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on Extremism & Democracy

Newsletter of the ECPR Standing Group 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 you are well, 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’. E-Extreme now includes a section with expert interviews focusing on current developments in politics on the extremes of the political spectrum. In this issue, **Nathalie Brack** answers our questions about the outcomes of the European Parliament elections, with a special focus on far-right parties and groups. **Marta Lorimer** then discusses the French general elections and in particular the Rassemblement National’s performance.

We are excited to welcome the e-Extreme new book review liaison, **Ghita Bordieri**! Ghita is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Genova and a research fellow at the University of Milano Bicocca. Her dissertation focuses on transformation processes within political organizations and involves original data collected through ethnography in a radical right party. Welcome to our team!

Please get in touch with your contributions and ideas for the next issue and don’t forget that the ECPR Standing Group on *Extremism & Democracy* has an official Twitter account (@ecpr_ed) where you can follow us for the latest news and updates, calls for papers, and must-read publications.

Finally, we hope to see many of you at ECPR GC2024 in Dublin!

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!

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:

ecprextremismanddemocracy@gmail.com.

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 Caterina Froio (Sciences Po), Andrea L. P. Pirro (Scuola Normale Superiore), and Stijn van Kessel (Queen Mary University of London). 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.

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

THE WEBINAR SERIES ON 'RESEARCHING THE FAR RIGHT: METHODS AND ETHICS' IS BACK!

The Webinar series on *Researching the Far Right: Methods and Ethics* is back for another academic year to discuss the methodological, ethical, political, personal, practical and professional issues and challenges that arise when researching far-right politics. For this new edition, the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX - University of Oslo) has the great privilege of collaborating with the Reactionary Politics Research Network (RPRN - University of Bath) and the Centre for Alternatives to Social and Economic Inequalities (CASEI - Lancaster University) to discuss researching the far right from a more critical perspective. Make sure to join us on zoom on the third Thursday of each month from 3:00 to 4:30 pm (CET)! The topics addressed in the webinars will be based on the volume '[The Ethics of Researching the Far Right: Critical Approaches and Reflections](#)' (Manchester University Press - Racism, Resistance and Social Change series), edited by Antonia Vaughan, Joan Braune, Meghan Tinsley, and Aurelien Mondon. For more information, visit [C-REX's website](#).

JOIN THE REACTIONARY POLITICS RESEARCH NETWORK

The [Reactionary Politics Research Network](#) was launched in May 2024 and brings together scholars to study and tackle the rise of exclusionary, authoritarian and reactionary politics. These include sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, racism, and ecofascism. The RPRN is interdisciplinary and open to all methods but requires a critical approach to researching reactionary politics. Particular care is taken towards ethical engagement with such research. Our first [Summer School](#) will take place in September. Colleagues can join our mailing list [here](#) or the network [here](#). We can be found on Twitter at [@reacpolrn](#).

WORKSHOP ON THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM IN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA

ECPR's Standing Group of Extremism & Democracy, in collaboration with ECPR's Standing Group of Latin American Politics, Panteion University, and the Greek National Center of Social Research (EKKE) are organizing a hybrid event which aims to advance the comparative study of far-right extremism in the two regions, and serve as a first step towards the creation of an enduring research network which will advance collaborations, contribute to the internationalisation of our Standing Groups research agendas, spearhead Equality, Diversity and Inclusion priorities and advance knowledge exchange in academia and beyond.

The event will consist of a round table discussion with Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, Daphne Halikiopoulou and Vasiliki Georgiadou open to the general public on September 11th, and will be followed by a welcoming reception at the Panteion University and a two-day workshop on September 12th-13th at the Greek National Center of Social Research (EKKE). The workshop will have seven panels addressing several themes, including the supply and demand-side dimensions of far-right extremism; citizens' support for undemocratic behaviour; the end of far-right exceptionalism; responses to the far-right; foreign policy; data and methods; and emerging debates on the study of the far-right. Each panel will include a set of papers on Europe and another on Latin America in order to facilitate comparisons in each thematic area. Details to join online will be circulated to the members of the standing group in due course.

CALL FOR PAPERS: TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY THEORY OF POPULISM. DEBATES AND REFORMULATIONS 20 YEARS AFTER ON POPULIST REASON BY ERNESTO LACLAU

The Las Torres de Lucca Journal of Political Philosophy is holding a call for papers to commemorate the 20th anniversary since the publication of *On Populist Reason* by Ernesto Laclau. The publication of the book swiftly attracted the attention of various thinkers hailing from diverse academic backgrounds and theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, Laclau's perspective also gave rise to a number of elaborations and criticisms at both the theoretical and the empirical levels. Amongst others, questions regarding Laclau's work were raised regarding hegemony, the preeminence of antagonism, the overlooking of populist institutionalization, the role of the leader, the affective dimension of populism, the rhetorical and psychosocial dynamics involved in the formation of collective identities and the influence of psychoanalysis in his theory. The present CfP seeks to reinvigorate these debates and expand a series of contemporary theoretical orientations in populism studies that have evolved through the discussion stimulated by Laclau's book during the two decades since its publication.

Papers from Political Theory, Philosophy and Sociology, as well as from other disciplines related to Social, Political and Humanitarian Sciences are welcome. In addition, unpublished translations into Spanish of relevant texts, as well as review of recent books related to the topic of the CfP, are accepted.

As a general guide for the authors, we provide an indicative, but certainly not exhaustive, list of recommended topics:

- Configuration of political identities. The distinction between "the popular" and "thepopulist".
- Populism beyond the rupture. Order and institutionalization.
- Populism and nationalism. Empirical and theoretical reflections.
- National State, republicanism and trans-national populism.
- Feminism and populism. The gender factor.
- Constructing the people. Leadership and political representation
- Populism and anti-populism in Latin America and Europe.

-Hegemony or post-hegemony. Political articulation and pluralism.

Submission deadline: November 15, 2024

Publication: July 2025

Website: <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/LTDL/announcement>

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EXPERT INTERVIEWS

AFTER THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

Nathalie Brack

Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

1. How do you explain the far right's performance in the EP elections in June 2024?

There is not one single element explaining the success of the far right at the latest EP election: European elections essentially remain 27 elections taking place at the same time rather than truly European elections. Despite the growing politicization and visibility of the EU, EP elections are still, to a large extent, second-order national elections. They take place at the national level and in national contexts, with national parties and what is at stake is less clear to voters than during 'first order' elections (typically legislative and/or presidential elections). Campaigns and voter concerns often focus more on national issues rather than European ones. Parties tend to frame their messages around national politics, leveraging European elections as a platform to address domestic concerns. More to the point, EP elections tend to lead to different voting patterns, and protest votes are higher, resulting in higher support for smaller or radical parties, such as far right parties.

Beyond the specificities of EP elections, the success of the far right is not homogeneous throughout Europe and its increased number of seats in the EP is largely driven by the success of the far right in large Member states such as France, Italy, and Germany. As shown by extant studies, its success is not a new phenomenon and its score in 2024 is the continuation of the trends observed in many countries over the past decade or so. It is the result of a combination of supply-side and demand-side factors: these parties are able to capitalize and shape public grievances, economic and socio-cultural anxieties and public dissatisfaction with the political elite for its (perceived) inability to address their grievances. The last decade has been labelled the decade of crises and these crises triggered insecurities (economically and socio-culturally) among segments of the population, which in turn have provided fertile ground for the success of these parties. In some countries, identity politics have become more salient and polarized, providing an ideal environment to far-right actors. Furthermore, many of the 'old' far-right parties have chosen the path of 're-branding' themselves to appear more moderate while keeping their core stances and their rhetoric of protecting the nation, the national identity, and sovereignty. At the same time, far-right ideas have become mainstreamed on many issues, including migration, through the media and their political competitors, helping the far right to appear more acceptable and 'normal' to a wider segment of discontent voters looking for change.

2. What will be the key issues and outcomes in far-right group formation in the EP?

The main concern before the EP election was whether the far right would unite in one group. It was unlikely given the divisions within the far right on many issues, and especially on Russia and Ukraine and their different strategies at the EU level, with some being more policy-seeking or office-seeking such as Fratelli d'Italia, others just using the EP as a platform for resources or visibility. Typically, the Rassemblement national hasn't used the EP to influence policies but rather to boost its resources and visibility as its priority is the national level. It might be also the case for recent parties such as Chega, Confederation or Revival.

As expected, they did not manage to form one large far-right group and instead, the EP now counts three groups (instead of two during the previous term): the ECR (European Conservative and Reformist), the Patriots for Europe, and the Europe of Sovereign Nations group. While the ECR has radicalized since Brexit and the departure of the British Conservative, the group does not face a cordon sanitaire in the EP, while the Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations group do. But the biggest change is that a far-right group, the Patriots for Europe, has become the third largest group of the EP (ahead of the Liberals, which became the fifth largest group). It is the first time that a "pure" far-right group manages to be the third largest group in the EP since the first direct elections in 1979 (the ECR was third in the 8th term but was a 'mixed' group with parties such as the British Conservatives, the AfD but also the Finns Party).

3. What will be the impact of far-right politics within the EP these next few years?

It is of course difficult to predict the future, but if we look at the last term, during which the far right was already well represented while the two largest groups (center-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, S&D, and center right European People's Party Group, EPP) lost their majority, the picture is nuanced. The grand-coalition – comprising the S&D, the Liberals and the EPP, often with the support of the Greens – continued to dominate the decision-making process and the legislative outcomes. But that does not mean that the far right did not have any impact. Recent studies show that these actors do have an effect in the EP: on the rhetoric, discourses, and debates, especially on issues such as the rule of law, gender, sexual minorities, and migration. Furthermore, the ECR was frequently part of winning right-wing coalitions, along with the EPP and the Liberals on specific issues such as the economy. Finally, the voting influence of the far-right group Identity/Democracy (ID – predecessor of the Patriots for Europe) was limited, but when the EPP decided to turn to its right, it allowed in a few cases the far right to be pivotal in the adoption of several texts and amendments.

On that basis, it is likely that the new term will largely be 'business as usual' in terms of coalitions, despite the gain of seats of the far right. The influence of the far right will depend on the EPP and on the degree of conflict in parliament: if the center-right sticks to the grand coalition (center-left + center-right + liberals), the far right's impact on the decision-making will be very limited. If the EPP turns to its right, for instance on migration or the environment, it knows it will be able

to count on the support of the far right, which will then become a crucial partner of the EPP to pass legislation, especially if the other groups are divided.

4. What will be the impact of far-right group formation in the EP on far-right parties and politics across Europe?

Overall, the EP provides far-right actors with four types of resources. First, it provides financial and staff resources, especially if they are part of a political group. Second, having parliamentary representation gives far-right actors extra visibility: it is especially important for new or small parties which can use the EP as a platform to increase their visibility at home. It might also provide some parties a greater degree of respectability depending on who their allies are in their political group. Third, it offers them some influence on the decision-making process although it depends on the group, the issue, and the coalition. But because there is no stable majority/opposition divide in the EP contrarily to parliamentary systems, coalitions tend to be negotiated issue by issue. The grand coalition has tended to dominate the decision-making process but there is still room for other actors to have some influence when the grand coalition is not used, especially for the ECR group. Finally, the EP is a platform for the socialization of far-right actors and the building or strengthening of their international network. Even though they did not manage to form one large far-right group this term, there has been increased discussions, meetings, and exchanges between far-right actors, inside and outside the institutional setting of the EP. It might help them to share 'best practices', strengthen their bonds and enhance their ability to develop common narratives on European integration, democracy and values, while keeping their own national appeal.

5. To what extent has the far right been normalized in the EU over the past couple of years?

I don't think there is much doubt about it. I am not the expert here but studies by excellent scholars have demonstrated that there has been a mainstreaming of the far right, a normalization of their ideas and of these parties in public life. The media and social media have played a role in this normalization. And other parties as well: especially when the center-right has adopted accommodative strategies such as copying far-right stances or rhetoric or forming coalitions with far-right parties.

At the EU level, the EPP has for long protected Fidesz on the rule of law debate on Hungary and has been responsible for the lack of action. During her campaign, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has openly discussed cooperating with the ECR in the years to come.

We now have a worrying situation in Europe (and not only) where the far right is present in several governments, is increasingly represented in the Council and the Parliament (and perhaps in the Commission in a few weeks or months) and its ideas are mainstreamed.

6. In the light of recent developments in your field, what are the questions that we should focus from now on?

The far right is the most studied political family and yet, there are probably many things we still don't know or don't fully understand. I will restrict myself to the EU issues to remain in my field:

- A) I would be very interested to read more about the growing cooperation and the transfer of ideas among far-right actors, when it comes to European integration but more generally, their stances on values, gender, and democracy. There have been many events (conventions, meetings, etc.) over the past years in Europe to develop networks of far-right actors beyond their national borders. These events included politicians but also civil society actors and think tanks. The relations between these actors and the impact of these regular contacts on the potential evolution of parties' stances and alliances, as well as the development of the narrative of these parties as 'defenders of the true Europe/the European civilization from within the EU institutions' remain so far understudied.
- B) The direct and indirect impact of the far right in the European Parliament also remains comparatively understudied. Under the last term for instance, the far right has increasingly joined winning majorities, even the grand coalition, when voting in plenary. Does it mean that it has become more pragmatic and compromise-oriented? More moderate? Or is there a shift of specific parties or groups towards the far right? Moreover, to what extent are there informal contacts between groups? On which policy issues? And to what extent has the far right professionalized in the EP (in terms of profile, staff, and strategies)?
- C) Finally, the relation between the far right and democracy seems more complex than ever. The so-called normalization of populist radical right parties meant a rejection of their Nazi/fascist past and their acceptance of the democratic game. The commitment to the democratic framework has traditionally been one of the elements distinguishing radical right from extreme right actors. But with the growing contestation of the rule of law and of liberal democracy, some radical right parties flirt with extreme ideas. It would be interesting to have more studies on the evolution of the stances of the far right on democracy (and its causes), its heterogeneity, the interplay between radical right and extreme right, and the consequences for liberal democracy at the national and EU levels.

AFTER THE FRENCH ELECTIONS

Marta Lorimer
Cardiff University, United Kingdom

1. How do you explain the electoral performance of far-right and (far-)left actors in the French general elections in the summer of 2024?

The Rassemblement National (RN) achieved its strongest result in its 50-year history. It came out as the biggest party in the election and achieved a score that seemed previously unachievable. There are several reasons that can explain its performance, but three seem worth mentioning. First, the RN has, by now, a fairly stable ‘core’ of voters who regularly vote for it. This group of voters turned up. Second, the RN likely benefitted from being perceived as the main opposition to Macron. Note that it did not achieve this result by itself: Macron has spent the last seven years saying that his main opposition was the RN, effectively giving it that role (although in this election, he did try to expand his definition of ‘extremism’ to the left as well). Finally, the RN has become increasingly normalised over the last decade. This has helped it appeal to sectors of the population that would not have voted for it in the past. However, it is worth noting that the elections were not an unmitigated success for the RN. After hyping up its chances of winning an election and forming a government, it only came in third position in the second round. This was largely the result of other parties and voters rallying against it in the so-called ‘republican rally’ – suggesting that there are still more people in France who are worried about a RN government than there are who are favourable to it (or could live with that outcome).

As for the left, for all of Macron’s (and Le Pen’s) efforts to claim that politics has moved beyond left and right, left-wing voters still exist, and they had viable political parties they could vote for. The Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) did well in the first round because it was able to present a united front and articulate a left-wing alternative to Macron and Le Pen’s agenda. While in 2017, many left-wing voters gave Macron a chance – believing his promise to be ‘both left and right’, his governing record means he is increasingly perceived as a centre-right politician. Those looking for progressive policies will have returned to their traditional party homes. In the second round of the election, the NFP also benefitted from the republican rally - with Ensemble candidates in three-way run-offs withdrawing in its favour, and voters from that party (more or less consistently) voting for it.

2. What will be the future of far-right and (far-)left politics in France these next few years?

It is nearly impossible to make any sound predictions on French politics at the moment: the lack of a clear majority (and of a government one month after the election) leaves open several possible courses of action for parties of the far right and of the left, including the far left. Depending on how they decide to place themselves vis-à-vis whatever government is in place and the Parliament more broadly, we may see very different outcomes. One thing I do expect to see for the RN is some sort of reflection on how they can be better prepared next time. The

RN has struggled for decades to identify and nurture ‘respectable’ candidates, and in this election, they faced several questions concerning some of their choices. If they want to stand a better chance in the next legislative election, they will need better candidates, although that might not be enough to fully reassure voters that this RN is different from the ‘old’ Front National (FN).

3. What impact will the French elections have on radical politics across Europe?

The results of the French elections are unlikely to have much of an impact on radical politics across Europe. The far right will not be further emboldened by one of their groups failing, once again, to get into government. The results will also likely lead to a RN that is more focused on domestic rather than international issues: their minds will be geared towards the 2027 presidential election (and a possible new legislative election before then). For radical left politics, the election seems to have demonstrated that there is still a constituency for left-wing parties, but the radical left La France Insoumise (LFI) underperformed compared to the previous election, suggesting that radicalism on the left may have lost some of its shine.

4. To what extent has far right extremism been normalized in France over the past couple of years?

The 2024 elections, and the last few years of French politics, paint a mixed picture. If we only look at the RN as the main expression of far-right politics in France, the party has gone through cycles of de-demonisation and re-demonisation. It has become progressively more acceptable to vote for the RN, and polls show that it is increasingly less likely to be perceived as a threat to democracy. The RN has entered the French parliament with a sizable delegation, and in the 2022-2024 parliament it even secured some of the top jobs in parliament. However, both during the 2017 presidential election and in the 2024 legislative election, it went through some ‘re-demonisation’, where other political forces allied against it and voters mobilized strongly to make sure they did not gain access to government or to top posts in parliament. So, the RN, while having become increasingly ‘normalised’, is not considered fully ‘normal’ (yet).

If we take a broader perspective and look away from the party itself and focus on far-right ideas, I would say that certain far-right political positions have become increasingly normalised. The fact that Macron’s law on immigration was dubbed as an ‘ideological victory’ by the RN suggests that positions that were once the exclusive domain of the far right have become more accepted.

5. In the light of recent developments in your field, what are the questions that we should focus from now on?

What I found fascinating about this election is precisely the fact that normalisation does not seem to be a one-way process, but rather, one that goes through cycles. A bit like the success of the far right, it is not some kind of ineluctable one-way road, so it is worth bringing attention to the dynamics of normalisation, looking at it as a process with its own ups and downs, not just an outcome.

REPORT ON THE NCVE 2024

NORDIC CONFERENCE ON VIOLENT EXTREMISM

By Deputy director Anders Ravik Jupskås
Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), University of Oslo, Norway

How do terrorists and extremists exploit new technology? What is the role of gender in politics of extremism? What are the limits and potential of countering hate crime within and beyond the criminal justice process? These questions were among those being discussed when nearly 240 researchers and practitioners from various countries gathered on June 17-19, 2024, for the 6th Nordic Conference on Violent Extremism, this year hosted by the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), University of Oslo. The conference, initiated in 2017 by The Segerstedt Institute's at the University of Gothenburg, has become the key event in the Nordic region for interdisciplinary research on violent extremism. It connects *Nordic* scholars researching violent extremism and non-Nordic scholars researching violent extremism *in the Nordic region*. The conference also aims to bridge the gap between the theoretical insight of academics and the experience-based knowledge of practitioners. While the conference initially adopted what Vittorio Buffaci (2005) calls a “Minimalist Conception of Violence” (i.e., “an intentional act of excessive or destructive force”), a growing number of presentations embraced a more “Comprehensive Conception of Violence” (i.e., “a violation of rights”), allowing for a broader assessment of how contemporary forms of extremism threatens (Nordic) democracy.

The conference started with an excursion to Utøya, one of the sites of the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011, where sixty-nine (mostly) youths were killed and many more wounded by a lone actor right-wing terrorist. Since the attacks, Utøya has been rebuilt as a “commemoration- and learning center,” with the explicit goal of “balancing the need to commemorate and the need for new life, learning and engagement for a more inclusive, democratic society.” (Utøya 2020) The island is now frequently used for seminars, workshops and conferences. The excursion to Utøya included a guided tour and a keynote by C-REX deputy director Anders Ravik Jupskås. Partly based on a journal article in *Perspectives in Terrorism*, Jupskås discussed what the 22 July case can tell us about the formation, persistence, and re-negotiation of narratives about a terrorist attack (Solheim and Jupskås 2021). This is important, Jupskås argued, when trying to understand the societal impact of terrorism, for example whether or not it leads to polarization (e.g., debates about the causes and consequences of this act of terrorism, as well as on how the country should respond to it), exacerbating divisions within society.

With 118 paper presentations and 30 panels, the conference covered a great variety of issues, ranging from the roles of emotions and technology in extremism to the prevention of and responses to radicalization and violence. However, there was at least one notable trend this year compared to the previous conferences, which was the growing number of presentations related to the role of gender in (violent) mobilization, including topics such as dog whistling strategies in anti-gender communication; the role of gender in conspiracy

theories; far-right constructions of the nativist homosexual subject; gendered aesthetics; masculinity in terrorists' manifestos; the role of humour in gendered political discourse; and the psychological underpinnings of right-wing and misogynist extremism. The conference also had a panel specifically devoted to the emerging topic of 'incels', discussing how they construct and de-construct their incel identity; how they drift in and out of online incel subcultures; and how they justify misogyny and victimhood.

Given the growing interest in gendered perspectives, it was particularly timely that Professor Tina Askanius, from Malmö University in Sweden, addressed this topic in her keynote speech entitled "Gender, Misogyny and Far-Right Extremism". A key takeaway from her talk was that "extremism research needs to take gender, misogyny and anti-feminism seriously" by adopting "intersectional analytical frameworks that help us understand the multiple, complex ways in which gender is invoked across a whole range of contexts and projects from conservative politics to violent far-right extremism." (Askanius *forthcoming*) Importantly, these frameworks should go "beyond ideas of womanhood and manhood, femininity and masculinity in representations and role enactment" (*Ibid.*) and they should acknowledge the importance of networked technologies when it comes to the production and diffusion of misogynist and extreme ideas. Both Askanius and Jupskås' keynotes will soon be available on the C-REX' website.

One key development of terrorism and fatal political violence more generally, including in the Nordic region, is the fact that almost all violent attacks with a fatal outcome are perpetrated by so-called lone actors. Upon closer examination, we know that these lone actors are rarely, if ever, isolated from the wider extremist milieu. Moreover, some of these lone actor attacks tend to cluster in time and space. As a result, a significant body of research has dealt with the question of how we should conceptualize, explain, and prevent such actors from committing violent attacks. Although few presentations at this conference specifically addressed these issues, it was the key topic of the third and final keynote speech given by Professor Lasse Lindekilde from Aarhus University in Denmark. Drawing on a recent co-authored journal article in *Perspectives on Politics*, Lindekilde proposed "a novel analytical framework for understanding lone-actor terrorism" which focuses on "the social embeddedness of terrorist lone-actor radicalization and the collective dynamic of lone-actor attacks." (Malthaner, O'Connor and Lindekilde 2024) In short, this framework conceptualizes "lone-actor radicalization as a relational pathway shaped by social ties and interactions with radical milieus/movements," allowing us to "analytically capturing an entirely different and potentially increasingly relevant logic of violent processes." (*Ibid.*)

The next Nordic Conference on Violent Extremism will take place at Aarhus University in Denmark in September 2025. If you are researching extremism in the Nordic countries, we hope to see you there.

References

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BOOK REVIEWS

MANÈS WEISSKIRCHER (Ed.) “CONTEMPORARY GERMANY AND THE FOURTH WAVE OF FAR-RIGHT POLITICS.”

ROUTLEDGE. 2024. 246 PP. £29.59. ISBN: 9780367634094

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Research on the far right in Germany has been gaining traction in the past decade, due to two important changes in the country’s political landscape: the emergence of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the appearance of Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West movement (PEGIDA). Indeed, these two actors have prompted discussions about the resurgence of a new wave of far-right politics in Germany, one that appeared to have more resonance with already existing and emerging grievances within German society, such as the country’s role in the EU, the welfare state reforms of the ‘Harz IV’ programme, the fiscal and economic policies of the federal government, and Chancellor Merkel’s decision to implement an open border policy to address the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2014-2015.

The context of contemporary Germany acts as the set for Manès Weisskircher’s edited volume, which features scholarly studies on the far right that are divided into two broader areas: the non-legislative field, which explores street politics, online presence, and the spectrum of far-right actors in the margins of the political scene, and the legislative field that focuses on the electoral impact of AfD and the responses of the political system against it. Introducing the chapters and the discussed topics, Weisskircher points out the German exceptionalism in the post-war development of the far right compared to other countries such as Austria and Italy and emphasises the electoral breakthrough of AfD as the decisive factor for the end of that exceptional era. Based on that context, Uwe Backes maps the intellectual trajectories of the far right and examines continuities and discontinuities of the New Right ideology between the past and the present. Following their previous work on PEGIDA (Vorländer et al., 2018), Maik Herold and Steven Schäler analyse the local character of the movement and its broader implications for far-right movements and right-wing populism in Germany and internationally. Matthias Hoffmann and Julia Rone discuss the hybrid dynamics of far-right online and offline mobilizations and explore how the internet and online media have contributed to the success of far-right actors in the field of digital communications. In their respective chapter, Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Annett Gräfe-Geusch present the far-right radicalization of youth through the prism of styling and fashion and how youths in Germany use subcultural brands to become part of the mainstream far right. Concluding the non-legislative part of the book, Pascal D. König and Sebastian Jäckle explore far-right violence from the 1990s to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and present the different trends and the targets of far-right violent acts over the years.

Turning the focus on the legislative part, Theresa Gessler and Sophia Hunger's chapter examines the politicization of the immigration issue in German far-right politics and how contextual and institutional factors have contributed to it, in Germany and Europe. Explaining the success of AfD, and how the East-West divide has played a role in it, is the aim of Kai Arzheimer's chapter. He claims that the party's electoral breakthrough at the national level is the result of the party's performance at the regional level and at that of the 'new' eastern states. Manès Weisskircher offers an updated version of how AfD addressed the pandemic, the movement of Querdenken (lateral thinking) and the anti-Corona protesters, by following a movement-party strategy that has become characteristic of AfD in the previous years. David Art's chapter focuses on how mainstream parties have formed a pact against AfD and practiced a form of party ostracism against the institutional aspect of the far right. Similarly, Anna-Sophie Heinze explores in her chapter the responses to AfD and the potential lessons that can be learned from the subnational level to the national. Lastly, Frank Decker, Fedor Ruhose, and Philipp Adorf analyse the influence of AfD on coalition-building and the pressure that the party can put on the main centre-right party of CDU-CSU. Concluding the volume, Manès Weisskircher summarises the aims of the edited volume and reflects on the possibility of a fifth wave of far-right politics in Germany, one that will be more synchronised with the respective developments of the far right in other European countries.

Manès Weisskircher's book offers an updated and thorough understanding of the nuances that characterise contemporary far right in Germany in both its non-institutional and institutional forms. This is due to the high quality of the research that each of the contributors has done, which is the outcome of a long scientific engagement with far-right politics and a testament to the quality of the edited volume itself. Nevertheless, those who study far-right politics might feel that there are areas that are not present in the volume but have an equal significance in understanding contemporary far-right politics in Germany. One of them is the lacklustre emphasis on the online media aspect, as the role of online communities can offer further insight into how the German alt-right develops. Regarding the latter, it is also an area that has been absent from the edited volume and possibly shows the limitations of the scope that it has, as it is an area in far-right studies that has flourished recently (Ahmed and PISOIU, 2021; Hermansson et al., 2020; Morstatter et al., 2018). It would be very interesting to offer more in-depth accounts of the German far-right's online presence, along with the respective chapter of Matthias Hoffmann and Julia Rone, and engage more with that sub-field.

Another important aspect of contemporary far-right studies that appears to be missing from the edited volume is the mainstreaming of the far right and the various forms that it takes. Granted, Manès Weisskircher states in his conclusion that the German far right appears to not have entered the state of mainstreaming yet, however, there is evidence to the contrary. The case of the left-wing politician Sarah Wagenknecht and her positions on tougher immigration laws (Thomeczek, 2024; Wagner et al., 2023), and the recent decision of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to deport immigrants who have committed crimes (Karnitschnig, 2024), against his open-border policy, are a few examples that the mainstreaming of far-right ideas in Germany is underway. This approach to the mainstreaming of the far right also ties within the intention of some contributors to focus more on AfD's populist aspect rather than its racist, nationalist, or authoritarian aspects, thus

perpetuating the conflation of populism and far right, despite the number of studies that have pointed to the dangers of that conflation (Brown and Mondon, 2021; De Cleen et al., 2021). As a result, the contributors give the impression occasionally that certain far-right actors such as PEGIDA and AfD are perceived as ‘populists’ and not ‘far-right’.

Despite these points, Manès Weisskircher’s edited volume is a substantial contribution to the study of contemporary far-right politics in Germany, offering insights into their inner workings and the various expressions, themes, and actors that characterize them. In conclusion, Manès Weisskircher presents some possible ways forward and the current volume is a good step towards that direction.

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LEIDIG, EVIANE. "THE WOMEN OF THE FAR RIGHT: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND ONLINE RADICALIZATION."

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2023. 276 PP. £22. ISBN: 9780231210171.

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This timely book, "The Women of the Far Right: Social Media Influencers and Online Radicalization," focuses on an often neglected yet crucial group of actors within the far-right movement: female social media influencers. The author, extremism scholar Eviane Leidig, shows how these influencers, educated middle-class white women, use mainstream social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, to strategically spread radical thoughts and far-right ideas.

So far, few studies have examined how radical political influencers utilize microcelebrity techniques similar to mainstream social media influencers (Lewis, 2020; Rogers, 2020; Laaksonen et al., 2020). In this book, Leidig shows how far-right influencers harness these techniques to appear relatable, approachable, and authentic for recruitment, radicalization, and propaganda.

Drawing from previous studies of the far right, Leidig starts by situating the influencers within the broader far-right movement, and to what Cas Mudde (2019) has called the fourth wave: that is the normalization and mainstreaming of the far-right ideology. Despite the influencers preferred self-classification as right-wing or conservative, the author argues that having emerged from the alt-right – a reactionary movement reproducing nativism, extreme nationalism, and authoritarianism –, they are ideologically situated within the far right or occasionally occupying the liminal space between the alt-right and conservative political.

In the following chapters of the book, Leidig discusses the influencers' activities in targeting different audiences. Her long-term, in-depth digital ethnographic study shows in detail how the influencers skillfully and deliberately harness platform affordances and the influencer industry's practices for their radicalizing efforts and propaganda work. These attractive women combine typical lifestyle content, cooking, dating, and makeup tutorials with far-right ideological positions and even conspiratorial content. They articulate radical positions in a subtle manner to avoid being deplatformed from mainstream platforms.

Leidig shows how far-right female influencers promote traditional gender roles and aspire male followers, while offering sisterhood for far-right women. Influencers tell their personal stories of radicalization or "red pill journeys" in YouTube vlogs and use Instagram's ephemeral stories functionality to initiate direct, intimate contact with their followers, aspiring them to join the movement.

Leidig argues that while these influencers have much in common with other alt-right or far-right online communities, such as #tradwife influencers (who propagate the traditional female role) and the so-called manosphere, they occupy a unique place in the far-right ecosystem and skillfully address multiple audiences with platform-specific strategies. While radical influencers might wish to keep their activities "below the radar" (Abidin, 2021), these influencers depend on their visibility on mainstream social media platforms and adopt familiar genres and conventions to exploit these platforms' business models and monetization logics to their advantage. Leidig then shows how the far-right ecosystem intersects with social media culture and platform economy as influencers monetize their activities and use crowdsourcing platforms to fund their endeavors.

The book's main contribution is that it shows how integral these female social media influencers are in their gendered ways of mainstreaming and normalizing far-right ideas and discourses on a global scale. They contribute to the broader, global, far-right mobilization both online and offline. Avoiding their male counterparts' violent expressions, these influencers soften the discourses, bring a fresh and high-maintenance appearance to the movement and raise topics to mainstream political discussions. Travelling transnationally, participating in protests and other events, and interviewing renowned far-right intellectuals on their channels, these influencers build bridges between European identitarian and Northern American alt-right movements.

In the final chapter, the author discusses concrete measures to tackle far-right influencers' impact online and offline. In addition to "hard" measures or content moderation, demonetization, deplatforming, deranking, and detection, she calls for "soft" approaches emphasizing, for instance, the use of counter-narratives and counter-influencers, as well as co-operation of various actors, academia, non-profit organizations, and policy makers.

The book is written in a very readable, but somewhat polemical style. The author explicitly expresses her critical position and is committed throughout the book to debunking the studied influencers' false statements. This may seem somewhat out of place for a reader looking for an analytical approach. The focus on Northern American, Australian, and, to some extent, European societies is justified, considering the centrality of these contexts, especially for the alt-right. Leidig emphasizes the global nature of the far right and the possibilities of reaching large audiences in a hybrid media space. Future studies should continue widening the scope and investigate how far-right ideas are negotiated, localized, and spread globally by both female and male lifestyle social media influencers.

To sum up, this book is a valuable contribution to the interdisciplinary field of extremism studies and emerging scholarship focusing on social media influencers' politicization (e.g., Suuronen et al., 2021; Riedl et al., 2023). It is a useful reading for students, journalists and others interested in the topic. The author's immersion in the realm of the far-right ecosystem brings forth a very nuanced understanding of the influencers' activities over many years. However, at times, the thorough understanding of the overall context seems to determine

(or overrun) the interpretation of the content produced by the influencers on particular platforms. For example, it could be argued that propagating a healthy Nordic diet for babies on Instagram might not be linked to white supremacism, even when the influencer is known to support such ideologies. All in all, Leidig's deep dive into the dark side of the influencer industry highlights the central role of these modern-day celebrities, often referred to as "so-called influencers", and hopefully helps increase interest in the radical potential of the fluffy and pretty in the attention economy.

Nuppu Pelevina is a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. She studies social media influencers' politicization in different societies, focusing on Brazil, Russia, Finland, and Ukraine. She is also a university teacher at the University of Vaasa, where she teaches communications.

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PUBLICATIONS ALERT

Our publication alert is based on a semi-automated search and can never be complete. Therefore, please tell us about any **recent** publications of interest to Standing Group members so that we may include them in our newsletter.

Aha, K; Hiebel, C; Jensen, L. (2024). Turning to the radical right: Examining subnational variation in radical right support after ethnic minority success in East Central Europe. *Electoral Studies*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2024.102828>

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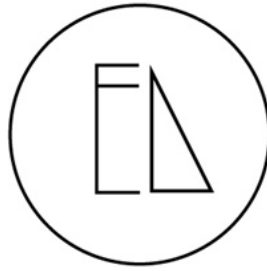
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