

Commissioned Book Review

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The Populist Radical Right: A Reader by
C Mudde (ed.). Abingdon: Routledge, 2017.
642 pp., £84.00 (h/b), ISBN 9781138673861

The Brexit referendum and the US presidential election in 2016 sparked an increased interest in the contemporary populist radical right. The public, pundits and politicians alike discuss the role of populism in democratic politics today, and with a comprehensive scholarly literature on the topic, it can seem cumbersome to become familiar with the decades of research on one of the most popular party families today, the populist radical right.

For the people interested in a better understanding of the populist radical right, a solid entry point to the academic literature is the voluminous volume, *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, edited by Cas Mudde. Cas Mudde is one of the leading researchers on the populist radical right and, with an immense knowledge of the literature, there is no doubt that Mudde is able to provide an extensive introduction to the literature.

The book in question is a collection of 32 previously published journal articles and book chapters handpicked by the editor. The contributions span a period of 25 years, from Klaus von Beyme's article on right-wing extremism in post-war Europe, published in 1988, to recent studies published in 2013. The 32 chapters have for the most part survived the test of time and seem, in many cases, more important for our understanding of politics today than when the contributions were initially published.

The chapters are distributed across six thematic parts: (1) ideology and issues, (2) parties, organisations and subcultures, (3) leaders, members and voters, (4) causes, (5) consequences and (6) responses. The first and second parts consist of contributions on how to study the ideological make-up of the radical right, the different political issues the populist

radical right parties deal with and its organisational expressions. The third and fourth parts consist of contributions interested in the people involved in and supporting the radical right, that is, the politicians/leaders, the members and last but not least, the voters. The fifth and sixth parts focus in particular on how radical right parties matter for parliamentary and governmental dynamics, including their implications for the policymaking process.

The six parts provide substantial variation in the content and topics being covered. You will find everything from philosophical discussions on key concepts to descriptive evidence on the evolution of radical right parties; from detailed historical descriptions to large-N statistical analyses; from analyses of racist organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan to analyses of contemporary right-wing parties in Europe. The book is, in other words, an impressive and pluralistic collection of authoritative texts on the populist radical right. Furthermore, each part begins with a brief outline of the chapters to come, a series of revision questions to each chapter, some discussion points and suggestions for further reading. The revision questions and discussion points will serve as a useful resource for teachers when designing modules on the populist radical right in the future.

However, the strength of the individual chapters is also the main limitation of the book. Specifically, the literature on the populist radical right relates to notoriously difficult terms and there is no unified theoretical framework guiding the individual chapters. To be fair, the limitation is present in the literature and is simply a limitation in this volume as well. As the editor acknowledges in the introduction, almost every author in the volume uses a somewhat different term, definition and classification of the populist radical right. This is especially symptomatic for a collection of contributions spanning over two decades in a

rapidly developing literature on the radical right. Overall, the book could have been improved by having fewer chapters and a more detailed description of the context for the selected texts, for example, a description of why they are included and what they can tell us about contemporary populism.

Without any context, some chapters seem outdated. To illustrate, Paul Taggart's chapter on *New populist parties in Western Europe* from 1995, when the new populist party in Denmark was the *Progress Party*, is, while interesting, superseded by several other studies not included in the volume. Admittedly, there is an inherent trade-off between the seminal pieces in the literature and the most up-to-date contributions, but in some cases I lack an explicit justification for including empirically outdated chapters. As a result, not all chapters leave an impression of being among the most important texts to read today, if you are to understand the populist radical right.

As noted, the most recent contributions in the volume are published in 2013. However, over the past 5 years, we have seen several notable theoretical and methodological innovations and improvements in the literature. First, researchers are beginning to have a better understanding of the psychology of the populist right that has significantly improved our understanding of why people support the radical

right. Second, novel approaches have been able to provide new insights into the role of the mass media in connection to the success (or lack hereof) of the populist radical right. This is not a criticism of the book, but an acknowledgment that this book will serve as a good supplement to recent research on the populist radical right. Last, an updated edition of the book would benefit from taking recent empirical developments into account, most notably on the populist radical right in the US with the Tea Party and Donald J. Trump.

These limitations aside, we are dealing with a significant and important contribution to the discipline. The book succeeds in being more than the sum of the 32 individual contributions and will be of interest to students of the populist radical right. In 2019, that should be most of us.

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