
William Allchorn (Ed.), *Tracking the Rise of the Radical Right Globally* (Stuttgart, Germany: ibidem Press/New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019), 464 pp., US \$ 46.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-3-8382-1326-2.

Reviewed by James J.F. Forest

Few would contest the observation that the radical right has seen a dramatic rise in extremist activity and membership in recent years. Researchers have taken notice of this threat, evidenced by the flurry of recent books, journal articles, reports and conferences on right-wing extremism. The December 2018 issue of this journal is a case in point, with 11 research articles on terrorism from the extreme right that had originally been presented as papers at a workshop in February of that year at the Centre for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo.

Thus the title of the book under review captures immediate attention: how does one track such a complex global phenomenon as the radical right with academic rigor, breadth and depth? Initial thoughts and imaginations included the idea that perhaps opinion surveys were conducted worldwide of governments, community leaders, law enforcement organizations, and so forth. Perhaps a major philanthropic foundation had sponsored such a massive undertaking, with the research team providing in this book their extensive analysis – both qualitative and quantitative – addressing research questions about where, how and why this phenomenon has come to be. These were just some initial thoughts before receiving this book for review.

However, this is not that kind of book. It does indeed offer a unique value to the researcher, the policy maker, and the casual observer of recent events—really, for anyone with an inkling of interest in this topic. But instead of a massive study laden with data, charts, graphs and analysis, the volume contains a wealth of relatively brief observations from around the world that collectively provide a robust, and rather disturbing, portrait of the radical right worldwide.

In April 2018, the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) was launched in the United Kingdom. [1] Led by a group of university-based researchers, CARR facilitates analysis on the radical right through a rapidly expanding collection of blog posts, reports, a doctoral forum, several research bibliographies and audio/visual resources (for example, the first CARR podcast featured an interview with Professor Cas Mudde, a US-based Dutch expert on right-wing populism and violence). Within the first year, several hundred brief essays and commentary had been posted to its blog forums by researchers associated with CARR and its partners. The volume under review contains 80 of these essays, most of them in the range of 4-8 pages in length, which makes for quick reading. Of course, as is the case with many edited volumes, the quality of writing varies considerably across these essays: fairly understandable, as they were initially blog posts. But each contribution in its own right provides some unique color to the complex, pixelated landscape of research on the radical right worldwide.

The essays are thematically arranged into seven sections of the volume. The first section, as editor (and CARR Associate Director) William Allchorn notes in his preface, reviews the “ideological currents present within the radical right.” Authors address such topics as right-wing nationalism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

The essays in the next section examine historical manifestations of the radical right. Case studies include the impact of false genetic supremacy theory, transnational white nativism, post-war Britain, and conspiracy theories. Highlights of this section include Henry Mead’s 2-part review essay on anti-democratic political ideologies, and Leonard Weinberg’s analysis of the historical record for comparing Trump and Mussolini. Essays in the third section of the book focus exclusively on the radical right in several Western European countries, while the fourth section of essays looks exclusively at the United States. The fifth section contains essays on the radical right in an eclectic variety of countries, including Brazil, Romania, Russia, Hungary, Poland and India. Through the culmination of these many essays (pp. 109-289) examining social movements, political parties, and prominent government leaders, some readers will be startled to realize just how global in scale the radical right has truly become.

The sixth section of essays in the volume takes specific aim at the violent manifestations of the radical right, which will be of particular interest to students and scholars of terrorism studies. The essay by Yannick Veilleux-LePage on how the radical right has legitimated vehicle ramming attacks is particularly striking. And the last section of essays - on social media and the radical right - includes case studies of groups (e.g., “Britain First” and DFLA) and online influence campaigns (e.g., #IAMSoldierX). One highlight in particular is the essay by Matthew Feldman, the Director of CARR, on how members of the so-called “alt-right” use humor in their online communications. Finally, the essays are followed by an extensive bibliography (69 pages, compiled by Archie Henderson) of books and articles published on the radical right during the previous calendar year.[2]

To sum up, this book offers a global snapshot of a complex phenomenon. As with any picture, it is merely a reflection of a moment in time, framed by what the camera lens could capture at that moment. Intuitively, we know there is much more out there beyond this snapshot. That, in the end, is a troubling thought indeed.

About the Reviewer: James J.F. Forest is a professor at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, a Senior Fellow at the U.S. Joint Special Operations University, and Co-Editor of ‘Perspectives on Terrorism’.

Notes

[1] For more information about the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), please see their website at: <http://www.radicalrightanalysis.com>

[2] A digital copy of this extensive bibliography, containing conference papers, reports, book reviews, blog posts and other materials (as well as links to full texts and abstracts where available online) is available at: <http://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/bibliography/bibliography-2018>