



CONCLUSIONS PAPER

THEMATIC RESEARCH MEETING ON THE IMPACT OF POLARISING FREE SPEECH AND ACTIVISM ON THE EUROPEAN UNION POLITICAL VALUES

Authors: Marta Driessen, Álvaro Vicente & Carola García-Calvo, RAN Policy Support

11 June 2024 – Virtual

Radicalisation Awareness Network

RAN  Policy Support

KEY OUTCOMES

This conclusions paper constitutes a compilation of the key insights and findings from the RAN Policy Support Thematic Research Meeting (TRM) on “The Impact of Polarising Free Speech and Activism on the European Union Political Values”, which took place virtually on 11 June 2024. The main objective of the event was to discuss the impact in the European Union (EU) of affective polarisation - the multifaceted phenomenon by which members of opposing social groups experience “emotional dislike and disgust based not on policies but on identity”¹, - and polarising free speech at two distinct levels. Firstly, it assessed the extent to which polarisation constitutes a security risk by acting as a breeding ground for the mainstreaming of extremist discourses, radicalisation processes, and potential manifestations of violent extremism (VE). Lastly, the event explored the broader societal impact of affective polarisation and polarising free speech on social cohesion, democratic values, and trust in state institutions held by EU citizens.

Polarisation has been studied by many different disciplines – political science, security studies, sociology and psychology, among others. This research event gathered researchers and scholars from EU Member States (EU MS) and beyond who study the phenomenon from different angles, with the ultimate goal of identifying how to mitigate the pernicious effects of affective polarisation in the EU.

This discussion contributed to advancing conceptual clarity on the phenomenon of polarisation by outlining its various types. Additionally, it endeavoured to further the academic community’s understanding of the complex relationship between polarisation and violent extremism (VE) by combining academic and policy-oriented interventions. This helped to shed light on contributing factors such as the proliferation of conspiracy theories, the use of social media to amplify extremist content, and undesirable foreign influences.

SOME OF THE KEY OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING WERE:

- The relationship between affective polarisation and VE is complex, dynamic, and non-linear. Affective **polarisation should be treated as a risk factor**, as it is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for manifestations of extremism and VE to occur.
- **Conspiracy theories** significantly contribute to polarisation and radicalisation by providing a simplistic ideological framework **that can be more appealing to vulnerable people and those who feel excluded from the system**. They use of conspiracy theories is particularly prevalent in the discourse of extremists, which contributes to which contributes to maintaining their own radicalisation processes, cognitive biases, and distrust in authoritative sources, thus hindering social cohesion.
- **Gender identity and sexual orientation is pervasive topic in polarising narratives** across the ideological spectrum. There is a mainstreaming of anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric nowadays. This trend stems from the

¹ Kleinfeld, R. (2023). Polarization, Democracy, and Political Violence in the United States: What the Research Says, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available [here](#).

deliberate framing of LGBTQI+ community as "the other" in direct opposition to what is deemed traditional or normative. Extremist groups and individuals from diverse conservative or religious ideological backgrounds converge in this space, fuelled by identity-driven narratives, thus expanding their influence and scope of their audience.

- **Interventions** to prevent affective polarisation or mitigate its harms **should take into account the complexity of the phenomenon**, as each type relates to VE in a different way. They should also be adapted to the level at which polarisation takes place, such as within small groups or public opinion.
- The **escalation of polarisation** in Europe is to some extent driven by **social exclusion**, which can result in **more young people feeling powerless and unrepresented**. To alleviate this situation, there is a need for policies that promote **opportunities for youth participation**, as well as **support identity flexibility**, which allows for the questioning, redefining, and **reconfiguring of national belonging** by integrating diverse experiences, values, and perspectives.
- **Russian disruption tactics** within the EU go beyond algorithms and state-funded media platforms, as Russia **uses alternative media outlets and individuals linked with local far-right movements** in the EU as proxies to mainstream its interests across Europe. Strengthening **alternative voices** is critical in countering the impact of these influencers, who have significant power in shaping public image across the European Union.

This paper summarises the highlights of the discussion as well as the recommendations that were formulated by the participants and will give an outlook on possible follow-up topics.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSION

POLARISED SOCIETIES AS BREEDING GROUND FOR RADICAL DISCOURSES AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The first panel explored the relationship between polarisation and extremism. It examined different types of polarisations and their complex, non-linear relationship with VE. The panel also analysed conspiracy theories as a common mechanism in polarisation, explaining their appeal, links to right-wing extremism and VE, and the broader societal impacts of widespread belief in such narratives. Finally, the panel addressed the role of gender and identity issues in VE narratives, identifying the LGBTQI+ community as a frequent target of harmful online narratives that are becoming mainstream.

The Interplay Between Polarisation and Violent Extremism

Currently 'polarisation' is primarily being used as a negative catch-all term to broadly designate various forms of social tension. However, it is not an inherently harmful phenomenon, as dissent and ideological distance can be constructive, respectful, and take place through democratic channels. Moreover, even in its toxic forms, polarisation is not a monolithic concept, as there are different types.

In-group polarisation takes place when a group of like-minded people increasingly sharpen their ideological positions. This can happen thanks to echo-chambers on social media platforms, in which individuals with similar opinions converge, reinforce each other's beliefs, and lack exposure to opposing views². Alternatively, individuals can move from moderate beliefs to more extreme ones to gain status within a given group. Secondly, distance can grow between two opposing groups in what is called **intergroup polarisation**.

Additionally, polarisation can be **thematic or issue-based**, which refers to the increase in ideological distance between two groups regarding a specific subject. Lastly, **social or affective polarisation** is a multifaceted phenomenon by which members of opposing social groups experience ideological *and* emotional distance, leading to hostility and aversion.

Conceptual clarity is essential, since each different type of polarisation relates to VE in a different way. For example, in-group polarisation can lead members of a group to accept violence as legitimate, while intergroup polarisation operates through cumulative extremism, causing opposing groups to engage in Manichean thinking³ and to view the out-group as a threat. To foster cumulative extremism, VE groups and movements aim to expand both their in-group, through the normalisation of extreme ideas, and their out-group, exaggerating the perceived threat and the perception of victimhood.

However, affective polarisation and VE are two separate processes that are not necessarily interrelated. Polarisation can create a favourable context for VE and, in turn, VE can further strengthen group identities, intensifying affective polarisation. At the same time, both phenomena may be unrelated, as polarisation can occur without leading to VE, and VE can happen in the absence of polarisation. The relationship between the two phenomena is therefore complex, dynamic, and non-linear. **As such, it is important to stress that affective polarisation is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for manifestations of VE to occur – it should rather be treated as a risk factor.**

The Role of Conspiracy Theories in Polarisation and Extremism

Conspiracy theories play a central role in polarisation, by providing an ideological framework that exacerbates extremism, spreads and normalises radical ideas, manipulates emotions, and promotes a Manichean worldview, thus deepening societal division and distrust. These elaborate narratives often explain situations or events as the results of secret and malevolent plans by powerful groups and/or individuals. Although conspiracy theories constantly evolve, they generally provide an **ideological framework to explain power and authority to the vulnerable or those who feel excluded from the system**. Among other purposes, these theories can serve to control and influence public opinion by provoking emotions such as anger and hatred, which can lead to changes in attitudes and motivate actions. In the context of radicalisation and violent extremism, these theories are specifically used to incite and recruit individuals, fostering an environment conducive to the adoption of extremist ideologies and participation in violent acts.

² Cinelli, M., Etta, G., Avalle, M., Quattrociocchi, A., Di Marco, N., Valensise, C., Galeazzi, A., & Quattrociocchi, W. (2022). Conspiracy theories and social media platforms. In *Current Opinion in Psychology* (Vol. 47). Elsevier B.V. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101407>

³ The term 'Manichean thinking' comes from Manicheism, which is a dualistic religion based on the principle that there is an eternal conflict between good and evil. In this context, Manichean thinking refers to a dichotomous 'us vs. them', 'good vs. evil' mentality.

Belief in conspiracy theories is more prevalent among extremists, creating a **cycle where increased belief in these theories leads to greater extremism**. Some individuals have a **tendency towards conspiratorial belief**, which involves the acceptance of conspiracy theories, typically measured using scales that capture both general and specific conspiracy beliefs. In some cases, this develops into a **conspiracy mindset**, a tendency to believe in conspiracy theories combined with rational scepticism.

The use of conspiracy theories is especially **prevalent among right-wing extremists**, who employ them to spread feelings of injustice, grievances, urgency, and crisis. Although conspiracy theories often appeal to those who feel excluded, they are also used by those in power to demonise and delegitimise opponents, promote a prolonged sense of crisis, rally support, and distract from their own potential political failures⁴.

Belief in conspiracy theories **serves different purposes**: it can alleviate anxiety in the face of uncertainty, offer a sense of distinction and privilege, provide simple and immediate answers to complex questions and important events in real-life, and can give a feeling of belonging to a distinguished group, thereby boosting self-esteem. It also creates the belief that one is resilient in the face of adversity, even as a minority, and, paradoxically, provides an alibi to hate minorities with impunity.

Conspiratorial beliefs make individuals more prone to cognitive and affective biases that lead to greater susceptibility to disinformation. Therefore, such beliefs can hinder the construction of knowledge and scientific advances, as individuals become less trusting of governmental sources, media, academia, etc. In particular, **they promote Manichaeian thinking, leading to dehumanisation and deepening polarisation and extremism**⁵.

The Instrumentalisation of Gender and LGBTQI+ Rights to Foster Polarisation and Radical Narratives

The online environment is exploited by VE and terrorist groups to disseminate harmful content –hate speech, disinformation, conspiracy theories, etc.–, **aimed at targeting and dehumanising particular individuals or groups on the basis of who they are or what they are not**. In other words, based on specific identity-based characteristics, such as their religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.⁶

In this context, **gender/gender identity is an omnipresent topic in extremist narratives** across the ideological spectrum **which repeatedly target women and members of the LGBTQI+ community**. The **LGBTQI+ population is often used as a convenient scapegoat**, easily defined as the ultimate "other" **perceived to threaten traditional socio-political values**. This vilification strengthens the mainstreaming of narratives that perpetuate discrimination and prejudice against this group, highlighting LGBTQI+ people's continuous struggles in the face of social norms and prejudices.

⁴ Pirro, A. L., & Taggart, P. (2023). Populists in power and conspiracy theories. In *Party Politics* (Vol. 29, No. 3). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221077071>

⁵ Guinjoan, M., & Galais, C. (2023). I want to believe: The relationship between conspiratorial beliefs and populist attitudes in Spain. In *Electoral Studies* (Vol. 81). Elsevier B.V. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2022.102574>

⁶ See: Ullman, S and Tomalic, M. (Eds.), *Counterspeech. Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Countering Dangerous Speech*, London & New York: Palgrave, 2024.

These harmful dynamics occasionally have led to violent expressions against targets identified as part of the **LGBTQI+ community**, such as the case of the homophobic attacks perpetrated in Oslo, Norway (2022), Bratislava, Slovakia (2022), Orlando, United States (2016)⁷.

Both VE and terrorist groups **use different virtual platforms for different purposes and constantly adapt their online strategies to the dynamic and rapidly changing virtual environment**, which presents a growing challenge for moderation efforts and removal of harmful content. Some of the key strategies today include **migration to decentralised or fringe platforms**, that do not operate with the same regulatory frameworks and security protocols as mainstream or bigger ones, and the use of **coded language**.

Regarding the response for governments, there are **three main pillars for action**: prevention, incident response, and the adaptation to a highly dynamic environment by coordinating stakeholders –the tech industry, experts, and civil society– to understand current and predict future online trends. When dealing with **borderline content** – also known as “lawful but awful” content – **counternarratives and alternative ones** have proven to be an **effective tool for mitigating the influence and impact of such borderline material in the audience potentially vulnerable to radicalisation**. Rather than relying simply on punitive measures or censorship, counternarratives serve as a proactive and empowering tool for confronting harmful messages, stimulating critical thinking, and cultivating a more inclusive society⁸. Lastly, it is important to emphasise **the need to adopt a systematic and comprehensive gender approach** as backbone of all preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) interventions.

EFFECTS OF POLARISING FREE SPEECH ON BROADER SOCIETY, CITIZENS’ TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS, AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

The second panel highlighted the various ways in which affective polarisation and democracy are interconnected. First, it examined the legal and non-regulatory measures available to contain and mitigate polarisation. It also addressed the systemic deficiencies that create a fertile ground and favourable conditions for polarisation, including both social inequalities and the opportunities for malign state and non-state actors to advance their disruptive agendas. Finally, the panel reflected on the tensions that polarisation creates within the core values of the democratic system, particularly when it comes to setting limits on freedom of expression or limiting the ability of certain media to operate in the EU.

Addressing Affective Polarisation Through Legal and Non-Regulatory Measures

Conflict is inevitable within European democratic societies. The challenge lies in **designing democratic channels to resolve disagreements and manage plurality**. In light of this, it is essential to maintain the space for debate and political conflict⁹ as broad as possible to ensure that it is channelled into democratic procedures. However,

⁷ For more information on the attacks see: Cincurova, V., (2022), “Anti-LGBTIQ murders were result of years of hate in Slovakia”, Open Democracy. And Vidino, L., & Meleagrou-Hitchens, A., (2022) Islamist Homophobia in the West: From Rhetoric to Violence, Program on Extremism (PoE)., September.

⁸Studies suggest that counter- speech can be successful; particularly in one-to-one conversations, it has been documented that empathy-based counterspeech can reduce racist hate speech on social media and it has positive effects on bystanders and silent followers of the discussion, decreasing the likelihood of others resorting to harmful language. Counterspeech is in line with international human rights and freedom of speech, and it can be a much more powerful tool against dangerous and toxic speech than blocking and censorship. See, S and Tomalic, M. (Eds.), *Counterspeech. Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Countering Dangerous Speech*, Introduction, London & New York: Palgrave, 2024.

⁹ The term political conflict is widely used in the literature and refers to discrepant constructions of reality coming into competition. For more details, please see Stern C. and Ondish P. (2018), “Political aspects of shared reality”, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Volume 23, 2018, pg. 11-14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.11.004>.

while democratic expressions of dissent – such as peaceful demonstrations, no matter how intense and confrontational – are healthy and should be encouraged, boundaries must be set as freedom of speech cannot be absolute.

To prevent high levels of affective polarisation, mitigate its harms, and maintain social cohesion, it is important to **reflect on where and how to establish the boundaries between democratic polarisation and toxic polarisation**, since these limits are human constructs that need to be negotiated. There are two approaches or tools to draw that line. Firstly, **legal frameworks** against the incitement of violence, hate speech, racism or misogyny are classic instruments to regulate freedom of expression. Secondly, **non-regulatory strategies** can be leveraged, particularly to manage borderline ('lawful but awful') content. However, many challenges remain in negotiating, establishing, and implementing the boundaries between democratic and toxic polarisation.

One way to navigate these difficulties is to **acknowledge the importance of the context in which potentially polarising speech occurs**. To this effect, three distinct spheres should be considered: school classrooms, neighbourhoods, and the online sphere. Classrooms are often seen as open spaces for political experimentation and the expression of potentially radical ideas, as young people are still forming their own worldviews. This sometimes entails fewer limits than, for instance, in the online sphere, which grapples with the challenge of regulating borderline ('lawful but awful') content and fringe platforms. At the same time, classrooms allow much less space for hate speech or discrimination compared to the other two spaces, as schools need to guarantee safety and respect for all. In all three spheres, **space for democratic disagreement must remain as open as possible**, while strategies are designed to channel toxic polarisation into democratic expressions of dissent¹⁰.

Thus, these types of interventions must consider the complexity of the phenomenon of polarisation. Firstly, each type of polarisation – in-group versus intergroup polarisation, and affective versus issue-based polarisation – should be addressed in a tailored manner. Additionally, the level in which toxic polarisation occurs should be accounted for and, therefore, interventions should be designed depending on whether they intend to address, for instance, in-group polarisation, polarising narratives coming from malign actors, or public opinion polarisation.

Democracies are a shared framework where many voices coexist. Efforts should be directed at **striking a balance between keeping spaces for democratic dialogue as open as possible, while negotiating the boundaries of freedom of expression**. By continually refining the boundaries between democratic and toxic polarisation, European societies will enhance social cohesion and their democratic resilience, as well as more effectively prevent potential manifestations of extremism and VE.

Foreign Influences and Funding of Actors Fostering Polarising Free Speech within the EU

Russia's disruption and interference tactics in the EU are not new; however, they have evolved and adapted to new context.. The methods historically utilised to influence European far-left and communist parties during the Soviet era have now been repurposed to target and exploit the modern European far-right. As of the 2010s, notably after 2012, the Kremlin shifted its focus towards **combatting liberal ideologies beyond Russian borders**

¹⁰ For more information on the importance of context – namely, these three spheres – please see Van Alstein (2022), "Polarisation and conflict: a non-violent approach", Report, Flemish Peace Institute.

by presenting itself as a traditionalist, anti-modernity, and anti-liberal role model¹¹This period witnessed the instrumentalization of the **European far-right actors as key political disruptors**, serving as effective intermediaries for Russia’s direct and indirect influence operations within the EU.

The **intersection of polarisation and the far-right, or racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE), has become increasingly apparent**, with far-right adherents showing a propensity for embracing and perpetuating conspiracy theories. Russia's political warfare strategy has capitalised on this dynamic, leveraging the far-right to further its objectives to appear as a viable and legitimate alternative to lead international relations for ‘like-minded’ or sympathetic groups and parties¹²The nature of the relationship between Russia and Europe’s far-right could be seen as an alliance of convenience fostering polarisation aiming to undermine liberal democratic systems and EU values.

In the practical domain, the **Russian disruption tactics transcend conventional methods**. On the one hand, the involvement of specific individuals based in different countries, working for different entities, of varying biographies and social backgrounds –including far-right politicians, businessmen, intellectuals or individuals with aligned ideological orientations–, acting as **political disruptors or agents of manipulation**, often do so on voluntary bases or are driven by bribery. Russia even tries to attract individuals or movements who have no ideological affinity with the Kremlin but whose goals may converge at some point, as in the case with **anti-government movements in the EU**. On the other hand, Russian tactics of influence extends beyond algorithms and state-owned media platforms like Russia Today or Sputnik, as it makes use of **alternative media** in different European countries which act as proxies for spreading the interests of the Kremlin in the EU. An example of the latter is "The Voice of Europe" in Czechia which may not look like a Russian media outlet but is financed by it.

Finally, a particular emphasis was placed on the role of **pro-Russian veterans** who fought in Ukraine in 2014 as they currently serve as an ideological conduit –or “conveyor belt”– for Russia's interests in the EU. Unlike Da’esh foreign (terrorist) fighters, they did not receive much attention from EU Member States (MSs) upon their return.

The response for this **complex and multifaceted phenomenon is challenging as it should be adapted to the existing reality in each country**, there is no one ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach which could be immediately implemented. Initiatives like “naming and shaming” of political disruptors serving Kremlin interests in the EU or upgrading EU MS’s capabilities for countering disinformation may not suffice to hinder Russia’s influence operations with Europe’s disruptors. It should be addressed at its source in Russia¹³

Dynamics of Exclusion and their Contribution to Polarisation

The development and escalation of polarisation are also connected to the very functioning of the democratic system. An extensive literature review on polarisation in Europe revealed that social exclusion is linked to many of the top 20 factors contributing to its fluctuations¹⁴. **In polarised contexts, young people report a sense of disconnection from mainstream politics and society, both in identification and spatial access**. They perceive

¹¹ Rekawek, K., Renard, T., & Molas B., (2024) *Russia and the Far-Right: Insights from Ten European Countries*, The Hague: International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT).

¹² Rekawek, K., Renard, T., & Molas, B., (2024).

¹³ Rekawek, et al. (2024).

¹⁴ McNeil-Willson, R., Gerrand, V., Scrinzi, F., & Triandafyllidou, A. (2019). Polarisation, violent extremism and resilience in Europe today: An analytical framework. In BRaVE Project. European University Institute. https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/65664/BRaVE_D2-1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

themselves as having no influence, being unrepresented by the government, and that their voices go unheard in their daily environments, like workplaces and universities. This disconnection contributes to their heightened concern over societal inequalities, elevated stress levels, and a sense of powerlessness or insufficient resources to address their concerns. This feeling of being excluded from society crosses different ideologies and communities among European youth, manifesting in various contexts, including educational, professional, and social environments.

Polarisation emerges from these various dynamics of exclusion, **taking root in a feedback loop between two conditions: the perceived hostility of the environment** (political, social, and economic, including authorities, the state, and the media) **and the feeling of powerlessness** (individuals feel unable to challenge inequalities, furthering their sense of marginalisation). In this context, engaging in polarising activism and extremist milieus serves both as a protective factor against hostility and inequality and as a means for challenging grievances and exclusion.

To address the relationship between polarisation and inequality and to mitigate its effects, it is crucial to support the flexibility of identity, particularly in the context of national identity. Providing more opportunities to question, redefine, and reconfigure national belonging by integrating diverse experiences, values, and perspectives that challenge national identity can help reduce feelings of exclusion among young people. Addressing concerns over inequalities and the declining opportunity for the current generation is essential, as these issues often drive engagement with extremism. It is also important to recognise that young people, even those with extreme views, are not inherently anti-authority or nationalists; their perspectives may shift based on their experiences and involvement in more encompassing national identity building. Increased support for young people to navigate the complex combination of contemporary problems, particularly in the post-COVID era, can help prevent their engagement with extremist milieus. Lastly, fostering high levels of **community engagement and pro-social political activism among youth** can harness their potential for positive change-making, steering them away from polarising activism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the key recommendations drawn from the TRM:

- European democracies should work to find a balance between maintaining democratic channels for ideological dissent and political debates as openly and broadly as possible, while setting boundaries for toxic polarising speech. These boundaries must take into account the context in which they are meant to operate: classrooms, neighbourhoods, and the online sphere.
- To combat conspiracy theories, which function as a key mechanism of polarisation, it is crucial to promote critical thinking and analytical skills, ensure transparent decision-making, and improve and publicise policy effectiveness. EU MS governments should also promote the status of scientists, educators, and high-quality media, and enhance digital literacy to help citizens identify conspiracy theories early.
- To address borderline (“lawful but awful”) content, counternarratives and alternative ones have been proved as an effective and empowering tool for confronting harmful messages targeted at certain groups

or minorities, such as the LGBTQI+ community, stimulating critical thinking and cultivating a more inclusive society.

- EU MS governments should promote equality of opportunity and implement positive discrimination (or affirmative action) where appropriate to mitigate inequalities. Enhancing linking capital between communities and state institutions can build resilience against polarisation and reduce the risk of VE.
- Further research should be carried out on the complex, dynamic, and non-linear relationship between affective polarisation and VE. Specifically, the academic community should look into the conditions that lead group or inter-group polarisation and ultimately result in VE manifestations.
- There is a need to acknowledge the damage Russia has been able to inflict on Western liberal democracies through various direct and indirect tactics. These should be identified and defined in detail to develop a meaningful response. Thus, more resources should be invested in strengthen the understanding of how Russia operates within EU/EU MS borders through political disruptors.

FURTHER READING

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC

- Cinelli, M., Etta, G., Avalle, M., Quattrociochi, A., Di Marco, N., Valensise, C., Galeazzi, A., & Quattrociochi, W. (2022). Conspiracy theories and social media platforms. In *Current Opinion in Psychology* (Vol. 47). Elsevier B.V. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101407>
- Grossman, M., Ungar, M., Brisson, J., Gerrand, V., Hadfield, K. & Jefferies, P. (2017). Final Research Report for Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: A Standardised Research Measure. In Melbourne, Australia & Halifax, Canada: Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University & The Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University.
- Guinjoan, M., & Galais, C. (2023). I want to believe: The relationship between conspiratorial beliefs and populist attitudes in Spain. In *Electoral Studies*, 81, 102574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2022.102574>
- Kleinfeld, R. (2023). Polarization, Democracy, and Political Violence in the United States: What the Research Says, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available [here](#).
- McNeil-Willson, R., Gerrand, V., Scrinzi, F., & Triandafyllidou, A. (2019), "Polarisation, violent extremism and resilience in Europe today: An analytical framework", BRaVE Project. Available in: https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/65664/BRaVE_D2-1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Pauwels, A. (2023), "Cumulative extremism: behind the scenes of toxic us-versus-them dynamics", Analysis, Flemish Peace Institute.
- Pirro, A. L., & Taggart, P. (2023). Populists in power and conspiracy theories. *Party Politics*, 29 (3), 413-423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221077071>
- Rekawek, K., Renard T., & Molas B. (Eds.), *Russia and the Far-Right: Insights From Ten European Countries*, The Hague: ICCT Press 2024. https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2024-04/Russia%20and%20the%20Far-Right%20Insights%20from%20Ten%20European%20Countries%20-%20A4%20e-book_0.pdf
- Ullmann, S. & Tomalin, M. (Eds.), *Counterspeech. Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Countering Dangerous Speech*, London & New York: Routledge, 2024.
- Van Alstein, M. (2022), "Polarisation: a non-violent approach", Report, Flemish Peace Institute
- Vidino, L., & Meleagrou-Hitchens, A., (2022), "Islamist Homophobia in the West: From Rhetoric to Violence", Program on Extremism (PoE). <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/IslamistHomophobiaIntheWest090722.pdf>