

Eviane Leidig, **The Women of the Far Right: Social Media Influencers and Online Radicalization**, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2023, 288 pp., \$28.00 (paperback).

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Eviane Leidig's ***The Women of the Far Right: Social Media Influencers and Online Radicalization*** is a truly important and timely book about far-right groups. In today's world, where extreme political movements are growing, Leidig's book carefully looks at a group often ignored: women. People usually think women are just followers or symbols in these movements, but Leidig clearly shows that they are active, deeply committed, and play very important roles. This book is not just a simple description; it is a well-researched work that challenges how we understand modern extremism. It is a must-read for anyone trying to understand today's complex political divides.

Leidig's main idea is strong and well-supported by facts: women's involvement in the far right is much more complicated and important than we have realized. To prove this, she uses a smart way to categorize women's roles into four main types: the "political professional" (those in politics), the "influencer" (those who shape opinions), the "activist" (those who take action), and the "homemaker" (those who focus on family life). This way of grouping is not set in stone, but it helps explore why women get involved, what they do, and how they impact the far right. From visible political campaigns to hidden online radicalization, Leidig shows how women surprisingly use their gender and what society expects of them to push for ideas that are against freedom, equality, and often, democracy. By showing a "softer" and more acceptable side of extreme ideas, these women play a big part in making these ideas seem normal and acceptable, which might otherwise be strongly rejected by the public.

The book's formidable strength lies in its comprehensive empirical scope and careful methods. Leidig did a lot of fieldwork, conducted many interviews, and closely studied online behavior. This gives her a rich collection of information from different countries and political viewpoints, including Germany, France, Italy, and the United States.

Leidig starts by setting the stage in chapter 1, "The Alt-Right Versus the Far Right," where she clearly defines these terms and helps readers understand the different shades of right-wing extremism. This foundational chapter is crucial for grasping the specific contexts in which women operate. She then dives into the personal journeys of radicalization in chapter 2, "Down the Rabbit Hole: My Red Pill Journey." Here, Leidig explores how women get drawn into these online spaces, often through seemingly harmless content that gradually leads them to more extreme views. This chapter highlights the psychological and social pathways that lead to radicalization.



The book then shifts its focus to how far-right women use their gender. In chapter 3, "Femininity Not Feminism," Leidig shows how these women promote a traditional idea of womanhood that stands against modern feminism. They argue that embracing traditional roles is a form of empowerment, not oppression. This idea is further explored in chapter 4, "The Making of a Tradwife," where she looks at the "traditional wife" movement. This chapter reveals how women build online personas that promote domesticity and large families, often linking these ideas to white nationalist goals. These chapters are particularly insightful, as they demonstrate how far-right movements, despite their often-old-fashioned views about women, cleverly change their messages to attract women, offering them a sense of purpose and belonging.

Leidig then examines the spread of hateful messages in chapter 5, "Crowdsourcing Hate." This chapter details how far-right women use social media platforms not just to share messages but for clever recruitment, building communities, and creating echo chambers where only similar ideas are heard. Her detailed analysis of online groups, including the often-misunderstood "femcels" (women who are involuntarily celibate), is very revealing. It highlights how often-ignored gender-based frustrations and identity issues can drive online radicalization and encourage extreme views.

The book broadens its scope in chapter 6, "From Protests to Parliaments," where Leidig examines the roles of prominent political figures like Marine Le Pen in France and Alice Weidel in Germany. She skillfully explains how these women navigate the male-dominated world of far-right politics, often using vague language that lets them appeal to more voters while still sticking to their core extreme beliefs. This chapter shows how women act as "Trojan horses," making radical ideas seem normal and widely accepted.

Finally, in chapter 7, "Countering the Far Right," Leidig shifts to practical solutions. She discusses different ways to fight the spread of far-right ideas, both online and offline. This includes strategies like "deplatforming" (removing extremists from social media), "demonetization" (cutting off their funding), and "deranking" (making their content less visible). This chapter provides crucial, actionable advice for lawmakers, people working against extremism, and community groups.

Leidig's approach, which combines ideas from political science, sociology, gender studies, and digital media studies, shows the book's intellectual sophistication. By smoothly bringing together these different fields, she builds a complete picture of the many reasons women are drawn to the far right. These reasons include worries about money, cultural complaints, a strong desire for community, and the appealing idea of traditional gender roles. Importantly, Leidig avoids simple explanations for women's motivations; she carefully recognizes the huge variety within this group. She shows that while some women might truly believe in traditional family values or strong national pride, others might be drawn by the promise of power or influence within a strict system, or by the chance to express anti-establishment feelings that match their own experiences.

The book also openly and insightfully looks at the internal conflicts and tensions within far-right movements regarding women's roles. Even though women are more visible and active, they often work within systems that still favor male leadership and old-fashioned gender roles. Leidig's analysis skillfully explores how women deal with these contradictions. Sometimes they subtly challenge existing rules from within, and at other times, surprisingly, they reinforce them by embracing traditional roles. This detailed

portrayal is crucial because it stops readers from seeing these women as either just victims of male-dominated systems or only as people who push extreme ideas. Instead, Leidig shows them as complex individuals working within a complicated and often conflicting political landscape, making choices that are both limited by and contribute to the movements they are part of.

While *The Women of the Far Right* is a serious academic book, Leidig's writing is easy to understand and engaging. She explains complex theories and detailed case studies with remarkable clarity, making the book accessible to both expert scholars and general readers. The book is based on thorough research, shown by its extensive list of sources and detailed footnotes, which prove the deep level of her academic work and factual basis.

Eviane Leidig's *The Women of the Far Right* is a groundbreaking and essential contribution to understanding modern extremism. It successfully fills a big gap in current research by providing a sophisticated, fact-rich, and theoretically detailed analysis of women's many and often strategic roles within these movements. By questioning common assumptions and offering a more detailed understanding of their motivations, strategies, and impacts, Leidig not only greatly improves our academic knowledge but also provides important, practical advice for lawmakers, people working against extremism, and community groups. This book is a powerful and timely reminder that to truly understand, analyze, and effectively fight the growing threat of the far right, we must move beyond simple, gender-blind analyses and acknowledge the significant, often overlooked, and strategically used contributions of women. It sets a vital foundation for future research into the intersection of gender, ideology, and political extremism.