

power of ideology and political judgment. Temporally, the book begins with Bashar al-Asad's rise to power and the development of what Wedeen terms "neoliberal autocracy" (chapter 1)—characterized by a turn toward some elements of market liberalism while, importantly, "cultivating desires for commodities, fostering new ambitions of upward mobility, and producing individual philanthropic programs envisioning citizens' empowerment in ways that presume their limitations" (p. 32). This set of ideological productions and practices—epitomized by images of the first family and especially First Lady Asma al-Asad as sophisticated, urban, and even cosmopolitan—were particularly effective in reinforcing desires for order and calls for gradualism, rather than revolution, among the upper and middle classes in Damascus and Aleppo in the first year of the uprising. Each of the following chapters takes on a separate set of ideological forms that, for different groups and over time, come together to shape the response of the "ambivalent middle" (what came to be referred to as the "gray people" or *al-ramadiyyin*). Chapter 2 spotlights the role of humor, primarily in television serials but also in online series; chapter 3 turns to the oversaturation of news and informational media sources; and chapters 4 and 5 situate the functions of mourning and fear, respectively. As she did in her first book on Syria, Wedeen demonstrates how the examination of sites of cultural production reveals critical insights about the formation of complex attitudes and norms held by people whose political preferences and behavior can seem indiscernible to outsiders.

Although one can find a great deal to engage with in each of this book's chapters, I want to focus on a few main contributions that are particularly potent for our time. First, Wedeen's analysis of the foreclosure of the conditions of political judgment in Syria is instructive for other contexts where polarization is increasingly characteristic of politics. Rather than relying on the denial or censoring of information, Syria provides a cautionary tale of how "an excess of information and accelerated conditions of dissemination [are] exploited for authoritarian political gain" (p. 81). In addition to the more widely established mechanisms through which information overload and the dissemination of counterclaims can produce what Wedeen refers to as "silenced publics," with people seeking out information that reaffirms their priors, her analysis draws attention to an overlooked and arguably more challenging consequence: "conditions of generalized uncertainty make it easy for people to find alibis for *avoiding commitment to judgment at all*" (p. 79; emphasis added). This process fundamentally privileges the status quo, even in contexts where "action might otherwise have seemed morally incumbent" (p. 80).

Second, Wedeen's analysis of the seductive power of neoliberal ambitions of the "good life" in sustaining support for the status quo, particularly among the urban middle and upper classes, begs the question of the interplay of material and ideational factors. As Wedeen shows,

purely economic and class-based arguments fail to capture the varied choices of many segments of Syrian society. Arguably, the economic openings ushered in by Al-Asad in the early 2000s likely had demonstrable effects on people's assessments of their own potential. However, as the conflict wore on, these images receded in favor of other potent ideological forms, though never truly disappearing. As the economic situation in Syria deteriorates rapidly at the time of this writing, despite the reduction in hostilities, the "good life" may be as elusive as ever. Will alternative ideological forms be developed to maintain the politics of disavowal—reflected in the recurrent phrase in the book of "I know very well yet nevertheless..."—as international sanctions, rapid inflation, and internal fractures within the regime pose growing challenges to the potential for order? These questions are ever more important within Syria as well as beyond, as the world faces one of its most turbulent periods under the strain of a global pandemic—and potential challenge to the neoliberal order—in the modern era.

The book not only provides an analysis of the ideologies that sustain the position of "the ambivalent middle" (as well as certain elements of the opposition and loyalists) but also points to alternative spaces for discourse that "embrace the ambiguity of the situation ... without giving up on judgment and political intervention as such" (p. 104). One notable example taken up in the book is the Syrian art collective Abounaddara, which posts weekly short videos online of complex, multidimensional, and nonsensational moments of Syria and Syrians. The question remains, however, whether and how these liminal spaces (which "interpellate" a limited set of audiences) can serve as incubators of profound challenge to the dominant ideological forms.

Finally, at a time when scholarship on Syria is rapidly growing in political science, even as the country itself remains inaccessible to most researchers, this book demonstrates the richness that can be achieved with deep contextual knowledge and ethnographic insights that go beyond the country's most recent history. The research for this book also took Wedeen beyond Syria's geographic boundaries, as she followed the paths of many of its citizens. As such, it provides an exemplar of sustained multisited ethnography and discourse analysis. The book is an invaluable contribution that will undoubtedly shape debates moving forward.

**Organizing against Democracy: The Local Organizational Development of Far Right Parties in Greece and Europe.** By Antonis A. Ellinas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 294p. \$99.99 cloth.  
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In *Organizing against Democracy*, Antonis Ellinas meticulously profiles the Greek Golden Dawn, while providing supplemental analysis of German and Slovakian extreme

right parties. The principal contributions of this monograph are its in-depth analysis of subnational extremist organizations and the wealth of data brought to bear on the subject, including interviews, party publications, and other media. Ellinas advances subnational extreme right organization as a novel dependent variable, asking how environmental and endogenous factors affect the development of far right parties beneath the surface of national politics. In so doing, the author uncovers a variety of tensions within the family of extreme right parties between conventional and contentious politics, subnational variation in organizational activity despite centralized charismatic leadership, and the extreme right's pursuit of seemingly suboptimal electoral strategies.

Ellinas is mainly concerned with the extreme right party family, in contrast to the better studied "radical right," as he makes clear in chapter 2. In part, systematic research on these parties is rarer precisely because they are smaller and more extreme. Ellinas highlights the comparatively "biological," or racial, nationalism of the extreme right, its interwar origins and imagery, its emphasis on party membership, and its commitment to contentious politics as the primary differences between radical and extreme right parties. Furthermore, although green or radical left parties may also practice contentious politics or have close linkages with social movements, the extreme right's exclusive membership practices, hierarchical structure, and occasional violence are inseparable components of its ideology. These characteristics result in conflicts within extreme right parties as they seek to expand their electoral appeal, recruit and retain moderate members, or otherwise maneuver around legal obstacles—up to and including party bans. In three cases considered in this book, these tensions are often resolved in favor of militants over moderates. However, little attention is given to extreme (maybe now "radical") right parties that developed in the other direction, such as the *Front National* or, arguably the British National Party, circa 2009, leaving some variation on this new dependent variable unaddressed.

Chapter 3 further establishes party organization as a dependent variable, and a particularly important one for the extreme right. Because far-right parties are centralized charismatic parties without many institutionalized procedures, significant subnational organizational variation suggests that endogenous and environmental (i.e., electoral, institutional, and societal) factors affect local development. The history, ideology, and membership of the extreme right fortify it against its environment to a greater extent than most other party families. However, parties like the Golden Dawn (GD), National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), and the Slovakian People's Party—Our Slovakia (LSNS) are not entirely insulated from their environments. They face electoral incentives that may amplify tensions between activists and politicians, legal barriers against violence and

extremism, and social pressure to which local organizations must adjust. Six subsequent chapters further introduce the GD and examine these factors in greater detail. Shorter case studies on the NPD and LSNS follow and generally confirm impressions from Greece.

As detailed in chapters 4 and 5, the Golden Dawn developed as a political party from a newspaper with explicit ties to National Socialism (p. 65), moderating somewhat as it developed and enjoying modest success at the municipal level throughout the 1990s before its parliamentary breakthroughs in 2012. Their entry into electoral politics and subsequent successes resulted in expansion into new districts and participation in a variety of activities. Ellinas systematizes organizational activity in chapter 5, with a thorough analysis of branch longevity (i.e., age and continuous operation) and activity, including events (e.g., lectures or meetings), political activism (e.g., marches or protests), and social engagement (e.g., food or clothing drives "for Greeks only"). Ellinas theorizes that the durability and activity of an organization will be shaped by endogenous and environmental factors, including institutional and societal responses to far right activities.

Although they lack institutionalization, the most successful far right parties resemble the postwar mass parties in their emphasis on local footprints and party membership. They also engage in contentious politics while maintaining a hierarchical structure and restrictive membership (p. 95). When extreme right parties are successful, they must expand party membership to include both militants and moderates. However, extreme right parties lack the institutional mechanisms to absorb more moderate members after electoral breakthroughs and to take advantage of their skill sets and resources. Chapter 6 demonstrates that militants tend to advance over moderates, which limits extreme right parties' ability to develop. Branches evolve differently from one another, with older branches, staffed with militants, being more active, consistent, and continuous. Thus, for reasons endogenous to the party family, far right parties may not moderate their activities or establish new organizational footholds in potentially favorable environments, even if doing so would be electorally wise.

Chapters 7–9 focus on environmental factors constraining extreme right organizations. Extreme right parties may not behave like vote-maximizing parties even when they enjoy the credibility, publicity, and resources associated with electoral success, for reasons internal to them. However, far right parties do generally build up organizations in districts where they expect to be competitive, and active party branches on balance foreshadow electoral support. Where this is not the case, it is likely due to institutional pressure, social opposition, or a combination of both. Chapter 8 demonstrates that "militant democracy"—the erection of legal barriers to far right operation—affects organizational development. If unsuccessful, militant

democracy can burnish the antiestablishment credentials of the extreme right. However, the threat of legal sanction or the prosecution of party members can scare off moderate members, amplifying the foregoing tensions, and force branch closures when resources become scarce (again, older militant branches are more resilient [p. 243]).

Similarly, chapter 9 indicates that left-wing opposition to far right parties is most effective at driving branches out of urban areas where they have institutional support from local officials. Electoral, institutional, and societal factors are all interrelated, which is logical, but prevents the isolation of clear-cut mechanisms. Ellinas suggests extremist right-wing organizations are most confounded by the confluence of institutional and societal factors. Generally, the foregoing trends are confirmed in chapter 10 for Germany and Slovakia, although in the absence of a strong radical left party, the Slovakian LSNS appears to have freer rein, and the German NPD's lack of institutional support means it turns more regularly to street politics. Again, although the qualitative work and data gathering are thoughtful and detailed, the quantitative analyses are comparatively threadbare, at times supplementing but sometimes obscuring the author's conclusions.

Considering the subnational imprint of extreme right parties is a worthwhile endeavor. Many of Europe's extreme right parties—including the NPD—are or were almost irrelevant at the national level but have had an influence on regional and municipal governments across Europe for decades. In other cases, regional strength has anticipated successful incursions into national parliaments, affecting national and supranational governance. Moreover, extreme right parties are somewhat rare in European politics; with their emphasis on street politics, local cells, and brick-and-mortar branches, they are almost a premodern form of party organization (p. 51)—further justifying systematic analyses of these parties at a subnational level. As such, Ellinas provides a timely and ambitious project and suggests ample avenues for future scholarship. As he suggests in chapter 11, future research should include a greater number of parties, some of which overcame their extremist roots, entering parliaments and governments. *Organizing against Democracy* provides an invaluable step in that direction.

**Power Grab: Political Survival through Extractive Resource Nationalization.** By Paasha Mahdavi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 243p. \$99.99 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592720002807

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In this clearly written, wide-reaching book about the politics of natural resource nationalization, Paasha Mahdavi explores why leaders take control of the natural

resource sector. Scholars of political economy have long argued that there are significant costs associated with appropriating private extractive assets, and Mahdavi argues that leaders nationalize the extractive sector as the result of a calculus about their own political survival. Because nationalizing the extractive industry brings immediate fiscal windfalls that leaders can use to shore up support and deter potential challengers, leaders who believe their survival is in jeopardy are more likely to nationalize in order to consolidate their hold on power. Leaders who are confident in their survival, in contrast, are more likely to retain the status quo, leaving the sector in the hands of private firms and ensuring the future benefits of continued extraction. In other words, strong leaders can afford to wait to reap the long-term benefits from private resource extraction, whereas weaker leaders cannot. Mahdavi elucidates and tests this theory with clarity, nuance, and methodological diversity, with implications for economics, public policy, and business, as well as political science.

Mahdavi's theory provides an account of both when nationalization is likely to occur and what form it is likely to take. For even a weak leader to decide to nationalize the extractive sector, she must believe she can get a better deal than the current extractive contract, and she must believe that nationalizing will be sufficiently beneficial to her. Consequently, nationalization should occur when sufficient information about alternative extractive contracts reaches the leader, enticing her to consider renegotiating. This kind of information diffusion, Mahdavi argues, is a sufficient spark for nationalization, because it allows leaders to imagine the possibility of a better deal, provided that the country has sufficient operational expertise to extract the resource.

Furthermore, leaders are likely to pursue *operational* nationalization in which a state-owned enterprise (SOE) assumes control of production and management, because it is most likely to increase the fiscal strength of the leader. Operational nationalization increases fiscal strength, according to Mahdavi, because it entails the reduction in information asymmetries that lead to reduced government revenues when the extractive sector is privately held. This form of nationalization also ensures the leader has the capacity to alter production to reflect or affect global commodity prices. However, this increase in fiscal strength is contingent on the timing of operational nationalization, given the inefficiencies at the beginning and end of the extractive cycle. As such, leaders realize the windfalls of operational nationalization immediately, while only suffering the costs associated with state ownership in the future. The consequence of this temporal inconsistency is Mahdavi's central point: leader tenure is both affected by the decision to nationalize the extractive industry and shapes the likelihood that nationalization occurs. The probability of leader survival and the decision to nationalize are *mutually endogenous*.