
BOOK REVIEW

Ashe, S. D., Busher, J., Macklin, G. & Winter, A. (Eds.) (2020) *Researching the far right: Theory, method and practice*. Routledge

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The volume at hand, on the theory, methods and practice of researching the far right comes amid a wave of political visibility of far-right actors which, in turn, has triggered a boom in demand for research meant to help understand and address extremism. As research strives to catch up to the ever-shifting reality of far-right electoral politics, not to mention the litany of incidents of political violence attributed to far-right actors over the past decade, the editors of this volume contend that there is a conspicuous gap between research practices and researcher reflexivity (3). By exploring the experiences of both established and novice researchers in a variety of disciplines, including scholarly and practitioner accounts, as well as taking stock of methodological, ethical, and personal implications of conducting research on the far right, the volume manages to give a wealth of answers to a fundamental question: how can researchers avoid unwittingly bringing contributions to the visibility of the far right? This is what differentiates and recommends this volume as foundational reading for researchers of the far right looking to consider the implications of their work.

There are six parts to the volume containing specialist contributions varied across fields, methods, theories, debates, assumptions, definitions, terminology, ethical stances, and intentions. Most contributions focus on far-right groups, movements, or parties from Europe or North America. Nevertheless, the volume reflects a richness of experience resulting in a diversity of tips, advice, methods, and questions for self-reflection that can inform research on extremism around the world.

The first part may be the most valuable for those seeking to gain a coherent understanding of the theoretical and methodological evolution of social science and humanities approaches to far-right phenomena. This section is an excellent starting point for students finding their way around their fields or those searching for gaps in their respective disciplines. In the short space of a chapter, Mayer systematically covers all important shifts in political science research of the far right, from terminological debates, to supply and demand approaches, to qualitative and quantitative methods. The section continues with similar panoramas from leading scholars of the far right in sociology (Blee & Latif), psychology (Merino, Capelos & Kinnvall), anthropology (Hervik) and criminology (Perry & Scrivens). A particularly welcome contribution presents the historical perspective, too often neglected.

In his chapter, Copsey doubles down on criticism towards both historians' and political scientists' tendency to cut conceptual ties between contemporary far-right phenomena and interwar fascism, and speaks to what can be gained by attending to continuities between far-right manifestations of different eras.

The volume's second section contains a wealth of resources and examples of quantitative and mixed integrative methods for investigating the far right with large survey (Georgiadou, Rori & Roumanias), crowdsourced (Ravndal & Jupskås), social media and other forms of digital trace or digital content data (Muis, Klein & Dijkstra; Önnersfors; Richards). As the editors point out, scholars engaging in quantitative research on the far right have no choice but to approach their topics from multidisciplinary perspectives; they must often-times integrate a plethora of different methods. The chapters included here demonstrate the agility needed to navigate a landscape of statistical, computational, and theory intensive studies. Moreover, they indirectly make a case for the need to integrate teams of different specialists, or for social scientists to hire specialized assistance to properly deal with the challenges of research designs based on large, non-traditional datasets.

The focus on methods of researching the far right concludes with section three on using interviews and section four, on dealing with ethnographic observational studies. The two sections are permeated by ethical issues, considerations about empathy towards unsympathetic study subjects, suspension of political judgement, the need to build rapport in order to safeguard data quality, and the personal cost to conducting this type of research. Notably, several authors point out that the personal costs are not only limited to the psychological effects of being directly exposed to extremist ideas, but also that scholars may share the social stigma of their subjects, being perceived as part of an extremist group or even becoming suspect in the eyes of academic peers who question the choice of directly engaging with extremist groups.

The volume is commendable for including a section on the contingencies of far-right parties, movements, groups, and allegiances, comprising aspects that usually elude study, yet may be fundamental to the propagation of far-right ideologies. Thus, section five deals with locality-dependent variation in participatory motivations of far-right adherents (Veugelers) and the importance of far-right aesthetics, including fashion, iconography (Miller-Idriss & Graefe-Geusch) and rhetoric (Wodak).

The last section may be the volume's most important part, as it has the potential to make visible the assumptions and preconceptions that researchers could be making to bias and skew studies of extremist groups. First, through a good amount of gifted storytelling drawn from a lifetime's experience engaging with far-right groups as a scholar, journalist, and activist, Chip Berlet (2020) confronts the reader with ways in which clear pre-determined ethical boundaries may become relative depending on specific situations as well as the purpose of the research. Berlet's account is particularly valuable to those who conduct activist scholarship.

The last chapter, however, is the ace up the sleeve of this volume. It takes on questions around the importance of researcher reflexivity and it details the risks of failing to do so. Rather than simply reformulating the points and counterpoints about the risk that research on the far right can unwittingly or negligently contribute to the visibility of extremist actors and ideologies, Mondon and Winter propose a practical process to safeguard against such a risk. They argue there should be four main subjects on which purposeful questions should be asked by anyone writing on the far right: 'amplification, hype and legitimization; distraction

and deflection; access, risk and representation; and bandwaggoning' (374). The risks of ignoring these processes may be serious. For example, amplification and hype can lead to misleading interpretations of available data and legitimisation of far-right parties through rushed and mistaken conclusions, such as the idea that they represent an imagined white-racialised working class. Buying into far-right rhetorical strategies of distraction and deflection helps conceal a certain racist ideological loading from the mainstream understanding of their ideologies. Being oblivious to who has access to actors on the far right and therefore who can represent their motivations and practices for scholarly purposes, can lead to the amplification of personalities and individual psychologies on the far right while the effects of their politics on targeted minorities remains unexamined. Lastly, the authors point out that the subject of the far right is understandably fashionable at this time, and scholars should avoid jumping on the bandwagon without first becoming familiar with previous research. These observations are supported with ample clarifying examples and they should benefit not only scholars but responsible journalists as well.

One of the limitations of the book comes down to its exclusive focus on Europe and North America. The editors rightly acknowledge that advancement of far-right electoral success is not a Western phenomenon, pointing towards the consolidation of Hindu Nationalism in India and the victory of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. A motivation for why the volume is not concerned with far-right extremism in the rest of the world has not been given. Short of winking at the irony of presenting a volume focused on the Global North while acknowledging the need for the field to take seriously the perspectives of scholars of more diverse backgrounds, the volume does not contribute at all towards encouraging that objective.

There is another direction in which the volume seems to have ambitions that are only partially fulfilled, namely that of bringing clarity specifically to explanations of the electoral rise of far-right parties. This volume has many strong contributions, but it simply does not offer sufficient space to electoral politics in order to illuminate this aspect. Mayer's political science disciplinary overview and chapter seven, on estimating far-right vote with aggregate data are the only sections approaching this topic head on. They are initiations into the topic but they reflect only a slim slice of debates and regional applications of far-right vote determinants.

Nevertheless, the volume delivers at least two major contributions to scholarship on the far right. Firstly, it shines a spotlight on a host of practical challenges posed by the research subject and ways to overcome them, from surmounting methodological entry barriers, to dealing with the psychological toll of processing extremist discourse. Secondly, it manages to drive home the point that, when it comes to scholarship on the far right, researchers cannot afford to treat questions of ethics as an afterthought or to merely delegate them to ethics boards without first submitting one's own intentions and practices to reflective interrogation. Moreover, it provides examples of pathways to researcher reflexivity. This is an important and timely contribution to a field that continues to expand voraciously as far-right governments and parties seemingly continue to gain prominence and popular support.

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