation, “[his] photographs adorned shop windows and buses, poets and songwriters composed verses to his glory, people lit candles and chanted prayers for his health, crowds came together and dispersed at his bidding” (Dragović-Soso 2002: 1; similarly, Stevanović 2000). Now, Milošević was in a position to organize the radical mass movement that was to consolidate his power but, eventually, lead Yugoslavia to destruction and collapse.

Milošević’s ascent to, and subsequent consolidation of power was swift. By the end of 1987, he was able to win over his moderate party opponents, such as the Belgrade party boss Dragiša Pavlović and Serbia’s President Ivan Stambolić, and gain absolute control in the Serbian Communist Party. During the following year, mass rallies (significantly called “rallies of solidarity” or “truth rallies”) were staged in many places in Vojvodina, Montenegro, and Serbia in support of Milošević and his nationalist project.<sup>333</sup> By the beginning of 1989, the old Titoist party leaders in both Vojvodina and Montenegro had been toppled and replaced by men loyal to Milošević. In February of the same year, Milošević succeeded to jail Azem Vlassi, the ethnic Albanian leader, and replace him with his own men. In March, as if to officially seal his political victories, Milošević proclaimed a new Serbian constitution, which was also ratified by the Kosovo assembly. The constitution stripped Vojvodina and Kosovo of most of their autonomous powers, including control of the police, education, and economic policy, as well as choice of official language.<sup>334</sup> Serbia was believed to be whole again and her new leader seemed to enjoy “a popularity greater than any Serbian political figure in [the twentieth] century” (Djilas 1993: 83).<sup>335</sup> In December 1989, Slobodan Milošević became President of Serbia after a referendum-type election in which 86 percent of Serbs expressed confidence in his leadership.

*Case Three: Hugo Chávez carries out the “bolivarian revolution.”* Unlike most of her neighboring countries, Venezuela presented during the postwar decades a workable political system based on a limited number of stable and sufficiently institutionalized political parties. Especially since the breakdown of authoritarianism and the return of democracy in 1958, there was formed in the country a two-party system including the center-left AD (*Acción Democrática*) and the center-right COPEI (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente*). That political arrangement was based upon several political pacts and agreements, most important of which was the 1958 Pact of Punto Fijo, which was signed by the major party elites and provided the guidelines of political pluralism in the country. Gradually, Venezuela’s two dominant parties built nationwide organizations (Kornblith and Levine 1995: 57) which, for the next forty years, allowed those parties’ alternation in office and, in consequence, their sharing of the spoils gained from power exercise. In such a “partyarchal” system (Coppedge 1994), “[s]tate subsidies gave everyone a bit of the wealth . . . and the parties gradually took control of most organizations within civil society” (McCoy 1999: 65). Given the foregoing picture, Venezuela’s political system came to resemble a “subsidized democracy . . . [in the sense that it was] based on the economic capacity of the state [to provide] the prebends necessary to maintain a certain consensus around the democratic system” (Giacalone

<sup>333</sup> The slogans shouted at those rallies tell an interesting story about the appeal in Serbian society of both Slobodan Milošević and the emerging nationalist ideology. Here is a sampling: “Kosovo is Serbia,” “Vojvodina is Serbia,” “Sloba, Serbian, Serbia is with you,” “Serbia is only asking, when will Sloba replace Tito,” “Slobodan our hero, Serbia will die for you,” “Slobodan, say when, we shall fly like bullets.”

<sup>334</sup> Kucan, party chief of Slovenia, noted: “By abolishing the autonomy of both provinces of Voivodina and Kosovo, Serbia would directly control three-out-of-eight votes in the Federal Presidency – in comparison with the other republics that had one vote each. That meant turning Yugoslavia into Serbo-slavia” (quoted in Silber and Little 1996: 63).

<sup>335</sup> The support Milošević received from both the mass media (Thompson 1992; 1994) and the Serbian intellectuals (Dragović-Soso: 2002) are noteworthy.

and Hanes 1992: 138). Two-party democracy worked sufficiently well as long as the economy followed an upward trend. But when it went on decline, political crisis seemed unavoidable.

Economic decline began in Venezuela in the early 1980s, and was associated with the plummeting of the international price of oil. A bold devaluation of the currency in 1983 failed to turn things around. So, between 1983 and 1993, the continuing fall in oil revenues caused the drop of Venezuela's GNP by 40 percentage points, and led to double-digit inflation rates; in 1989 inflation peaked at 84.5 percent (Crisp 1998). The economic downturn created for many people in the country a state which Molina and Pérez (1998: 3) describe as "endemic discontent, [that is,] the tendency of large sectors of the population, from all walks of life, to be dissatisfied with the government's performance." In those circumstances, many people put their hopes for confronting the crisis and bringing prosperity on former president Carlos Andrés Pérez. Alas, popular hopes were soon frustrated as Pérez attempted in 1989 to implement an austerity program and apply orthodox neo-liberal policy changes. This provoked massive street riots, the so-called *Caracazo*, which, however intermittently, continued for the next years. Then, in February 1992, Lt. Colonel of the paratroopers Hugo Chávez Frias attempted a coup against the government. Although it failed, the attempted coup generated wide support within the middle and lower social strata, which precipitated the political dealignment from the traditional parties and, ultimately, the erosion of stable two-partyism. It was on the basis of such widespread popular discontent that Chávez built a radical mass movement "dedicated to the fundamental transformation of society" (Hawkins 2003: 1137) and which, by 1998, would successfully catapult him to state power.

The roots of Chávez's mass movement, later become known as *chavismo*, are to be found in the *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200* (MBR 200), which was organized within the armed forces in December 1983 with the purpose of fighting against social inequality and political corruption. For most of the 1980s, the members of MBR 200 operated clandestinely but their resentment had grown large, particularly after the government called them to repress the riots of 1989. When they finally decided for a dynamic intervention in politics, their coup was defeated and Chávez himself was sent to jail. He would remain incarcerated for two years until next president Rafael Caldera offered him a pardon in 1994. When released from jail, Chávez decided to abide by constitutional legality and contest his opponents with electoral means. In October 1997, he founded the Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento Quinta República* – MVR). Meanwhile, increasing numbers of people had begun seeing in Chávez a new leader capable of radical political change (Hawkins 2003: 1141), thus sustaining Gott's (2000: 19) claim that, in the tumultuous 1990s, "the arrival of Hugo Chávez on the scene was greeted [by many Venezuelans] as thought it were the Second Coming." Be that as it may, Chávez won the 1998 election by a landslide (56,2 percent against 40 percent gained by his main opponent Henrique Salas Römer), this way verifying the collapse of the old party system. Over the next years, Chávez set out to implement his promise of "Bolivarian revolution," a program for radical change named after the Independence hero Simón Bolívar. In 1999, the new president organized a national referendum to ratify a new constitution (in which the yes vote received 88 percent) and, shortly after, he also encouraged the organization of the *Círculos Bolivarianos*, which are neighborhood groups for turning out the pro- Chávez vote and defending the revolution. And so the *círculos* did during the short-lived coup against Chávez in April 2002. No long after Chávez was forced to resign, his supporters rioted in virtually every city in Venezuela and, within less than forty-eight hours, had succeeded his restoration to power.

How are we to explain Chávez's extraordinary rise to power? Why did the Venezuelans not choose Salas who, like Chávez, was a political outsider but, unlike him, also displayed a moderate image, a coherent political program, and better democratic credentials? The questions become even more intriguing in the light of a recent analysis by Kurt Weyland (2003), who persuasively forwards the claim that Chávez's 1998 victory, rather than being determined by economic factors, was in fact the outcome of political-ideological, as well as cognitive determinants. Based on the statistical analysis of opinion surveys conducted in Venezuela around election time, Weyland shows that Chávez received backing primarily by people longing for the well-being of their country as a whole rather than the pursuit of their own individual interests, and who, therefore, nurtured high hopes for future improvements. The conclusion then is that "many people's hopes in Chávez were derived from faith in his charisma, not from a careful assessment of his likely performance, based on his track record" (Weyland 2003: 843). Given the circularity of this argument, however, the questions persist: Where does charisma derive from? And, how was Chávez elevated to such charismatic status as to inspire a radical mass movement aiming at the fundamental restructuring of Venezuelan politics?

Chávez's rise to power cannot be accounted for unless through his symbolic political discourse. By that discourse, Chávez simultaneously succeeded in three areas. First, he expressed a widespread feeling of collective disenchantment and social despair that was in the air since the early 1980s. Going contrary to the ideas of political accommodation and social harmony that had prevailed in Venezuela for four decades, Chávez emphasized political domination, pointed to social inequality, and declared the inevitability of conflict. "What differentiates Hugo Chávez from his political rivals," writes Moisés Naím (2001: 27), is "his enthusiastic willingness to tap into collective anger and social resentments [what] other politicians had failed to see, refused to stoke, or had a vested interest in not exacerbating." Furthermore, Chávez successfully presented the national maladies as resulting from the conflict between a powerful political elite and the powerless people. In this sense, all politics was condensed in a moral and ethical struggle between the repressed people (*el pueblo*) and an oligarchic elite (*la oligarquía*). As de la Torre (2000: 15) explains, "El pueblo is positively defined as all that is not oligarquía. Given their suffering, el pueblo is the incarnation of the authentic, the good, the just, and the moral. It confronts the *antipueblo*, or oligarquía, representing the inauthentic, the foreign, the evil, the unjust, and the immoral."<sup>336</sup> Finally, Chávez proposed himself as a leader of the people capable of both making away with the old political system and bringing social justice.<sup>337</sup> The size of his success is attested by the mass support he received, which was "socially heterogenous and multiclass, as his backers hailed from all walks of life" (Weyland 2003: 836).

### Can economic and political development rates explain mass radicalism?

Following Seymour Martin Lipset's (1959, 1960) original intuition, the emergence of radical mass phenomena in society are related to economic development and political stability. In other words, a relation is expected to exist between, on one hand, low wealth and feeble democratic institutionalization, and, on the one hand, mass radicalism. At first sight, even the most cursory review of the economic and political conditions of Greece in the 1970s, Yugoslavia in the 1980s, and Venezuela in the 1990s seems to verify Lipset's thesis. When mass radicalism emerged in these countries, each of them was faced with severe economic difficulties, accumulated social distress, and considerable political flux. At the economic level, the oil price hike of the 1970s affected Greece, the ensuing recession of world trade hit Yugoslavia, while the decline of oil prices in the 1980s and 1990s damaged Venezuela's economy; in addition, all three countries suffered around the critical periods double-digit inflation rates and high levels of unemployment. At the political level, after the collapse of a military dictatorship in 1974, Greece was trying her first steps into uncertain democratic terrain and, in Venezuela, the traditional political class had to cope with growing popular unrest that occasionally led to mass violence. Yugoslavia, to be sure, was not a democracy. Yet, after Tito's death in 1980, the centralizing intentions of the Communist Party (the League of Communist Yugoslavia, LCY) became increasingly relaxed and many political decisions originated at the republic political level, and even below. Most party organs were elected from the base and, in general, there was a sense that "the process of political change [was] likely to see the [communist] system replaced by a more democratic structure in which the LCY would be less dominant" (EUI Country Profile, *Yugoslavia*, 1989-90, p. 5).

Be that as it may, neither bad economics nor fluid and insecure politics can by themselves explain the emergence of radical mass movements in our three countries.<sup>338</sup> For, if it were so, mass radicalism would be rampant in many middle-income countries faced with the hazards of economic development and the insecurities of political democratization. To further impress this point, I am going to pit each of Greece, Yugoslavia, and Venezuela against pairs of countries belonging to same region and sharing similar socioeconomic and political characteristics with them. To this purpose, Greece will be contrasted to Spain and Portugal circa the time of their almost simultaneous transitions to democracy; post-Titoist Yugoslavia to Bulgaria and Romania during the early post-communist years; and Venezuela will be compared to neighboring Colombia and Ecuador. Each set of countries represents a particular

<sup>336</sup> Note that pitting "the people" against some presumed "elite" is a quite typical strategy by many a populist leader in many epochs and parts of the world. Not many of those leaders, however, succeed in creating mass movements on the basis of their populist discourse. It is in the success of such leaders to build a mass movement that lies, I think, the proof of political charisma.

<sup>337</sup> As he himself would put the matter, "What my rivals don't understand . . . is that Hugo Chávez is not Chávez but the people of Venezuela."

<sup>338</sup> Remarkably, in all three countries examined here, the emergent mass radicalism was a poly-classist and socially heterogenous phenomenon.

geographical region (southern Europe, eastern Europe, Latin America), as well as a particular mode of transition to and consolidation of democracy. As I will try to show, Greece, Yugoslavia and Venezuela were in most respects better performers than most of their neighbors in terms of both socioeconomic and political developments. And yet, it was in them, not in their often poorer, unhappier, and more insecure neighbors, that radical mass movements emerged. A reason of why things happened the way they did will be proposed in the following section.

For now, to compare and contrast levels of socioeconomic and political development in the three country sets, I consider the following factors: (a) The level of economic development, as measured by per capita income; (b) The Human Development Index (HDI), which is a summary measure of human development based on three dimensions: a long and healthy life, level of education, and standard of living as measured by GDP per capita; (c) Political histories and level of democratic consolidation (including duration of authoritarianism, mode of transition to democracy, stability of current institutional frame, et cetera); and (d) Freedom ratings, which, as defined by the Freedom House, encompass two sets of characteristics grouped under “political rights” and “civil liberties.”

To begin in chronological order with the cluster of southern European countries in the mid-1970s, Spain performed better than her southern European counterparts in terms of both per capita income and HDI scoring (Table 1). Yet, Greece did not lag too far behind Spain on either count, while, on the other hand, Portugal’s performance was extremely poor. The picture turns decisively in favor of Greece, however, when supplementing socioeconomic with political variables. That country had experienced only a short seven-year military dictatorship and, the tumult over Cyprus apart, regime change was smooth and, by all accounts, quite successful. According to Linz and Stepan (1996: 133), the Greek democracy had in many respects been consolidated by the time of introducing a new constitution in June 1975. By then, political rights and civil liberties were fully respected, and Greece was considered to be a “free” country (Table 2). In contrast, Spain and Portugal had experienced very long periods of authoritarianism (thirty-six and forty-eight years respectively) which had left in place complex institutional structures that would not be easy to dismantle. Spain, moreover, was a multinational and multilingual state with increasingly assertive minorities. Like the Greek PASOK, the Spanish socialist party (PSOE) was at the beginning of the democratic transition process a Marxist (and potentially radical) force. In addition, there existed in both Spain and Portugal many other groups (formidable communist parties, sectors within the Church, or junior army officers) who remained only conditionally committed to democracy.<sup>339</sup> In general, unlike in Greece, the political situation in Spain and Portugal during the early post-authoritarian years did not warrant excessive optimism, and this reflects clearly in the restrictions of political rights and civil liberties in both countries, which led to classifying them as only “partly free.”

**Table 2. Measuring freedom**

	PR	CL	ST
<i>Greece</i>	2	2	F
<i>Spain</i>	5	5	PF
<i>Portugal</i>	5	3	PF
<i>Yugoslavia</i>	5	4	PF
<i>Bulgaria</i>	2	3	F
<i>Romania</i>	5	5	PF
<i>Venezuela</i>	2	3	F
<i>Colombia</i>	3	4	PF
<i>Ecuador</i>	2	3	F

Key: PR: Political Rights; CL: Civil liberties; ST: Freedom status F: Free (1-2,5); PF: Partly free (3-5,5); NF: Not free (5,5-7). Reference years: For GR, SP and PT, 1976; for YU, 1989; for BU and RO, 1991; for VN, CO and EC, 1998. Source: *Annual Surveys of Freedom*, Freedom House, New York.

<sup>339</sup> An abortive attempt for a military coup occurred in Spain as late as February 1981.

**Table 1. Socioeconomic indicators**

	<i>Southern European cluster</i>			<i>Eastern European cluster</i>			<i>Latin American cluster</i>		
	GR	SP	PT	YU	BU	RO	VN	CO	EC
<i>Income per capita</i>	10,237 <sup>1</sup>	11,154 <sup>1</sup>	7,543 <sup>1</sup>	5,003 <sup>2,3</sup>	5,231 <sup>2,4</sup>	1,464 <sup>2,4</sup>	6,412 <sup>5</sup>	5,373 <sup>5</sup>	3,455 <sup>5</sup>
<i>Human Development Index (HDI)</i>	0.832 <sup>6</sup>	0.836 <sup>6</sup>	0.785 <sup>6</sup>	n.a.	0.795 <sup>7</sup>	0.771 <sup>7</sup>	0.768 <sup>8</sup>	0.751 <sup>8</sup>	0.719 <sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Real GDP per capita (constant prices in \$US); year of reference, 1975. *Source:* Penn World Tables (6.1).

<sup>2</sup> Real GDP per capita (1985 international prices). *Source:* Penn World Tables (5.6).

<sup>3</sup> Year of reference for Yugoslavia, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Year of reference for Bulgaria and Romania, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Real GDP per capita (constant prices in \$US); year of reference, 1999. *Source:* Penn World Tables (6.1).

<sup>6</sup> Year of reference, 1975; that year's highest rank, Switzerland (0.878). *Source:* UN Human Development Reports.

<sup>7</sup> Year of reference, 1990; that year's highest rank, Canada (0.928). *Source:* UN Human Development Reports.

<sup>8</sup> Year of reference, 1995; that year's highest rank, Norway (0.935). *Source:* UN Human Development Reports.

Turning to the eastern European cluster of countries, inter-regional comparisons get somewhat complicated due to the fact that, while the critical events in Yugoslavia during the late 1980s were unfolding, Bulgaria and Romania were still under communist rule. To deal with diverse timing among the cases, I have chosen to compare conditions in Yugoslavia during the second half of the 1980s with similar conditions in Bulgaria and Romania in the early 1990s, that is, the earliest phase of post-authoritarianism. Although such a comparison is far from perfect, it still yields interesting results. As far as the economy is concerned, Yugoslavia compares satisfactorily with Bulgaria, while Romania is a clear laggard. The same happens with HDI scores, according to which Romania is by far the poorest and unhappiest among her neighbors (Table 1). With respect to politics, I argue that both Bulgaria and Romania faced in the 1980s far more difficult obstacles to democratization than post-Titoist Yugoslavia. They have not only had experienced long, and particularly ruthless, communist rules; in addition, their respective transitions to democracy were painful and, in a sense, had remained incomplete. For, unlike in most other eastern European countries, the former communists in both Bulgaria and Romania retained power, now in democratic disguise. Even more ominous was the fact that, like Yugoslavia, both countries had sizeable minorities (ethnic Turks in Bulgaria and ethnic Hungarians in Romania) who, after organizing their own political parties, became increasingly assertive and demanded the reinstatement and expansion of their rights. At any rate, when it comes to assessing freedom, Yugoslavia in the late 1980s might have been less free than Bulgaria in the early 1990s, but certainly freer than Romania (Table 2).

Finally, with respect to the Latin American cluster of countries, when either socioeconomic or political variables are taken into account, Venezuela comes off better than Colombia and Ecuador. As shown in Table 1, in the late 1990s, income per capita in Venezuela was considerably higher than in Colombia and almost double than Ecuador's.<sup>340</sup> HDI score was also higher in Venezuela than in any of her two neighbors. When it comes to politics, Venezuela and Colombia share several commonalities, which, like with economics, contrast sharply with Ecuador's own experience. More specifically, both Venezuela and Colombia have had long experience with stable democracy (since 1959 and 1958, respectively) and, for many years, had functioning two-party systems. Both political systems included elaborate sets of formal and informal rules to which all socio-political collective actors (the army, the Church, the bureaucracy, the trade unions, et cetera) abided. The slow breakup of two-partyism began in both countries around the mid-1970s, yet only Venezuela followed a revolutionary course. On the other hand, Ecuador had achieved a negotiated transition to democracy only in 1978. Since then, a succession of democratically elected presidents has been dotted by military interventions (1987, 1999, 2000), political emergencies caused thanks to the border dispute with Peru (1981, 1995), and upsurges of the indigenous population (2000, 2004). Paradoxically, perhaps, Ecuador fares equally well with Venezuela in terms of freedom (both are considered "free" countries), in contrast to Colombia which, in 1998, was considered as only "partly free."

To sum up and conclude this section, poor environmental conditions, such as low levels of socioeconomic development and political insecurity, are, perhaps, necessary but not sufficient factors for explaining the emergence of radical mass movements. Evidently, when mass radicalism broke in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Venezuela, each of these countries was better off in terms of either economic performance or political stability than most of their neighbors. What then explains the emergence of radical mass movements in them? In the following section, I turn my attention to political leadership and its role in forging and leading radical mass movements.

#### *Injustice frames, mass radicalism, and political charisma*

Rather than objective socioeconomic and political conditions, what seems to explain best the emergence of radical mass movements in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Venezuela is the presence in them of political leaders who, by addressing specific ideological messages, have been capable of radicalizing, and mobilizing, large publics. To put in another way, no radical mass movement would have had emerged in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Venezuela if it were not for the political initiatives undertaken by such political entrepreneurs as Andreas Papandreou, Slobodan Milošević, and Hugo Chávez respectively. Of course, to simply assert that those men succeeded in building broad radical mass movements because they were charismatic only begs the question. For, not only is the concept of political charisma beset with notional confusion, uncertainty, and triviality (e.g., Willner 1984; Spinrad 1991; Madsen and Snow 1991); it also tells us very little about the conditions of charismatic emergence. One has, therefore, to look at the

<sup>340</sup> In the late 1990s, Ecuador suffered the worst economic crisis in its modern history, with natural disasters and the decline in oil prices driving the economy into free fall. Real GDP contracted sharply and poverty worsened significantly. In 1999, the currency depreciated by almost 70 percent, which led the Jamil Mahaud government to the decision to dollarize the economy. This led to an upsurge of native Ecuadorians and the imposition of a junta.

specific mechanics that caused the elevation of Papandreou, Milošević and Chávez in their respective societies to charismatic status. In reality, those leaders acquired vast charismatic authority because they were able to construct subversive ideological messages, capable of manipulating large mass publics and mobilizing them towards radical political action. This is not an insignificant issue. For, if we accept (a) that ideologies are constructs by political leaders and that they serve as means to the end of manipulating and mobilizing mass publics, and (b) if we know something about the leaders themselves, as well as the socio-economic conditions within which they act, we can make specific predictions about when, and how, radical mass movements are more likely to emerge.

Evidently, for a radical mass movement to emerge, some critical mass of people must first *perceive* their situation as both unjust and subject to change. Two questions immediately arise: How do people perceive? And, what sort of perceptions make people eager *and* ready to radically change an established order? To answer such questions, it is necessary that we link action at the mass level with strategic choices made at the elite level. This is to say that, in fact “[p]art of politics is convincing people of who they are . . . and what they want,” (Brysk 1995: 566, 564), then, in order to mobilize and act collectively, people need to be provided by their political leaders with compelling frames of meaning, or ideologies,<sup>341</sup> which call for change while at the same time proposing a realistic course of action. Therefore, the emergence, and final success, of radical mass movements depends on the presence of maverick political leaders able to compellingly propose subversive ideological messages. This takes us into the terrain of symbolic politics and framing processes. The success of political leaders in creating radical mass movements, I am going to submit in conclusion, offers both an unambiguous indicator and a valid measure of political charisma.

Following Erving Goffman’s (1974: 21) original lead, “frames” are interpretative schemata that enable people to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” realities within their proximate or broader world. They consist of symbolic narratives that offer people meaning in a perplexing world, present new identities and social roles, enlarge the political agenda, project the ideal of good and just society, and challenge existing authority relationships.<sup>342</sup> In short, symbolic frames are powerful devices, or mechanisms (Elster 1993: 5; also see Ross 1997: 42), that are necessary for social change to occur. This becomes possible because, as an author explains,

**[w]e think about politics in stories, and our consciousness is changed when new stories persuade us to adopt a new paradigm. Collective action itself then involves a kind of storytelling or political theater, performing the new paradigm to persuade others. . . . The successful exercise of symbolic politics then leads to social change through shifting priorities, building collective identities, shaping social agendas, or challenging state legitimacy” (Brysk 1995: 561-62).**

All in all, symbolic frames are deliberate ideological constructions by political entrepreneurs that provide the necessary link between the elite and the mass action levels; it follows that, in this view, “mass belief publics [are] dependent variables of elite belief publics” (Sartori 1969: 407). Symbolic frames perform three functions with respect to mass politics: the demarcation of the political universe; the solidification of political groups; and the provision to group members of resources for political organization and conflict. More specifically: (i) *Symbolic frames demarcate the political universe.* This is to say that frames are “systems of meaning” that people use to both make sense of their lives and orient their actions. In this sense, frames provide matrixes within which the “chaotic public will” (Neumann 1956: 396) takes shape and becomes specified. For this to occur, however, such frames need to depict reality in extremely condensed and symbolic ways, let alone to present those depictions of reality as valid ones. When this process is successfully completed, symbolic frames help both “organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow et al. 1986: 464). They also become for their conversed adherents instruments of both vision and division of the world. (ii) *Symbolic frames help make the political groups.* Given that political groups are never to be found ready-made in reality, frames, quite like ideologies, form the basis for the creation of political identities and the aggregation of common-interest groups. Founded as they are upon preexisting social values, and also consisting of normative and affective representations of reality, frames inform social actors about their own positions in existing social arrangements, as well as about whether those positions involve gains or losses (Berejikian 1992: 652). It is this enormous capacity of frames to enhance in-group solidarity and out-group hostility, so as to produce political groups, which makes

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<sup>341</sup> In a very real sense, symbolic frames are the stuff ideologies are made of.

<sup>342</sup> Our focus on symbolic narratives should recall Max Weber’s *erklärendes verstehen* (explanatory understanding), that is, understanding the motivation of actors by placing their acts “in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning;” cf., Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1: 8, 58.

them so important for the conduct of politics.<sup>343</sup> (iii) *Symbolic frames provide resources for political organization and conflict*. In the hands of political leaders, frames and, more particularly, the symbols they contain are tools, not only for making groups, but also for manipulating them and creating the conditions for mass action. Symbolic frames constitute powerful mobilizing resources. As political entrepreneurs realize the potential of framing for attracting mass followings, thus enhancing their own power, individuals also learn that they can improve their lives' conditions by taking appropriate stances either in compliance or vis-à-vis existing frames.

Which frames work best for producing radical mass movements? The analysis of the ideological messages projected by Papandreou, Milošević and Chávez reveals a strong injustice component that seems to be necessary for motivating subsequent mass action. Considering that, "before collective action can get underway, people must collectively define their situations as unjust" (McAdam 1982: 51), our leaders used symbolic narratives presenting reality as being both fundamentally unjust for large social sectors and ripe for radical change (Gamson 1992: 31-33). Interestingly, the injustice frames proposed by the three, seemingly diverse, political leaders consist in common of three elements, each roughly corresponding to the general symbolic frame functions described above. First, all these frames are based on simple binary oppositions (e.g., rich vs. poor; privileged vs. underprivileged; *la oligarquía* vs. *el pueblo*; core vs. periphery; Serb vs. Croat; Orthodox vs. Muslim, et cetera) dividing societies into irreconcilable parts. Such divisions, besides effectively demarcating the political universe, also provide new clues for perceiving social reality. Thus, past experiences "that were formerly bracketed and interpreted in one or more ways are now given new meaning and rearranged, frequently in ways that previously were inconceivable, in accordance with the new [injustice] frame" (Snow et al. 1986: 475). Second, by pointing to some adversary other, or symbolic enemy, injustice frames help make groups and create solidarity (Weber's *gemeinschaft*) within them. Such groups often resemble moral communities fighting against some abstract evil (e.g., poverty, capitalism, the West, the Right, or injustice in general) in the name of some high-order value (such as social egalitarianism, economic redistribution, ethnic homogeneity, national survival, et cetera). Third, injustice frames invariably include some "salvation narrative" (Smith 2000: 103, 104), which is a powerful means for both keeping the group together and providing it with ethical weapons for its struggle.

In conclusion, the radical mass movements that emerged in Greece in the 1970s, Yugoslavia in the 1980s, and Venezuela in the 1990s, can only be explained through the symbolic-cum-strategic action of their leaders. Seen from this perspective, symbolic power (i.e., the strategic manipulation, modification or change of existing shared symbols) becomes a powerful political resource. This is particularly evident in environments where politics is in a flux, within which political leaders "have an opportunity to create new visions and state new truths" (Laitin 1986: 91). As Abner Cohen (1974: 30) nicely describes the process:

At times of change, some men's symbolic forms can provide better solutions to the current problems of a group than other symbols and those men who articulate them may become leaders and have their symbols adopted by the group. There is thus a great deal of the creative artist in the political leader who, through his rhetoric, slogans, and tactics, manipulates existing symbols or creates new ones. When this creativity is particularly original, when it helps to articulate or to objectify new groupings and new relations, we describe him as "charismatic."

The last point should not be lost. By linking mass-level phenomena with the symbolic action of strategic leaders points directly to a theory of political charisma as it offers this "blighted concept" a wide range of new empirical referents, which are, moreover, readily subject to comparison and measurement.

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<sup>343</sup> In Bourdieu's (1995: 741) felicitous phrasing: "Politics is the site par excellence of symbolic efficacy, the action that is performed through signs capable of producing social things, and, in particular, groups."

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