

Catalytic Mobilization of Radical Ukrainian Nationalists in the Second Polish Republic: The Impact of Political Opportunity Structure

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Abstract: *This article brings together historical and political science approaches in order to examine the growth of radical nationalist sentiment and the subsequent strengthening of Ukrainian radical nationalist movements in the Second Polish Republic, from 1918 through the 1930s. Offering a sociological explanation for this process, the article applies the concepts of contentious politics and political opportunity structure to the field of study. The author argues that during the inter-war period, contentious politics were used by both the moderate and radical wings of the Ukrainian nationalist movement. However, the moderate nationalists adopted a contained contention strategy, whereas the radical nationalists opted for a transgressive contention strategy. Consequently, their mutual disposition was characterized by an opposite flank effect—a competition for resources between the wings, their common goal notwithstanding.*

This competition unfolded within a particular political opportunity structure (hereafter: POS) of the Second Polish Republic. Using five indicators of POS, the author suggests that the successful mobilization of the radical Ukrainian nationalists was facilitated by the increasing opening of POS towards the radical strategy. A chronological study of POS fluctuations is used to demonstrate the case.

The article also expands the scholarly understanding of mechanisms of contentious politics by introducing the concept of “catalytic mobilization”—an extensive resource mobilization process occurring despite governmental attempts to restrain it. As this study shows, catalytic mobilization was a crucial component in the further strengthening of the position of Ukrainian radical nationalists under the Second Polish Republic.