

ensuring that federal constitutional guarantees are met. In the case of elections, the drastically *different* conditions under which citizens in the *same* state exercise a fundamental right raises serious constitutional concerns. And unlike many other fundamental rights, the right to vote is one that cannot be exercised at all outside the framework of state implementation.

Amar's picture of the constitution and constitutionalism is a bit optimistic for this political scientist's taste. While he acknowledges real concerns about the constitution and its contemporary operation, his celebration of figures like Lincoln and Anthony Kennedy betray a deep faith in the ultimate triumph of egalitarianism, progressive development, rights as bulwarks against state oppression, and the fundamental goodness of the American constitutional mission. In the wake of a successful presidential electoral campaign based in division, xenophobia, race-baiting, and misogyny, and in surveying the rise and success of right-wing political movements abroad, I am not so sanguine about the continued triumph of liberalism or even that liberalism is a sufficiently strong, cohesive, or protective ideology. Amar's last substantive chapter, however, suggests that states and localities can function as reservoirs for creative and assertive paths to protect and preserve fundamental rights if things go ill. I accept his invitation to consider the possibilities here and encourage others to do so as well.

Reference

Brennan Center (2016) "Voting Problems Present in 2016, But Further Study Needed to Determine Impact." Available at <http://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voting-problems-present-2016-further-study-needed-determine-impact>. Accessed March 28, 2017.

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The Seductions of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence, and Sex Trafficking. By Sally Engle Merry. Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016. 249 pp. \$25.00 paperback.

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As the saying goes, numbers do not lie. Yet numbers do not tell the whole truth, and nor are they immune to the inequalities of power. In this fascinating book, Sally Merry seeks to critically explore the

strengths and limitations of global indicators that purport to measure human rights, gender violence, and trafficking. Taking a genealogical approach, Merry carefully describes, compares, and analyzes three indicator projects in order to examine the ways in which knowledge is constructed, the role that power and inequality play in the construction of that knowledge, and the implications for addressing and preventing these problems in practice. While acknowledging the importance of quantification for understanding the murky and highly complex nature of social phenomena, Merry's aim is essentially to demystify the power of numbers through not only exposing the banality and bias inherent in quantification, but also fundamentally questioning the deeply held view that numbers yield objective, apolitical, and incontrovertible truths. Merry's detailed description of the behind-the-scenes decision-making processes related to the development of each indicator gives the reader a glimpse into the institutional and bureaucratic structures and politics that underpin these projects.

The first indicator project discussed is the United Nations Statistical Commission's (UNSC) attempts to measure the nature and extent of violence against women globally. The second is the US State Department's *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report*, which provides estimates on numbers of victims, prosecutions and convictions in most countries of the world. And the third indicator project refers to the system used for measuring human rights as developed by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Merry argues that although these various indicators are important for creating awareness of the nature of these problems, prompting political, legal, and social action, validating the experiences of victims, and ensuring accountability at the individual, organisational, and state levels, the downside is that the knowledge they manufacture is "decontextualized, homogenized, and remote from local systems of meaning" (p. 3). For instance, Merry explains that violence against women has "moved from being the subject of political mobilization to a site of technical knowledge" (p. 45). She notes that global indicators are not able to adequately capture the complexity of women's "perception, fear, injuries, and consequences" of violence (p. 85). I found Merry's reflection on her work with domestic violence support groups in the US particularly pertinent to the key points in her book about the limitations and strengths of quantification, the importance of qualitative research, and the difficulties in defining and understanding the complexity of violence. She writes: "... the act of physical violence was less important to these women than the violations of a sense of self, repeated insults and humiliations, threats to

children and pets, and excessive demands for money that they experienced” (p. 82).

Merry contends that while very different, the three indicators “do not include analyses of the roles of larger economic, political, and social structures or patterns of inequality and violence or theories that would suggest different solutions that address underlying patterns of inequality” (p. 208). She argues that the UNSC’s violence against women indicators frame violence as an interpersonal issue rather than as a problem of structural racial, gender, and socio-economic inequality. She claims the trafficking indicators fixate on human traffickers at the source of the problem, rather than “the pressures of violent marriage, poor food and housing, family obligations, long-term indebtedness, or even the desire to travel and modernity that shape the path into exploitative labor” (p. 208). And in regards to the OHCHR’s human rights indicators, she argues that their focus is on governments and states in terms of law and policy making, instead of on the effects of global capitalism, environmental degradation, and corruption.

Each theory on causation and responsibility play an important role in shaping and developing the indicators at various stages, including how to define “violence against women,” “trafficking,” and “human rights,” and what to include and exclude as measures. The solutions to these problems then are invariably shaped by how the problem is defined in the first place. Merry makes strong recommendations that theories underpinning global indicators of violence acknowledge and embrace the structural causes of violence, and yet I wanted to know more about “best practice” indicator projects that succeed on this front. In other words, what kind of solutions might be crafted if indicators were informed by theoretical frameworks that situate structural inequality at the heart of these problems, draw on rich qualitative research, and consult with a wide range of people, especially local populations? Perhaps there is no such thing as a perfect indicator? Indeed, Merry concludes by acknowledging the power and purpose of statistical data, the limitations of statistical data alone, while also underscoring the importance of mixed methods in shaping our understandings of these global issues.

Overall, this book makes an important and timely contribution to understanding the role of quantification in contemporary life. This “quantitative turn” is only likely to increase owing to the rapid pace of globalisation and the development of highly sophisticated technologies for measuring the world. Yet Merry’s message is clear, coherent, and compelling: qualitative or quantitative methods alone will not provide the answer—what we need is a mixed methods approach to generate knowledge about the complex world in which we live.