

From Far-Right to Populist Extremism

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A Review of Max Taylor, Donald Holbrook, and P. M. Currie. *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 278 pp. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN: 1441151621

- 1 *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* examines diffuse post-war European extremist movements that have been involved in violent acts or promote terrorism. The chapters derive from a May 2011 workshop about the wider political context where the groups thrive, how they attract supporters, the nature of the violence, ideological developments, the impact Islam had on right-wing extremism, and prevention strategies. Though the anthology does not promise an exhaustive account, it leaves out countries with significant extremist movements and does not address the more recent transnational developments or tie their success to reactions against the European Union. Nonetheless, the book is a timely contribution that offers an important understanding of the personalities and temperaments involved in political violence and terrorism. This review will offer a brief summary of the book's twelve chapters that explore American, British, Dutch, French and German movements that have been involved in political violence, promote terrorism as a political strategy or have moved away from an extremist past to enter the normal political process.
- 2 *First chapter:* Donald Holbrook and Max Taylor explore the difficulty in labeling such heterogeneous and diverse extremist organizations. They explain that "extreme right-wing views are often contrasted with extreme left-wing views," but "in psychological terms there are grounds for supposing that there may be critical common links between right and left effects on behavior that lie not in contrasting qualities of ideologies, but in the role of extremism" (4). Using Erving Goffman's idea that the extreme right-wing can be understood as "spoiled identity" in that its positions are "spoiled" and are no longer acceptable following specific events, the book aims to highlight "different strands of violent political activity, attitudes and related discourses and contexts that have been grouped under [the] 'extreme right wing' banner" (5).
- 3 *Second chapter:* Leonard Weinberg defines the American far right and looks at the diverse attitudes that encompass its broad ideology. He explores differences between "right-wing populist" groups that have paranoid tendencies and anti-elitist bent, and far-right revolutionary groups, sometimes referred to as "hate groups," that express ideology for racial or ethnic separation. Pointing out that the biographies of significant figures show the people in far-right revolutionary groups do not have limited intelligence or lack accomplishments, he surveys the different religious attitudes and different strategies, such as a "lone-wolf" approach where a small group or individual launches a terrorist campaign. He also examines outreach with music and the Internet and concludes that "[i]f the governments are unresponsive or, worse, appear to side with the white populations' racial or religious enemies, then the conditions are present for a terrorist campaign directed not only at members of minority groups, but also at the governments that now appear to constitute the 'enemy' as well" (28-29).
- 4 *Third chapter:* Robert Lambert discusses evidence of extremist violence in the United Kingdom and examines whether there is a connection between campaigning against

Muslims and anti-Muslim violence. His sources include qualitative research from interviews with the victims of violence and questionnaires sent to more than 1,000 mosques in the United Kingdom. He concludes that “this preliminary analysis does however provide a clear indication that extremist nationalist organizations including the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League (EDL) have a key role in fostering a climate in which anti-Muslim or Islamophobic violence has become an established feature of British life since 9/11” (32). Lambert traces historical right-wing violence with the White Defence League’s bookshop in Notting Hill in the 1950s to the more recent BNP’s “decade-long campaign against Muslims” (50). Reviewing his research, he describes “that between 40 and 60 percent of over 1,600 mosques, Islamic centres and Muslim organizations in the UK” had at least one attack that could be considered a “hate crime since 9/11” (45). Lambert also looks at the victims of violence and concludes that the acts were part of a wider climate of anti-Muslim sentiment.

- 5 *Fourth chapter:* Joel Busher explores the English Defence League’s “discourse and public (dis)order.” He examines how the EDL consciously moved away from the BNP and the National Front’s “traditional” right-wing extremism. Using data Busher collected with permission at EDL demonstrations and meetings, he highlights five prominent themes in the group, including the EDL as a “rights organization,” the threat of Islam, the threat of the left, victimization from state authorities and the EDL as the “vanguard” in a heroic narrative. He writes that the EDL has distanced itself from neo-Nazism by “clamping down” on those who give Nazi salutes and have shunned troublemakers that join the demonstrations to engage in violence. Busher concludes that EDL is not a “homogenous block” and on-going tension within the group might result in fragmentation. Additionally, he argues the EDL has “provided an outlet for hostility and in some instances for violence, and enabled some activists to legitimize this violence by situating it within a heroic narrative about protecting their community, country and/or culture from the advance of (militant) Islam” (80).
- 6 *Fifth chapter:* James W. McAuley looks at Ulster loyalism with focus on its ties to the British extreme right. He examines “the formation of contemporary views concerning race and ethnicity across unionism” and the British extreme right’s “attempts to organise” in Northern Ireland (86). McAuley concludes, “any evidence that working-class Protestants have turned to the extreme right is limited” (95). In fact, loyalists have actively campaigned against racism. Though there have been cases of racist violence by people who consider themselves loyalists, the “substantiation of any structural involvement by Loyalist paramilitary groups is much less assured” (98).
- 7 *Sixth chapter:* Rob Witte examines the Dutch far right’s move from “classical outsiders to modern insiders.” He seeks to understand the “self-image” of the Netherlands as a “tolerant” and non-radical place, but with the rise of right-wing extremism asks if this image was false or if it has “undergone extensive societal changes since 2001” (105). Witte finds “the dominant self-image of the Dutch as a tolerant nation that has become embedded over the ages has now become more nuanced” (122). Furthermore, right-wing extremism and racism “within society at large became perceived not as extremist or racist in character, but rather as the utterances of people living under difficult circumstances, especially due to the impact of immigration or in relation to the presence of migrant populations” (122). He also describes how the “old far right” was associated with Nationalism Socialism, but the “new far right” has increasingly taken on a less marginal role with anti-Islam discourse.
- 8 *Seventh chapter:* Ineke van der Valk argues the extreme right-wing movement in the Netherlands has become more prominent due, in part, to “the internet and through a focus on specific youth cultures” (129). Using data that traces youth recruitment and disengagement, she shows there is no linear path for de-radicalization, but a significant fact “was the need for a more conventional, socially integrated existence: in short, work, partner, and a house, a wish that was obviously related to their age” (134). The chapter concludes by stressing the pathways of youth involvement, including rebellion, protest and discussing social issues, and points to the need for focusing “attention on what the people who adhere to these extremist dispositions have in common” when developing policy to “prevent engagement in extremist activity” (144).
- 9 *Eighth chapter:* Michel Gandilhon answers whether the rise of French right-wing extremism foreshadows “a return to political violence or even to terrorism” (149). He discusses the historical aspects of the French extreme right, and shows that violence was unusual and developed during the decolonization process. Then the chapter examines the present extreme right and its integration into normal politics, including political violence disappearing and looking at those who support, but criticize the *Front National*. The final portion of the chapter reviews specific concerns, mainly Islam, by exploring how the *Front National* argues it is a defender against Islamification. Gandilhon concludes that the trends that made neo-Nazi violence possible in France “are now in the throes of extinction, surviving only in the virtual form of internet sites which get swallowed up in the great ebb and flow of the web”

- 10 *Ninth chapter*: Toby Archer examines Anders Behring Breivik's mindset by analyzing his manifesto, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, written "to make sure his political motivation" for the 2011 bombing and massacre in Norway is understood (170). Archer surveys the history of "counterjihad" ideology and shows that while "Breivik was the first terrorist to act in the name of this ideology, at least on such an extreme scale, he was far from the first proponent of it" (182). The ideology opposes any form of Islam and paints Muslims as the "other" in an intolerant framework and Breivik saw his actions as the "logical endpoint" of those beliefs. Yet, Archer points out that the counterjihad construction has tension, notably "between its claims to liberalism and the arch-conservatism of many of its positions" and this "remains the central issue for it to resolve if it wants to become a wider movement" (182).
- 11 *Tenth chapter*: Peter Lehr looks at the similarities and differences of violence in the German extreme left and extreme right. He argues "that when it comes to countering terrorism and political violence from the extreme right and extreme left, certain European states still tend to be 'blind in the right eye'" (187). Lehr reviews the definitions of radicalism and terrorism, and analyzes the motivations for terrorism. He shows that prior to German re-unification, leftist terrorism was the major concern and extreme right-wing terror "did not leave much trace in the public memory" (196). Lehr concludes that "the under-reaction of both state and the public" to extreme right-wing terrorism "as opposed to the overreaction to similar acts from" extreme left-wing "terrorism cannot and should not be explained in terms of 'being blind in the right eye' in the sense of tolerating it to a certain degree alone" (206). Rather he contends, "it is also a matter of state and public perceptions and understanding terrorism" (206).
- 12 *Eleventh chapter*: Donald Holbrook compares right extremist and militant Islamist discourses. Using publications and statements from representatives on both sides, he compares "prominent extremist narratives of the far right with those of militant Islamism with the aim of assessing similarities and differences and the ways in which the former reacted to the latter" (217). Though there are obvious differences, Holbrook argues that the two narratives converge with condemning homosexuality, democracy, capitalism, Zionism, and supporting Palestinian independence and developing clandestine networks. Despite the hostility, the belief that the Islamist groups and ideologies are threats to extreme right-wing groups' values "may encourage some right-wing violent extremists to embrace" militant methods used by Muslim extremists (234).
- 13 *Twelfth chapter*: P. M. Currie's conclusion reviews each chapter by looking at the ideology of the extreme right, developments of radicalization and assessing the risks of extreme right-wing violence. Indeed, there has recently been a move away from neo-Nazism and a rejection of traditional far-right politics as the extremists embrace populist concerns about Islam. The anthology shows not all extremists are violent and that when extreme right parties are involved in the political process, there is less violence. The growth of political violence and terrorism with examples from the Netherlands as well as the terrorist attack in Norway shows the continuing threat. Where there are risks, engaging activists who are disenchanted with extremism can help mitigate the potential for violence.
- 14 *Extreme Right-Wing Political Violence and Terrorism* highlights specific elements of right-wing organizations by looking at youth involvement, comparisons between extreme right-wing ideology and militant Islam, the transition away from anti-Semitism to anti-Islam, a comparison of extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing violence, and the move away from traditional "far right" to populist extremism. The anthology successfully surveys individuals, ideologies and organizations as well as shifts away from the "traditional" far right in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Besides the obvious omissions of Greece, Hungary, and Russia that have significant right-wing movements, the book fails to focus on the growing transnational dimension of extremists, such as the Alliance of European National Movements in the European Parliament or the signing of the New Orleans Protocol. Euroskepticism also is not examined as an important aspect of the extreme right or as a recruitment vehicle for citizens who fear that the European Union is impinging on state sovereignty. Nevertheless, the book offers solid approaches to understanding extreme right-wing political violence and the transformations of extremist politics.

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