Preface

Like most academics and pundits, we are increasingly surprised and worried at the rise to power of political leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, and Javier Milei in Argentina. Drawing on our knowledge of comparative politics and the far right in Europe, we believe that the emergence of these leaders might not be merely coincidental but rather indicative of an enduring trend with significant implications for democracy across Latin America. However, the more we examined this phenomenon in the region, the more we were struck by the similarities and differences among the various instances of the far right in Latin America and beyond.

To address this puzzle, we were fortunate to secure funding from the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which enabled us to establish the Laboratory for the Study of the Far Right (ultra-lab). This initiative allows us to conduct research on this topic and disseminate our findings to a broader audience. We believe that to properly understand this phenomenon, it is crucial to engage in a dialogue based on empirical evidence rather than existing preconceptions or highly normative positions. While there are valid reasons to be concerned about the rise of the far right in Latin America, our focus must be on comprehending this phenomenon rather than merely denouncing it or lamenting its emergence.

The reelection of Donald Trump in 2024, along with the growing electoral support for populist radical-right parties across Europe, underscores the need to view the far right not as an ephemeral trend, but possibly as a by-product of deep structural transformations within contemporary societies – one that is likely to persist and may even provoke a broader process of electoral realignment. Latin America is now witnessing the rapid emergence of far-right actors, and we hope this volume contributes meaningfully to the understanding of a phenomenon that has become truly global. In this sense, we intend for the book to be of interest not only to scholars focused on Latin America, but also to those

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engaged in the broader study of the far right. By providing cross-national and cross-regional evidence, we aim to strengthen our collective capacity to analyze this phenomenon and to more effectively reflect on how democracy can be defended.

One of our initial undertakings was an academic workshop focused on the ideas promoted by the far right in Latin America. This event was held at the Institute of Political Science (ICP) of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile on August 9 and 10, 2023. Over these two days, we discussed preliminary versions of all the chapters included in this book and received valuable feedback from several participants. We are particularly grateful for the insights provided by David Altman, Kirk Hawkins, and Daphne Halikiopoulou. Additionally, we appreciate the support from the Faculty of History, Geography, and Political Science of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, especially Umut Aydin, Bernarda Gutiérrez, Margot Lagos, Valeria Palanza, Viviana Sepúlveda, Julieta Suárez-Cao, Deborah Valenzuela, and Cristina Vidal. Following the workshop, we collaborated with the Chilean Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) to publish short pieces in Spanish on the far right in Latin America. We then provided detailed feedback to each of the authors, who worked diligently to revise and improve their original contributions.

Preliminary versions of several chapters were presented at the general conferences of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), held at Charles University in Prague (September 4–8, 2023) and University College Dublin (August 12–15, 2024), and at the International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), held at the Pontifícia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá (June 12–15, 2024). The introductory chapter was presented and discussed in various academic settings, including the Eunadi Center for International Studies at Cornell University (November 2023), the Fundação Fernando Henrique Cardoso in São Paulo (March 2024), the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence (July 2024), and the Latin American Congress of Political Science (ALACIP) in Lisbon (July 2024). Additionally, we have had the opportunity to discuss this project with various friends and colleagues, who offered invaluable support and ideas at different stages. We would like to extend special thanks to Lenka Bustikova, Manuela Caiani, Donatella della Porta, Sofia Donoso, César Guzmán-Concha, Michael Minkenberg, Cas Mudde, Catherine Reyes-Housholder, Kenneth Roberts, Javier Sajuria, Rocío Salas-Lewin, and Sidney Tarrow for their invaluable insights and encouragement. Moreover, the support of Cambridge University Press has been incalculable – particularly the patience and enthusiasm of our editor, Rachel Blaifeder, who embraced this project from the outset and successfully engaged two scholars whose reviews provided exceptionally insightful feedback. We are deeply grateful for the time and thoughtfulness they devoted to their assessments.

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