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Radical right parties have earned more scholarly attention than any other party family in Western Europe. Cas Mudde’s book masterfully synthesizes this voluminous literature, adding original insights and opening new venues for academic research. His exhaustive review of the literature makes three important contributions to this mushrooming field: it provides a solid conceptual basis for understanding the radical right; it extends the analysis to Eastern Europe; and it improves existing explanations for the rise of this phenomenon.

One of the main strengths of the book is the conceptualization and classification of the radical right. Building on his earlier work on the “extreme right,” Mudde devotes the first part of the book to providing a clear definition of the “populist radical right.” The book joins a growing consensus in the literature that distinguishes nationalism as the single characteristic that all radical right parties share. To exclude liberal forms of nationalism, Mudde comes up with the term “nativism,” a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. He defines nativism as “an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the nation-state” (19). In addition to nativism, Mudde points out two other core characteristics of the populist radical right: the belief in a strictly ordered society (authoritarianism) and the reverence of the “little man’s” wisdom (populism). The definition is specific enough to distinguish the populist radical right from other party families but at the same time, it is sufficiently broad to stretch the geographical scope of the study to Eastern Europe. Mudde uses this definition as the basis for examining party literatures and classifying more than 100 parties as “populist radical right.” For definitional reasons, the list excludes some of most discussed parties, like the German NPD, the Norwegian FRP, and the Dutch Pim Fortuyn List. Moreover, it does not take into account changes in party ideology across time. But even this “provisional classification” (58) gives a clear indication of the spread of this phenomenon.

The extension of the analysis to Eastern Europe is the second major innovation of the book. Whereas most analyses assume that the rise of the radical right is largely a postindustrial phenomenon constrained to the long-established democracies of Western Europe, Mudde shows that similar parties made advances in young post-Communist democracies. The analysis of party politics in 37 countries—including Russia and Ukraine—would present any study with data availability problems. Such problems are more acute for students of “populist radical right” parties which are either too secretive to outsiders or too marginal to merit media reporting. To overcome these problems, Mudde organizes the second part of the book thematically and relies on intermittent references to individual parties to highlight the position of the entire party family on specific issues. He shows that these parties share parallel views on the economy, democracy, the European Union, and globalization. And that they similarly divide the world into friends and foes thriving on the spread of fear about “non-natives”—especially Muslims, Jews, and Rom. The geographical breadth of the analysis becomes more difficult to handle in the third part of the book, which reviews the various explanations for the divergent electoral fortunes of these parties. The unavailability of comparable data makes it hard to assess the relative validity of the multiple explanations. Moreover, cross-regional differences raise obstacles to the transplantation of theories developed for Western, to Eastern Europe. For example, the spatial competition or party interaction models that have come to dominate the literature on the West European radical right are not easily transposed onto new party systems characterized by weak party identification and high voter volatility.

The third contribution of the book is the clarification of existing explanations and the generation of new hypotheses for the rise of the radical right.
Politics is about getting your way—winning—and one of the crucial questions in the study of politics is how losers deal with their lots. The five authors of this appealing book deal with the question of losers’ consent, that is, the extent to which those who fail in the game of politics nevertheless accept the rules and the outcomes they generate. This is not the first effort to understand politics from the vantage point of the losers—indeed William Riker made that a critical part of his innovative work on heresthetics. But the current book is by far the most systematic and sustained empirical analysis of the assessments made by political losers (and winners) across a large set of advanced democracies.

This is an unusual and gratifying book in several respects. It is still uncommon for a political science book to be coauthored by five different scholars, and especially by five such established scholars from widely different institutions on different continents. It is even more unusual for such a book to be as thematically coherent as this one is. There are no country-specific chapters and no pandering to individual pet projects that might fit awkwardly with the main thrust of the book. Instead, the chapters flow intuitively and seamlessly from the larger concerns that motivate the study. And even a reader who knows the team of authors well may have a difficult time attributing specific parts of the book to particular individuals.

The authors’ main concern is with the implications of losing for the democratic bargain: the willingness of political players to abide by the rules of the democratic game and accept its outcomes, regardless of how unfavorable they may be for these players themselves. It is this consent, they argue, that forms the foundation of political legitimacy. And indeed it does. Thus, the critical democratic challenge is not only to keep winners from abusing their power, but also to keep losers wedded to the rules of the game. And until recently, we have had little systematic knowledge of the conditions under which this is likely to happen.

This volume goes a long way in providing important insights about these conditions. The authors do an admirable job of analyzing data from a variety of democratic countries, including new (meaning mainly Eastern and Central Europe) as well as older democracies. Although their sample includes the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the bulk of the data remains European. But while many readers would surely welcome a geographically even broader sample, the authors deserve much credit for the insightful and creative ways in which they use data from specific countries to analyze the effects of particular institutions, such as federalism (in Canada) and attitudes toward institutional change (in New Zealand and the United