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on Extremism & Democracy

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The *e-Extreme* is the newsletter of the ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy*. For any enquiries about the newsletter and book reviews, please contact the managing editors (ecprextremismanddemocracy@gmail.com).

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STANDING GROUP ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dear *e-Extreme* readers,

We hope this issue finds you in good health and high spirits, wherever you may be. Read on for the usual mix of announcements, reports, reviews, and alerts to keep on top of all the recent developments related to extremism and democracy.

This *e-Extreme* features two expert interviews: one interview on the Netherlands after the general election in October 2025 with our very own **Léonie de Jonge**, and one on Japanese politics and right-wing populism with **Andreas Eder-Ramsauer**. Moreover, we are happy to provide two book reviews: **Francesco Marolla** discusses Ihsan Yilmaz and Fizza Batool's *Populist Identification in Public Discourse: Pakistanis Constructing Pakistani*, while **Alessandro Franzó** reviews Linda Schlegel and Rachel Kowert (eds)'s *Gaming and Extremism: The Radicalization of Digital Playgrounds*.

Please get in touch with your contributions and ideas for the next issue and do not forget that the ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* has an official Bluesky account ([@ecpr-ead.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/ecpr-ead.bsky.social)) where you can follow us for the latest news and updates, calls for papers, and must-read publications.

Wishing you a wonderful break and all the best for 2026!

WELCOME TO THREE NEW E&D STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

We are extremely happy to welcome three new Steering Committee Members that will join in organizing the diverse activities of our expanding group. The successful candidates in the recent byelection for the Standing Group on *Extremism and Democracy* are: **Larissa Böckmann**, University of Amsterdam, **Javier Sajuria**, Queen Mary University of London, and **Teresa Völker**, WZB Berlin Social Science Center. Congratulations!

Many thanks for everybody's excellent candidacies, and also to all group members who participated in the byelection.

Stay tuned for further news on the activities planned for the next couple of years, including the second stand-alone E&D conference in 2027!

REGISTER AS AN E&D STANDING GROUP MEMBER

You can join the ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* always free of charge and at the click of a button, via the ECPR website (<https://ecpr.eu/Groups>). If you have not already done so, please register as a member so that our list is up to date and complete.

In order to join, you will need a MyECPR account, which we assume many of you will already have. If you do not have one, you can create an account in only a few minutes (and you need not be from an ECPR member institution to do so). If you are from a non-member institution, we will need to accept your application to join, so your membership status (which you can see via your MyECPR account, and on the Standing Group pages when you are logged in to MyECPR) will be 'pending' until you are accepted.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch!

E&D ROUTLEDGE BOOK SERIES

The Routledge Book Series in *Extremism and Democracy*, which publishes work that lies within the Standing Group's academic scope, covers academic studies within the broad fields of 'extremism' and 'democracy', with volumes focusing on adjacent concepts such as populism, radicalism, and ideological/religious fundamentalism. These topics have been considered largely in isolation by scholars interested in the study of political parties, elections, social movements, activism, and radicalisation in democratic settings. Since its establishment in 1999, the series has encompassed both influential contributions to the discipline and informative accounts for public debate. Works will seek to problematise the role of extremism, broadly defined, within an ever-globalising world, and/or the way social and political actors can respond to these challenges without undermining democratic credentials.

The series was originally founded by Roger Eatwell (University of Bath) and Cas Mudde (University of Georgia) in 1999. The editorial team now comprises Andrea L. P. Pirro (Scuola Normale Superiore) and Léonie de Jonge (University of Tübingen). The editors strongly encourage ideas or suggestions for new volumes in the book series, both from established academics and early career researchers.

To discuss any ideas or suggestions for new volumes in this book series, please contact the editors at: ecprextremismanddemocracy@gmail.com.

CALL FOR REVIEWERS

e-Extreme is offering scholars the opportunity to review books and articles! If you want to share your review of the latest published books or articles in the field of populism, extremism, and radicalism and have it published in *e-Extreme*, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via our email address.

KEEP US INFORMED

Please keep us informed of any upcoming conferences or workshops you are organising, and of any publication or funding opportunities that would be of interest to Standing Group members. We will post all details on our website. Similarly, if you would like to write a report on a conference or workshop that you have organised and have this included in our newsletter, please do let us know.

Please, also tell us of any recent publications of interest to Standing Group members so that we may include them in the 'publications alert' section of our newsletter, and please get in touch if you would like to see a particular book (including your own) reviewed in *e-Extreme*, or if you would like to review a specific book yourself. We are always keen on receiving reviews from junior and senior scholars alike!

Finally, if you would like to get involved in the production of the newsletter, the development of our website, or any of the other activities of the Standing Group, please do get in touch. We are always very keen to involve more and more members in the running of the Standing Group!

UPCOMING EVENTS AND CALLS

ECPR GC2026 at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland

We are pleased to inform you that the call for panels and papers for the 2026 ECPR General Conference at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków is out.

This year, we have two sections - one with official E&D endorsement and an additional one, which we co-organised with the Standing Group on Central and East European Politics. This should allow us to accommodate more panels and papers!

- The E&D-endorsed section (S25) is entitled "Extremism in Extreme Times: Moving Beyond the Mainstream" and co-chaired by Katherine Kondor (Universitetet i Oslo), Greta Jasser (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen) and Ryan Switzer (University of Copenhagen). You can find the details here: <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/SectionDetails/1637>
- The additional E&D-CEE section (S08) is entitled "CEE Extremism and Resilience" and co-chaired by Claire Burchett (King's College London) and Jonathan Collins (Charles University). You can find the details here: <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/SectionDetails/1639>

The deadline for submitting panels and papers is **5 January 2026**. We hope to see many of you in Kraków next year!

POLARIZED DEMOCRACIES: NEW LINES OF DIVISION IN EUROPE at TU Dresden, Germany

Workshop, June 11-12, 2026, Dresden

Organized by Mercator Forum Migration und Demokratie

Political polarization has become a recurring theme in debates about the state of European democracies. It shapes how citizens relate to political opponents, how parties position themselves, and how trust in democratic institutions is maintained or eroded. Polarization is visible across several arenas — including conflicts over values, identity, and social inequalities, as well as public debates about migration and cultural change, which often evoke strong emotional and moral reactions. At the same time, scholarship cautions against overly dramatic or one-dimensional accounts of polarization that overlook its complexity, variation, and ambiguous democratic implications. Understanding when polarization becomes harmful — and when it reflects legitimate democratic contestation — remains an important analytical challenge.

This workshop brings together early career researchers (advanced doctoral and postdoctoral) from across Europe to examine how different forms of polarization emerge, how they intersect with issues such as migration and identity, and how they reshape democratic life. It aims to link empirical findings and theoretical perspectives on political and affective polarization, radical-right mobilization,

media environments, and strategies for strengthening democratic cohesion and resilience.

The following thematic clusters will be discussed in the workshop:

- Affective Polarization, Identity, and Democratic Cohesion
- Media, Misinformation, and Conspiracy Thinking
- Radical Right Mobilization, Migration, and Party Competition
- De-polarization and Democratic Resilience

Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words (including research question, theoretical approach, and methods) and a short bio (max. 100 words) to midem@mailbox.tu-dresden.de by **20 January 2026**. Selected participants will be notified by the beginning of February 2026. Funds are available to cover travel and accommodation costs for participants.

For questions, please contact Dr. Oliviero Angeli (Scientific Coordinator, MIDEM): Oliviero.angeli@tu-dresden.de

The workshop will take place at the MIDEM research centre, Würzburger Str. 46, 01187 Dresden and will be held in English.

5th ECPR SUMMER SCHOOL ON CONCEPTS AND METHODS FOR RESEARCH ON FAR-RIGHT POLITICS

6–10 July 2026, University of Bologna, Italy

The ECPR Standing Group on Extremism and Democracy is excited to announce the 5th edition of its Summer School, designed for early-career researchers keen to deepen their understanding of far-right politics in its radical, populist, and extremist variants. Over five days of interactive sessions, participants will engage with leading scholars, explore key theories and methods, and develop practical skills to study far-right ideas, electoral performance, and activism.

Confirmed instructors:

Cas Mudde (University of Georgia), Kathleen Blee (University of Pittsburgh), Pietro Castelli Gattinara (ULB), Léonie de Jonge (University of Tübingen), Daphne Halikiopoulou (University of York), Ofra Klein (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Andrea L. P. Pirro (University of Bologna).

Highlights:

- 30 hours of teaching across six theory and methods classes
- Two roundtables addressing the main challenges in the field
- Student paper presentations with feedback from international experts
- Training in mixed-method approaches, including protest event analysis, ethnography, social network analysis, elite interviews, and field experiments

Who can apply: PhD students with a research interest in far-right politics. Applications must include a CV, cover letter, and paper abstract by **25 February 2026**. Registration fee: €300 (covers materials, light lunches, and a social dinner).

Join us in Bologna to advance your research, expand your methodological toolkit, and network with scholars from across Europe and beyond.

Directors: Pietro Castelli Gattinara (Université Libre de Bruxelles) & Andrea L. P. Pirro (University of Bologna)

More info & application: Available soon on www.ecpr.eu

SPRING SCHOOL ON DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING AND POLITICAL CONFLICT

30 March to 2 April 2026, European University Institute (Florence) and the Scuola Normale Superiore's Palazzone di Cortona (Cortona, Arezzo)

We are pleased to announce that the Call for Applications is now open for the Spring School on Democratic Backsliding and Political Conflict, jointly organised by the Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS) and the European University Institute – Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

It offers an intensive programme of lectures, methodological workshops, and research feedback sessions focused on the study of democratic backsliding, political mobilisation, far-right and anti-gender activism, and the broader dynamics shaping contemporary democratic erosion.

The School is open to **20 doctoral researchers**, selected through an international competitive process.

Application deadline: **7 January 2026**, 17:00 CEST. Accepted candidates will be notified no later than 15 January 2026.

For any questions, please contact:

Manuela Caiani – manuela.caiani@sns.it

Lorenzo Cicchi – lorenzo.cicchi@eui.eu

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

THE NETHERLANDS AFTER THE ELECTIONS

LÉONIE DE JONGE, University of Tübingen

1. **The far-right party landscape in the Netherlands comprises at least three parties, including Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom (PVV), Forum for Democracy (FvD), and JA21. Why is the Dutch far-right party landscape so fragmented?**

Since 2021, a distinct far-right bloc has emerged alongside the traditional centre-right and centre-left blocs in the Netherlands. This new electoral space has become larger and more competitive, with voters switching between several far-right parties. This include most notably Geert Wilders's PVV, as well as the more extreme-right FvD and the FvD-splinter party JA21. Part of the fragmentation is simply a consequence of the Dutch party system. The highly proportional electoral system makes it relatively easy for new parties to enter parliament and maintain parliamentary representation. But fragmentation also stems from the growing size and diversity of the far-right electorate. While these parties share a broadly nativist, authoritarian, and (to a lesser extent) populist agenda, they diverge on several other policy dimensions. Wilders, for example, takes a more welfare-chauvinist stance, whereas FvD and JA21 are more economically liberal. FvD is markedly more pro-Russia, while PVV and JA21 are more skeptical toward Putin. All three parties, however, compete intensely on the issue of immigration, and these patterns of competition have shifted over time. In 2017, for instance, FvD positioned itself as a more moderate alternative to the PVV; by 2025, JA21 sought to place itself to the right of both the liberal-progressive VVD and the far-right PVV and FvD. This dynamic competition within the far-right family has shifted the political centre of gravity of Dutch politics further to the right.

2. **The largest far-right party, Geert Wilders's PVV, lost 11 seats in the 2025 election, however, other far-right parties such as FvD and JA21 gained various seats. The far right thus occupies 42 seats in the Dutch parliament total. Was the election a victory or defeat for the Dutch far right?**

On election night, the liberal-progressive D66 emerged as the "largest" party with less than 17% of the vote, thereby narrowly beating Geert Wilders's PVV by only a few thousand votes. International media were quick to frame this as a major setback for the far right. That interpretation is misleading. Although the PVV lost 11 seats, it still won 26 – just as many as D66. Moreover, this marks the second-best result the PVV has ever achieved. Meanwhile, the rest of the far-right bloc expanded. In fact, if we count borderline cases like the agrarian-populist BBB and the Christian-conservative SGP, far-right parties hold about a third of the seats in the Dutch Parliament.

JA21 jumped from one seat to nine, and FvD grew from three to seven seats. Roughly one-third of FvD's support came from former PVV voters. This matters because FvD has radicalized in recent years: it has openly embraced conspiracy myths about COVID-19 and the "Great Replacement," echoed Russian narratives on the war in Ukraine, and seen one MP convicted for inciting violence. Two party activists were sentenced for plotting a terror attack on another party leader, and the FvD flag was displayed at a far-right protest in September 2025, during which a window at D66 headquarters was smashed. The party's leader, Thierry Baudet, has repeatedly used or endorsed anti-feminist, transphobic, racist, and antisemitic slurs, as well as conspiracy narratives.

Ahead of the 2025 campaign, the party replaced Baudet as its figurehead with a young female staffer, Lidewij de Vos. This was a strategic rebranding: she did not alter the party's direction, spoke favourably about its extreme-right youth wing, and kept the convicted MP on the candidate list. This "pinkwashing" strategy proved effective. In short, the far-right bloc as a whole not only held its ground but consolidated – and became more extreme. So no, the 2025 election was certainly *not* a defeat for the Dutch far right.

3. What will be the far right's impact on the government coalition building and broader role in this new parliamentary term?

Predicting the far right's impact remains difficult. Coalition formation in the Netherlands is typically a slow and complex process, and most parties have publicly ruled out governing with the PVV. JA21, however, seems to be less of a taboo. As of late November 2025, coalition talks are in full swing. Technically, only one four-party majority coalition is possible: the liberal-progressive D66 (26 seats), the liberal-conservative VVD (22 seats), the GreenLeft–Labour alliance GLPvdA (20 seats), and the Christian-democratic CDA (18 seats). This "grand-coalition"–type arrangement would command a comfortable 86-seat majority. However, the VVD has vetoed this option due to its unwillingness to cooperate with GLPvdA; the two parties differ sharply on economic policy, environmental regulation, and migration. A five-party right-coalition could combine D66, VVD, CDA, the far-right JA21, and one of the smaller right-wing parties (either BBB or SGP). This configuration is the VVD's preferred option. For D66, however, entering a coalition composed exclusively of right-leaning parties (particularly with the far-right JA21 and BBB and/or SGP) would be politically unattractive.

Another scenario is a minority government consisting of D66, CDA, and VVD. Yet given the Netherlands' limited tradition of minority governance and the current high political fragmentation, this too appears unlikely. But even if the far right is not included in the next government, it will likely put its stamp on the political agenda, exerting pressure on mainstream parties to harden their positions on issues such as migration, security, and cultural issues.

4. To what extent has the far right normalized in the Netherlands over the past couple of years, and what was the role of mainstream parties in the process?

The normalization of the far right in the Netherlands has been both rapid and far-reaching. With far-right parties gaining significant power and visibility (largely thanks to the accommodation of the mainstream right), this process has accelerated markedly. In the run-up to the 2025 elections, Iris Beau Segers and I wrote a [short piece](#) for C-REX's *RightNow!* blog warning about the rapid normalization of extreme-right ideas and actions. The consequences became ever more obvious during an unprecedented outbreak of violence at an anti-immigration demonstration in The Hague on 20 September 2025. The demonstration, organized by a woman known as "Els Rechts" ("Els Right"), drew thousands of protesters demanding stricter immigration policies and a tougher stance on asylum seekers. Activists from established far-right groups joined, carrying far-right symbols while chanting racist and antisemitic slogans. Violence escalated quickly: rocks and bottles were thrown, police cars were set on fire, fences around the Dutch parliament were stormed, and the headquarters of D66 was attacked. Several journalists and police officers were injured. To put this in perspective, it is important to bear in mind that far-right protests –and especially violent ones –remain rare in the Netherlands, which made these incidents particularly striking. They can be viewed as another symptom of the rapid erosion of Dutch liberal democracy, driven by more than two decades of far-right normalization. Just prior to the events in The Hague, the Dutch parliament passed a motion initiated by FvD, in collaboration with the PVV and BBB – and with support of the VVD – calling on the government to designate Antifa as a terrorist organization. Shortly after the demonstration, the BBB pushed for stricter asylum policies in parliament, framing this demand as a response to "all the other thousands of peaceful people" who had joined the protest. These examples further illustrate how mainstream parties have helped legitimize far-right grievances and demands, thereby reinforcing the normalization process.

5. What are the international implications of the strength of the far right in the Netherlands?

The Dutch case is far from exceptional; political developments in the Netherlands are part of a broader international trend marked by the rise and normalization of far-right actors. Across the globe, far-right parties are manoeuvring themselves into positions of influence and power, and ideas that were once considered beyond the pale have become increasingly *salonfähig* or *socially acceptable*. One consequence is a noticeable shift in how the media label such parties. As Tim Bale [has highlighted](#), British media have started to refer to clearly far-right actors as "hard right", a term with virtually no analytical value among academic experts. A similar dynamic is visible in the Netherlands, where there is ongoing debate over which labels are appropriate. The underlying assumption seems to be that once a substantial share of the electorate votes for these parties, they are no longer radical or extreme. That is, of course, a misconception. This trend also affects research on the phenomenon. Far-right parties in power frequently attack scholars, undermine academic freedom, and delegitimize critical expertise. This

not only makes academic research more challenging but also underscores its growing importance.

6. In the light of recent developments in your field, what are the questions that researchers of ‘Extremism and Democracy’ should focus from now on?

At least three strands of research come to mind. **First**, we need a better understanding of the growing links between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary far right. As Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Andrea Pirro [have noted](#), the far right is gaining power both *at the barricades and at the ballot box*. Political scientists are generally trained to focus on parties and institutional politics, but in doing so we risk losing sight of what is happening in the protest arena – and, crucially, of the *division of labour* between these different faces of the far right. Understanding how electoral actors, street movements, and online communities reinforce one another is essential. **Second**, researchers should devote more attention to the growing normalization of the far right. One particularly interesting development is what I call “**everyday extremism**”: the ways in which far-right ideas manifest in everyday spaces, places, and activities – including food culture, music scenes, or outdoor recreation like hiking. The far right is increasingly active in populating these not-strictly-political domains to build communities and broaden their appeal. This, in turn, accelerates normalization. Thanks to important work by scholars such as [Teresa Völker](#), [Cynthia Miller-Idriss](#) or [Vicente Valentim](#), we now understand more about *how* normalization occurs, but far less about *whether* and *how* it can be reversed. **Third**, we need to study societal and institutional responses more systematically. These responses must reflect the changing face, expanding reach, and diverse manifestations of the far right. Here, collaboration with civil society organizations is crucial – not only for gaining insight into grassroots experiences and local dynamics, but also for assessing which interventions actually work.

JAPANESE POLITICS AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM

ANDREAS EDER-RAMSAUER, University of Vienna

- 1. Can you give us an overview of the political far-right in Japan during the past decades?**

Since the late 2000s, the far-right in Japan has undergone significant changes. While it had previously been split into the “old right” (pre-war roots, militarist, elitist, ties to organized crime, anti-communist) and the “new right” (post-1970s, intellectualist, anti-US, pan-Asianist), the newly emergent Action Conservative Movement (*kōdō suru hoshu*) mixed xenophobia with a mass-movement style practice and garnered significant, if short-lived, support (see Smith 2018 for a good introduction). Although its most visible embodiment, the Anti-Korean group Zaitokukai faded during the next decade, far-right groups and actors succeeded in networking behind the scenes during the long tenure of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, who himself had been a champion of many reactionary and religious-based nationalist causes. After his resignation as Prime Minister and later assassination, the far right became impatient with its support for the long-governing Liberal Democratic Party, and two competing far-right political parties emerged: the Do-It-Yourself Party (*Sanseitō*) and the Japanese Conservative Party (*Nihon Hoshutō*). While the right always had a transnational network of conservatives with which it engaged (see Narita 2021, Miller 2019), relations to the MAGA movement, the Hungarian Fidesz or the German AfD are a more recent worrying trend, as the Japanese far right used to remain locally bound.

- 2. What is the current situation with regard to the far-right parties in Japan’s political landscape?**

After the House of Councillors (the lower of the two chambers in the Japanese parliament) election this year, the far-right *Sanseitō* found itself in the media and public spotlight as one of the two winners—next to the center-right Democratic Party for the People. Above all, its xenophobia and reactionary views on society and politics (demands for constitutional revision heavily influenced by Japan’s prewar constitution) have been the subject of intense media debate. *Sanseitō* is often labeled “populist”, even though its central antagonism is not anti-elitist in the strict sense, partly because of its tax-reductionist economic agenda. Cooperation with the main conservative actor, the LDP, already occurs at the local level in twelve municipalities, and negotiations for a national-level coalition with the LDP are envisaged to rest on policy content rather than fundamental societal conflict lines. Further, the party’s proximity to the LDP’s right wing is undeniable; Abe Shinzō even supported party leader Kamiya Sōhei as an LDP candidate back in 2012. The break with the LDP should therefore be interpreted as a break with the centrist post-Abe LDP. Even though the party emphasizes a participatory element and criticizes historically entrenched hegemonic practices, strong tensions with the LDP under the stewardship of the new PM Takaichi Sanae are not to be expected.

Sanseitō's self-portrayal as different from the hierarchical intra-party culture of the established parties is still significant, though. While the LDP and former center-left to center-right Democratic Party Japan are framed as hereditary and hierarchical institutions with no prospects for advancement for "normal people", Sanseitō, in contrast, proclaims internal appreciation and equality among all supporters and politicians.

The Japanese Conservative Party (Nihon Hoshutō, 2023) should also be briefly mentioned here, as many of its policy positions overlap with those of Sanseitō. In contrast to Sanseitō's ostensibly grassroots-democratic posturing, the Conservative Party has relied from the outset on the fame and popularity of its founder, Hyakuta Naoki. The author, publicist, and YouTuber enjoys a large following in right-wing circles and founded the party in 2023 together with conservative journalist Arimoto Kaori. Together with Kawamura Takashi, the controversial former mayor of Nagoya, the party managed to win two seats in the 2024 House of Representatives election, and it also secured two seats in the House of Councillors election despite internal disputes. Substantively, the party places greater emphasis on opposing anti-LGBTQI* discrimination legislation, preserving the male line of imperial succession, and restoring historical cultural sites than on economic policy.

3. To what extent is the far right normalised in Japan, and what is the role of party and media actors in the normalisation process?

We see quite a bit of "mainstreaming" and "populist hype" around, especially, Sanseitō. Under the leadership of former PM Ishiba, the LDP was quick to reply to xenophobic fearmongering by Sanseitō with legitimizing many issues and promising inquiry into "illegality" among non-Japanese nationals. Japanese media is also displaying mechanisms of a "populist hype" as Aurelien Mondon and Jason Glynos have discussed (Glynos, Mondon 2019). Deradicalizing the far right and stretching the term populism to include centre-right parties with similar economic policies has surely contributed to the far right's success. The center-right opposition party Democratic Party for the People (DPFP)—newly emboldened by electoral success and its leader Tamaki Yūichirō's popularity—similarly brushed off media criticism of being "populist" and engaged in practices of normalizing far-right demands, in turn. In the 2025 House of Councillors election, for example, the DPFP called for ensuring that taxes paid by Japanese citizens should be used for policies benefiting Japanese citizens (*Nihonjin ga haratta zeikin wa nihonjin no tame no seisaku ni tsukaimasu*). Tamaki himself had already appeared in 2024 at the U.S.-founded Conservative Political Action Conference Japan, alongside members of the Sanseitō. The Liberal Democratic Party was quick to jump on far-right-enflamed scandals, such as the supposed mistreatment of deer in Nara by foreign tourists and quickly made concessions to Sanseitō's demands. It is an irony of history that Abe Shinzō supported the expansion of inbound tourism, something the far-right now benefits from under the signifier "over tourism" against Abe's former party.

4. **The new PM of Japan is the first female Prime Minister of the country and a strong supporter of the British PM Margaret Thatcher. What are some of the domestic and international implications of the new PM's election?**

Domestically, it is likely that PM Takaichi will halt any socially progressive policies—she is an opponent of dual surname usage by married couples, among other things—and, much like Abe Shinzō, will pursue monetary and fiscally—by pressuring the Japanese central bank as much as possible—expansionary policies geared towards strengthening large export-oriented companies. It is unclear how she will halt inflation and calm consumer frustration with stagnant wages, rising prices, and a weak currency. The restrengthening of old factions inside the LDP by her, which had been tainted due to numerous scandals, will be interesting to watch, as it could allow the far-right to successfully distinguish themselves in this regard. Internationally, as the current worryingly heated tension with the People's Republic of China shows, she will not bring calm to international relations. Friendliness with the Trump regime and like-minded leaders, such as Narendra Modi, will lead to tense relations with others, much as was the case under the leadership of Abe Shinzō.

5. **In the light of recent developments in your field, what are the questions that researchers of 'Extremism and Democracy' should focus on from now on?**

Japan was long treated as an outlier to the “populist moment” and democratic erosion through authoritarian (far) right politics. While this was never completely true, recent developments should make us focus on reconsidering past misjudgements in scholarship. Popular exclusion from liberal democratic practice must be taken seriously when attempting to understand far-right politics. The inadequacy of paternalist, disciplinary politics to create popular consent, and the crisis of conservatism as an ideology more globally, are not adequately understood either. These matters, in my belief, must be focused on.

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BOOK REVIEWS

IHSAN YILMAZ AND FIZZA BATOOL, "POPULIST IDENTIFICATION IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE: PAKISTANIS CONSTRUCTING PAKISTANIAT."

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2025. 159 PP. ISBN: 978-981-96-0559-0 (eBook).

Francesco Marolla, *University of Milan & LUISS Guido Carli University*

Over the past decade, demand-side populism research has flourished, generating insights into which citizens support populist movements and under what conditions. Nevertheless, quantitative scholarship often provides an insufficient ontology of populist dynamics. Survey-based approaches efficiently address the attitudinal correlates of populism (the who and why), yet they fail to penetrate the complex, relational discursive processes (identification as a mode) that underpin its actual construction in public parlance. Yilmaz and Batool's work addresses this gap by asking: how do ordinary Pakistanis mobilize the concept of "the people" when constructing political identity?

The book is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical framework, drawing on the works of Laclau and Panizza, and details the methodological approach of qualitative discourse analysis. Chapter 2 applies this framework to the case of Pakistan, providing a historical thematic overview of how "the people" and "the anti-people" have been constructed in the country's political history. The empirical heart of the work appears in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, which analyze how Pakistani respondents construct their identity through three distinct registers: the intersection of Muslim nationalism and the Ummah (Chapter 3), plebeian anti-elitism and institutional discontent (Chapter 4), and democratic sovereignty (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 synthesizes these findings, discussing theoretical contributions and practical implications regarding how these three dimensions operate simultaneously in shaping populist identification.

The book's central contribution is twofold. First, it extends Laclauian discourse theory, typically tested in European and Latin American contexts, to Pakistan, demonstrating these concepts' analytical portability to a South Asian Muslim-majority democracy rarely featured in comparative populism scholarship. Second, it demonstrates empirically that populism functions as a "mode of identification" rather than primarily as an ideology (Panizza, 2005). Through qualitative discourse analysis of 38 in-depth interviews conducted in Lahore between late 2020 and early 2021, the authors show that Pakistani discourse articulates three simultaneous meanings of "the people": plebs (powerless underdogs), ethnos (morally superior Muslim nation), and demos (sovereign democratic actors). These articulations "[...] exist simultaneously and declaring one specific articulation as the dominant one would involve oversimplification" (Yilmaz and Batool, 2025, p. 146). Respondents, thus, fluidly shift between registers depending on context. The authors observe, in a noteworthy example, that "[...] when talking about the military strength of Pakistan, the same respondents who were talking about the greed and venality of the Pakistanis, started talking about their altruism" (Yilmaz and Batool, 2025, p. 85). This fluidity

makes populist identification politically potent. Where traditional demand-side work asks "what predicts support?", this qualitative focus reveals what it means to be "the people," delineating populism's dynamic mechanics beyond surveys' static measurement.

Drawing from Laclau's discourse theory and the Essex School's empirical frameworks (Laclau, 2005; Howarth et al., 2000), the authors operationalize antagonism as constitutive of identity rather than merely predictive of attitudes, and treat "the people" as an empty signifier: fillable with competing demands and shifting across contexts. This theoretical architecture proves essential for analyzing how "the people" in Pakistan is simultaneously articulated as plebs, ethnos, and demos. By operationalizing this architecture, the authors provide a robust empirical demonstration of Panizza's theoretical claim that populism operates as a "mode of identification" at the public level. This finding fundamentally reorients the analytical focus from what populism is to what populism does. Specifically, it invites scholars to study how populism constructs political subjectivity through the fundamental role of antagonistic relationships. Such a perspective marks a meaningful advance in populism theory, complementing purely ideational or institutional approaches to reveal the discursive mechanics of identification.

These antagonistic constructions, thus, extend beyond local taxonomy. This resonates with Canovan's (1999) seminal theorization of the democracy-populism tension, tracing how Pakistani respondents simultaneously yearn for democratic agency while articulating that institutions obstruct popular will. Comparatively, where European populism mobilizes exclusionary logics against immigrants and the EU, Pakistani discourse constructs the "anti-people" through opposition to the West, India, and corrupt dynastic elites. Moreover, the book's advantage over standard demand-side scholarship certainly lies in its historical texture. Unlike the synchronic snapshots typical of quantitative European research, this analysis provides a much-needed diachronic approach, demonstrating how, in the specific Pakistani context, current discursive binaries are sedimented layers of history characterized by colonialism, Partition, military rule, and religious nationalism. In less institutionalized post-colonial contexts, this historical-discursive analysis is undoubtedly essential.

The study's methodological parameters define its scope and chart trajectories for future inquiry. The analysis leverages 38 semi-structured interviews conducted in Lahore. While the case selection was strategic and motivated by theoretical sampling, it opens productive questions for comparative research: do the specific discursive mechanisms identified here (the simultaneous articulation of "the people" as plebs, ethnos, and demos) operate similarly in other contexts? Future scholarship could explore whether these patterns vary across different Muslim-majority democracies, or whether urban versus rural settings produce distinct discursive configurations. The supply-demand interaction also warrants attention: future research could trace how parties like the PTI actively construct the frameworks within which publics identify, beyond the "two-way echo" concept employed here. Finally, the link to political behavior remains compelling. While this book categorizes identification patterns, it opens avenues for investigating their explanatory power. Do 'plebs-identified' citizens vote differently than 'demos-identified' ones? Does antagonistic rhetoric intensity

correlate with party loyalty? These questions underscore the need for mixed-methods designs bridging discursive construction and behavioral outcomes.

In conclusion, Yilmaz and Batool's work delivers a sophisticated contribution advancing demand-side scholarship beyond attitude measurement. By treating antagonism as constitutive rather than incidental, the authors operationalize Essex School concepts into practical empirical tools. This makes the text essential reading for South Asia specialists, discourse analysts, and early-career researchers seeking methodological models for applying Laclauian frameworks. Most significantly, for political behavior scholars, the book corrects the limitations of synchronic modeling. By demonstrating how citizens simultaneously sustain contradictory identifications, the authors reveal the fluid discursive reality that static variables obscure. The work succeeds in explaining how populist resonance is actively constructed in public discourse, moving beyond merely documenting its existence. For researchers committed to understanding the demand side of global populism, this qualitative depth is indispensable.

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LINDA SCHLEGEL AND RACHEL KOWERT (Eds.), "GAMING AND EXTREMISM: THE RADICALIZATION OF DIGITAL PLAYGROUNDS."

NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, 2024, 234 pp., Open Access e-book, ISBN 9781003388371

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Do violent video games promote violent behaviour? Even though scientific literature on the topic has developed a nuanced understanding of the relationship between violence and gaming (e.g., Kowert & Quandt, 2015), the edited book *Gaming and Extremism: The Radicalization of Digital Playgrounds* takes a completely new approach to the question by exploring how digital games, like many other cultural products, have become fertile ground for promoting violence. The work by Linda Schlegel and Rachel Kowert, which brilliantly summarise this new area of study, is particularly relevant if we consider recent violent events not least the recent killing of Charlie Kirk (e.g., Frenkel & Toler, 2025). Studying the dynamics of cultural contamination and gamification of extremism explored in this book appear, thus, dramatically up-to-date and necessary.

Published in a time of rising global tensions and wars, this volume situates itself at the nexus of different scholarly areas to demonstrate how "digital playgrounds" increasingly serve as an elective space for ideological recruitment and hate speech, especially among younger generations. This, along with some final remarks for policymakers to develop counterstrategies, makes the overarching aim of the book extremely valuable for both scholars and practitioners, even if they lack substantive prior knowledge on the topic. Overall, the book's structure is easy to follow and provides a wealth of empirical evidence on the primary modalities of extremist engagement with gaming and adjacent platforms. This includes the production and dissemination of bespoke propaganda games, modification of commercial titles, occupation of platform spaces for organising or raiding purposes, appropriation of visual and narrative rhetorics to produce extremist content, and the adoption of game-like mechanics to reward radicalisation. Although this book does not constitute a handbook in the stricter sense, as it lacks a thorough methodological section or explicit how-to instructions for researchers, its content offers a "snapshot" (p. 203) in a much-neglected area of research and intervention.

By keeping the literature review easily accessible, *Gaming and Extremism* offers a comfortable "starting point" for the theme (p. 6). Indeed, the volume starts with introducing core concepts for the field: Constance Steinkuehler and Kurt Squire's first effort is to define games, as well as move the reader toward a more contemporary understanding of gaming as an "ecosystem" made of a layered, not-always-clear set of entwined actors including users, social media platforms, game publishers and more. A standpoint shared by Galen Lamphere-Englund in Chapter 2, where the conceptual toolkit coming from extremism studies is introduced to discuss the use of gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms for radicalisation. From streaming platforms to smartphones, these authors demonstrate how gaming subculture has gone well beyond the bidimensional

limits of the screen, penetrating our lives and, most importantly, our everyday technologies.

On the same line, Chapter 3 by Mick Prinz examines how gaming culture has been “weaponised” through the modification of existing games and the creation of bespoke propaganda titles. Acknowledging the limitations and costliness of such endeavours, the chapter points to gaming-adjacent platforms as the new spaces where extremist groups enact their recruitment, networking, and mobilisation strategies. Chapters 4 (by Newhouse and Kowert) and 5 (by Jacob Davey) continue this analysis by noting how platforms like Roblox and Steam might be leveraged to “spread hate, find like-minded individuals, plan harassment campaigns, and radicalize others” (p. 91). Refraining from condemning game(r)s, these authors advocate for industrial and community-based countermeasures that can preserve the positive effects of gaming.

In Chapter 6, Amarnath Amarasingam and Daniel Kelley present the results from extensive surveys conducted by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOTC) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Center for Technology and Society. Albeit mostly US-focused, the data shows a rise of hate and toxic behaviour in online spaces, but also the positive aspects of gaming. By offering a nuanced perspective, this chapter actively builds up toward the underlying argument of the book, which rejects a “media-in/behavior-out approach” (p. 112) to propose, instead, interventions that could restore the benefits of play.

Such an approach takes its clearest form in what I personally identify as the turning point of the book, Chapter 7 by Ashton Kingdon. Here, the author unpacks the aesthetic power of cultural artefacts at large, explaining why games constitute an appealing target for those groups seeking to promote violent ideologies. Indeed, game aesthetics “revoke the modern boundaries between modes of cognition, experience, and expression” (pp. 132-133), representing a highly captivating experience. Hence, games’ narratological and visual apparatus is purposefully converted into ideological signifiers, becoming “a recurrent and identifiable staple of extremist propaganda” (p. 131). This does not mean that video games (and adjacent platforms) reproduce extremist ideologies per se, but that extremist groups have developed as “professional storytellers, seeking to hijack the popular culture of the West (i.e., pop culture)” (p. 130) to normalise and aestheticise violence. This might explain why violent or hate-related internet memes appear so often among the materials of modern attackers, as well as why extremist groups have started to “gamify” radicalisation. In Chapter 8, Suraj Lakhani explores how extremist groups have increasingly adopted game-like mechanics to promote their ideologies, dividing between strategic (top-down) and organic (bottom-up) processes. If the first takes the form of games and apps that directly encourage recruits to “rank up” within terrorist or violent groups, the second constitutes the emulation of gaming-related cultural scripts, representing another aspect of the expanding influence of gaming culture. This is reflected not only in the adoption of game-like visuals (as seen in Chapter 7) but also in the increased use of language and symbols associated with gaming practices, such as scoring, leaderboards, and grinding (p. 151).

Whilst all previous chapters contain some useful indications for undermining extremists’ appropriation of games and restoring the positive power of this

experience, it is in the last two contributions that such a suggestion takes a systematic form. Indeed, in Chapter 9, Erin Saltman and Nagham El Karhili call for a “levelling up” of current policies, acknowledging the scarce to null effect of current interventions. A point further reinforced by Linda Schlegel in Chapter 10, where the growing menace represented by extremism globally is compared to the slothfulness sometimes exhibited by publishers and platforms in implementing moderation procedures, enforcing anti-hate policies, or even allowing scholars access to the data. Unsatisfied with public-appealing moves, such as mass banning in the wake of attacks, the authors follow policymakers and activist groups in their praise for a more diffuse introduction of golden standards and detection tools, aimed at systematically identifying and rapidly removing extremist content regularly. Moreover, the authors suggest leveraging subcultural knowledge and collaboration to promote broader cultural change in gaming spaces, thereby restoring their positive effects through gaming communities.

To sum up, the book by Schlegel and Kowert does achieve its aim of centring the attention on a so-far overlooked theme, that of extremism and its diffusion through gaming and gaming-adjacent spaces. Whilst keeping the reading experience pleasurable smooth, the volume contains a wealth of empirical data sustaining the need for heightened interest in countering the potentially noxious effects of online harassment, hate speech, and internet-led radicalisation. Yet, the authors carefully refrain from claiming that gaming itself is the sole cause of violent or extremist behaviours. On the contrary, they repeatedly point to the benefits of gaming, even suggesting that they can be leveraged in the creation of effective preventive interventions. They do, however, underline a crucial factor for both interested scholars and academia at large: extremist behaviours are enacted by individuals who are immersed in a cultural milieu that increasingly draws from gamer subculture, from the most frequented platforms (e.g., Twitch, Discord) to its jargon (e.g., raiding, leaderboards). It is not surprising, then, how digital play has been increasingly deployed for political purposes by both extremist and more democratic groups, aiming to influence the opinions of large (and young) segments of the global population. In a scenario of increased algorithmic surveillance (Zuboff, 2019), the question will not be whether the proposed interventions prove efficacious, but whether we can retake control of our spaces, our communities, and even our pastimes (Berardi, 2009).

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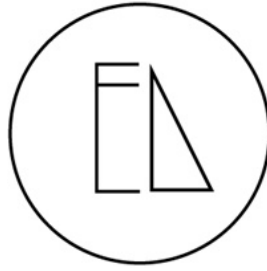
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