



CORDIS Results Pack on **insights into extremism**

A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

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Research and Strategies to Prevent Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

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Editorial

The EU was established with the aim to provide common ground, literally and metaphorically, for its members to thrive in a stable and secure environment, being 'united in diversity.' The emergence of violent extremism, populism and radicalisation undermines European cohesion, unsettling the Union's foundations and fostering insecurity among its citizens.

For some, different ideological traditions or religious or political beliefs serve as flags of an 'otherness' they believe must be subdued. Impactful events may also give rise to extreme nationalist groups and/or tendencies. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, for example, in addition to the terrible human losses and destructions it causes in the country under attack, also deeply affects the social fabric of the occupying country as well as European societies in various ways. Not only did it lead to issues such as inflation and a new energy crisis, it also brought to light again another, more sinister façade of human nature often associated with societies in conflict. Extremist narratives surrounding the war emerged, leading to mounting polarisation in society and undermining stability.

Ever since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, addressing radicalisation and violent extremism has been and continues to be at the forefront of EU domestic and foreign security strategies. This challenge has prompted researchers to try to provide a better understanding of collective and individual triggers, geopolitical contexts, economic interests, diffusion channels and narratives. The goal is ultimately to shed light on why individuals embrace, support and act on extremist ideologies and movements that justify violence. Creating and sharing such knowledge constitute the first and most crucial step towards shaping resilient societies and designing interventions to protect the safety and well-being of all EU citizens.

An approach for unity, cohesion and security across the EU

A wide range of approaches (national security, international cooperation, social psychology, social policies, ethnography of social networks) turns the spotlight on the people and communities concerned. Moreover, it focuses on possible ways to address their challenges in order to build new forms of resilience and a common, inclusive sense of social cohesion against hateful and discriminatory extremist thinking and actions.

At a policy level, initiatives such as the [EU Strategic Orientations on a coordinated approach to prevention of radicalisation](#) ensure that actions taken at EU level address and are aligned with the needs and priorities of stakeholders in Member States. Equally, the [Radicalisation Awareness Network - RAN](#) connects frontline practitioners from across Europe to exchange knowledge and approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms.

Moreover, the [Counter-Terrorism Agenda](#) aims to boost the EU's resilience to terrorists' threats, while legislation such as [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/784](#) tackles the dissemination of terrorist content online. The European Democracy Action Plan also identifies the need to counter radicalisation and disinformation, as a way to strengthen the resilience of EU democracies.

The 12 EU-funded projects featured in this Results Pack provide a comprehensive overview of the latest scientific knowledge, evidence-based findings and policy-relevant insights about the human and societal impacts and causes of violent radicalisation and extremism in Europe and globally. The Results Pack highlights research funded between 2014 and 2020 under the Horizon 2020 framework programme, including ERC-funded frontier research.

Community-based strategies to prevent violent extremism among youth

Better insight into what drives young people to radicalisation and violent extremism across Europe, the Middle East and Africa is leading to improved prevention measures.



In trying to make sense of the world, youth can be drawn to radicalisation. There is a growing body of literature on youth radicalisation, but the majority does not take into account young people's opinions.

The EU-funded [CONNEKT](#) project gives youth a strong voice in understanding the phenomenon of violent extremism. It recognises young people as agents of prevention and their right to have a say in the issues that affect them and endeavours to better comprehend grievances that may lead them to radicalisation.

Making youth the focal point in tackling violent extremism

"The idea is to turn youth from being the 'problem' into the 'key' for a solution," explains CONNEKT scientific coordinator Lurdes



The idea is to turn youth from being the 'problem' into the 'key' for a solution.

Vidal Bertran. "Their engagement in the design of prevention measures, besides empowering them, is a determining factor in guaranteeing the relevance and legitimacy of prevention strategies and in contributing to better adoption."

By carrying out research on the ground, the project is building a consistent and complete picture of the phenomenon. The ultimate goal is to design informed prevention strategies and put forth policy recommendations that are not based on theories but on empirical data.

The scientists analysed seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30 at transnational/state, community and individual levels. These are: religion; digitalisation; economic deprivation; territorial inequalities; transnational dynamics; socio-political demands; and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities. The focus is on local community authorities, organisations and leaders as the main actors of prevention.

Extensive research, data and fieldwork to boost community resilience

The CONNEKT team mapped past and present country strategies and approaches towards radicalisation and violent extremism in Europe, the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia), and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia). The mapping helped to identify the main actors and existing frameworks and policies at state and local levels in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism.

Eight [country reports](#) present an overview of previous and current understandings and policies developed by domestic and foreign governmental actors and NGOs. They compare the eight countries in MENA and the Balkans, with particular attention to impacts on the EU.

Eight [macro country papers](#) and a [cross-regional overview](#) examine the perceptions of state institutions regarding the seven pre-identified drivers and analyse their response.

Based on these publications, a [policy paper](#) and [policy brief](#) on countering and preventing macro-level (transnational/state) drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in MENA and the Balkans translated results into policy recommendations for national authorities and the EU.

Going from research to action at community level

The research undertaken at community level concluded that there were significant gaps between state and community actors. These gaps concern which drivers matter in the process of radicalisation and which combinations of drivers create more vulnerable situations.

Another key finding concerns the impact of international dynamics and foreign policy on group grievances. Despite a strong presence of narratives referring to international conflicts among violent extremist groups, results show that the importance of the transnational dynamics driver at state level is limited to foreign fighters or diaspora dynamics. However, at community level, the grievances are mainly local.

CONNEKT is testing the drivers at individual level to identify further gaps. It is also engaging civil society actors, youth and particularly women in the grassroots creation of prevention strategies and initiatives.

PROJECT

CONNEKT - CONTEXTS of extremism iN mEna and balKan socieTies

COORDINATED BY

European Institute of the Mediterranean, Spain

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.3.6., H2020-EU.3.6.1.3.,
H2020-EU.3.6.3.3.

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870772

PROJECT WEBSITE

h2020connekt.eu/




Countering the populist threat: policy recommendations and educational tools

Populist sentiments and politics are spreading across Europe, dividing society into 'Us' and 'Them'. An EU-funded project addresses this challenge, thereby ensuring *stability of liberal democracies*.

Populism is present in our societies as a specific mindset of people, as a communication style by both citizens and political actors, and as a political strategy represented by populist leaders and movements. Populist and extremist actors have also emerged in politics with some success in radicalising it.

"So while populism has a strong democratic potential, its political practice is often at odds with the norms and institutions of liberal democracy, therefore, it is also a potential threat to the latter," reflects Zsolt Boda, coordinator of the EU-funded [DEMOS](#) project.

To better understand populism and to address the challenges it brings, DEMOS studied the phenomenon from a multitude of perspectives and disciplines through the lens of [democratic efficacy](#). This is an idea inspired by the notion of political efficacy, which captures citizens' subjective attitudes towards politics.



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[types of populism](#) in contemporary Europe. These are radical right-wing populist parties, radical left-wing populists, illiberal (post-communist) populist parties, and anti-establishment populists and political entrepreneurs.

The project also supports, while studying populism at the individual level, that the emotion of anger is a strong predictor of populist attitudes. "However, we also proved that the strength of populist attitudes is moderated by certain democratic capacities, especially for those who have strong internal efficacy feelings," highlights Boda.

DEMOS further found that the media landscape is witnessing a process of normalisation of populism in news coverage and that there are no national answers to populist 'threats' that are effective everywhere, every time.

Further project [insights](#) can be found on the DEMOS website.

Unmasking populism: new insights

Having examined 17 European populist parties and movements across the continent, DEMOS argues that while they all adhere to the standard populist framework, there is not one but [four](#)

How to address the populist challenge

Given the continued support for populist extremist parties, dealing with the populist challenge is important for the stability of liberal democracies. In this context, DEMOS developed a



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model of populist policymaking, policy recommendations and practical tools to provide key insights and help counter the populist threat.

The conceptual model of populist policymaking was developed along three dimensions: policy content, policy procedures and policy discourses. "This model was well received by the academic community. Today it may be a thesis in an academic paper, but tomorrow it will shape policies," notes Boda.

Several educational tools were also developed. "For instance, [Wing](#) is a game about populism and social change. It aims to help players learn about a possible path to becoming active citizens, to raise awareness of the skills needed to stand up against an authoritarian regime," explains Boda. Supporting educational material for the game was also developed.

The project expects that the educational tools will see some success. "So far, the website of the Wing game has got more than 300 000 hits and several thousand visits," confirms Boda.

"We expect some of the research findings will have a lasting effect on how we think about populism. We also hope they may be translated into new legal ideas, interpretations and ultimately decisions," concludes Boda.

PROJECT

DEMOS - Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

COORDINATED BY

MTA Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Political Science, Hungary

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.3.6., H2020-EU.3.6.1.1.,
H2020-EU.3.6.1.2.

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/822590

PROJECT WEBSITE

demos-h2020.eu/en



Analysing cultural factors to raise resilience and reduce radicalisation

Global inequalities are on the rise and religion is sometimes weaponised to address grievances through religiously attributed violent radicalisation. Positive engagement with religious minority groups and culturally sensitive strategies that create trust instead of securitisation can curb violent radicalisation.



GREASE sought to better understand the connection between state-religion relations, governance of religious diversity and violent radicalisation processes, in order to inform European efforts to prevent and counter religious radicalisation.

The previous decade has been marked by important violent radicalisation trends in European cities, indicating that policies aiming to integrate religious diversity into the mainstream are failing. The question has arisen whether secularism offers the right approach to accommodating religious minority claims. The EU-funded [GREASE](#) project brought together researchers from around the globe, particularly Muslim majority countries, to investigate alternatives and to shed light on best practices for addressing violent radicalisation dynamics. “GREASE sought to better understand the connection between state-religion relations, governance of religious diversity and violent radicalisation processes, in order to inform European efforts to prevent and counter religious radicalisation,” noted Anna Triandafyllidou, scientific coordinator of the project.

The State Indicators are a useful and accessible [tool](#) and are available for use by any country. The indicators, which included topics such as state recognition of religious freedom and the existence of religiously based parties in the political arena, allowed for quantitative as well as qualitative assessment and enabled a clear analysis of trends within each country and region.

Researchers explored best practices in the responses of 12 countries where acts of violent religious extremism had taken place. These results are presented in the 2020 publication ‘[An International Handbook of Good Practices for Building Resilience Against Violent Religious Radicalisation](#)’. Further, the project’s research on different models of religious governance became chapters in the ‘[Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity](#)’, published in January 2021.

Amplifying the results

A major objective of the GREASE project was disseminating results to a wider audience and delivering key information to policymakers. In addition to creating and contributing to the handbooks, GREASE conducted two free online courses using the MOOC platform. They hosted meetings and workshops, and they uploaded blog posts about the governance of religious diversity and building resilience against violent radicalisation in the [openDemocracy](#) platform.

The GREASE team also produced two high-quality documentary films featuring first-hand experiences of religious and national identity. The film [Countering Religious Extremism](#) explores specific

A spotlight on indicators

In order to investigate religious governance, researchers reviewed societal norms, laws and practices from diverse regions. A major outcome of the GREASE project was the development of a set of State-Religion Governance Indicators that allowed researchers to create an in-depth analysis of 24 countries across 8 regions, including 13 countries in Europe.



examples of how to build resilience against radicalisation in six countries. In Italy, for example, having an imam fluent in Italian and Arabic lead prayers for Muslim inmates was instrumental in building community and reducing incidences of prison-born radicalisation. The films are available through the project website as well as YouTube.

There are many factors contributing to the growth of violent radicalisation in the modern world. The work of GREASE to establish highly applicable indicators for analysing religious governance is an important step in understanding and addressing religiously-inspired violent radicalisation. When it comes to identifying best practices, Triandafyllidou stated: "Efforts aimed at preventing religiously motivated violent radicalisation should avoid restrictive interference and securitisation and instead focus on promoting democratic engagement and political participation of religious groups." The project's in-depth analysis of the governance of religious diversity and their efforts to disseminate results are helping to promote an inclusive understanding of citizenship across Europe.

PROJECT

GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives

COORDINATED BY

European University Institute, Italy

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.3.6., H2020-EU.3.6.2.4.

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/770640

PROJECT WEBSITE

grease.eui.eu/



In-depth analysis exposes risk factors for violent extremism

Sophisticated modelling techniques and unique data sets yield results in the fight against violent extremism.



The ERC-funded **GRIEVANCE** project aims to advance the understanding and reduce the risk of extremist violence in all contexts. According to principal investigator Paul Gill: “Collectively, I think we’ve raised the bar and set an agenda for what the scientific study of risk and protective factors for violent extremism should look like.”



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Innovative research

GRIEVANCE applied novel approaches to analyse risk factors associated with violent extremism. Among their innovative achievements, the team added to the field of terrorism studies by producing the first nationally representative survey to examine radical intentions and attitudes in the UK. They were also the first to apply **risk terrain modelling** to extremist violence in a Western context, as well as the first to apply **discrete choice modelling** to understand terrorist spatial decision-making.

In one example of how the project applied innovative modelling to spatial data to better analyse terrorist events, researchers learned that terrorist attacks increased in likelihood when the perpetrator resided close by. In another example, with respect to dissident Republican violence in Northern Ireland, an area was more likely to be chosen for attack if it contained a major road, police station or military base.

Developing data sets and data scientists

Much of the analysis performed by GRIEVANCE would not be possible without robust data sets. A major goal of the project

was to move terrorism research beyond anecdotal stories that may obscure the bigger picture. Consequently, as well as using existing data sets, the team developed data sets through phone and online surveys and collaborated with agencies, such as police departments. They also interviewed people who were involved in terrorism or violent extremism and gathered data through linguistic analysis. "Traditionally, terrorism studies have been viewed as devoid of data. They have come a long way in the last decade," Gill explains.

The collection and management of data related to the risk of violent extremism required a lot of organisation. Initial steps involved analysing the risk of radicalisation and recruitment. Further effort concentrated on spatial and temporal risk factors of violent extremism. Finally, researchers focused on potential negative impacts of government policies and counter-terrorism efforts.

GRIEVANCE has contributed much to the study of counter-terrorism, including the development of innovative techniques, new data sets and contribution to the field through dozens of [publications](#) in peer-reviewed journals. All these efforts demanded a strong cohort of data scientists, and one very promising outcome of the project was the development of human potential. "An important impact that the GRIEVANCE project will have is undoubtedly the cohort of early-career researchers it funded as research assistants and postdoctoral fellows," Gill comments. "Every one of them has already led influential work."

GRIEVANCE has made significant strides in understanding the risk factors involved in acts of violent extremism. They have developed large data sets as well as analytic techniques that help to broaden the study of extremist violence. The direction taken by GRIEVANCE will also allow investigators in related fields to deepen their understanding and combat the threat of violence in many contexts, including domestic abuse, cybercrime and youth violence. GRIEVANCE has set a course for making Europe a safer place.

PROJECT

GRIEVANCE - Gauging the Risk of Incidents of Extremist Violence Against Non-Combatant Entities

COORDINATED BY

University College London, United Kingdom

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.1.1.

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/758834

PROJECT WEBSITE

grievance-erc.com/



Tolerance: one of those things we cannot not want

ERC-funded research sheds light on the significance, measurement and broader implications of tolerance, a concept widely accepted yet difficult to define.

Tolerance is something of a buzzword today. While the concept is widely embraced in national, European and organisational settings, in celebration of diversity, it is also subject to interpretation.

As an essential aspect of a liberal democracy, positive intergroup relations and everyday life, tolerance is much more than putting up with things that we approve. Rather, it's about putting up with things that we find difficult to bear, according to Maykel Verkuyten, a professor of interdisciplinary social science at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, and former academic director at the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations.

Endurance in the face of disagreement

Verkuyten's ERC-funded [InTo](#) project explored the concept of intergroup toleration, shedding light on tolerance, its importance, definition and measurement, and implications of the research for broader debates around cultural diversity. Growing polarisation in society and the need for tolerance to prevent violent extremism, discrimination, repression, and oppression provided the main motivation for undertaking this research.

"Tolerance is one of these things that we 'cannot not want'," Verkuyten said, "even as we recognise that it is not the silver bullet for solving all diversity questions."

When asked to define intergroup toleration, he explained that it involves endurance and forbearance in the face of disagreement, disapproval or dislike. It requires self-control and positive behaviour.

"A more tolerant person is more likely to accept conduct that they object to," he noted, providing real-life examples of intergroup toleration in Europe. These include debates over the wearing of headscarves by Muslim women, the building of minarets in several EU capital cities and public demonstrations by far-right groups.

What is considered tolerable?

The project measured tolerance in two ways: as a general personal difference trait and as acceptance of specific minority practices despite one's disapproval of these practices. Verkuyten emphasised the importance of establishing standards and allowable variations of what is considered tolerable. "Successful policies and interventions for improving tolerance need to set norms and stimulate the willingness and ability to discuss disagreements and put up with group differences," he said.

Considering the challenges of measuring tolerance, it was necessary to distinguish it from prejudice and broad negative feelings towards groups of people. These challenges were addressed through pilot tests and advanced statistical techniques.

Regarding the implications of his research for broader debates around cultural diversity, Verkuyten explained that tolerance is an intermediate position between complete rejection and wholehearted acceptance. "Obviously people should not reject or discriminate others but they should also not be expected to embrace and celebrate all differences," he explained.



Tolerance is one of these things that we 'cannot not want', even as we recognise that it is not the silver bullet for solving all questions.

The research highlighted the importance of establishing boundaries to what can and should be accepted, as reflected in the term 'zero tolerance'. Another key takeaway is that policies and initiatives for promoting tolerance should be included in civics courses, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

The InTo project resulted in many [academic publications](#) and the monograph 'The Social Psychology of Tolerance' published by Routledge (2023). Overall, the findings provide insights into the challenges of measuring and promoting tolerance, as well as the importance of establishing standards and boundaries. Policymakers and educators can use this research to develop initiatives and policies that promote tolerance and positive intergroup relations.

PROJECT

InTo - Intergroup toleration: Its Nature, Processes, and Consequences for Culturally Diverse Societies

COORDINATED BY

Utrecht University, Netherlands

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.1.1.

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/740788

PROJECT WEBSITE

intergrouptolerance.eu/

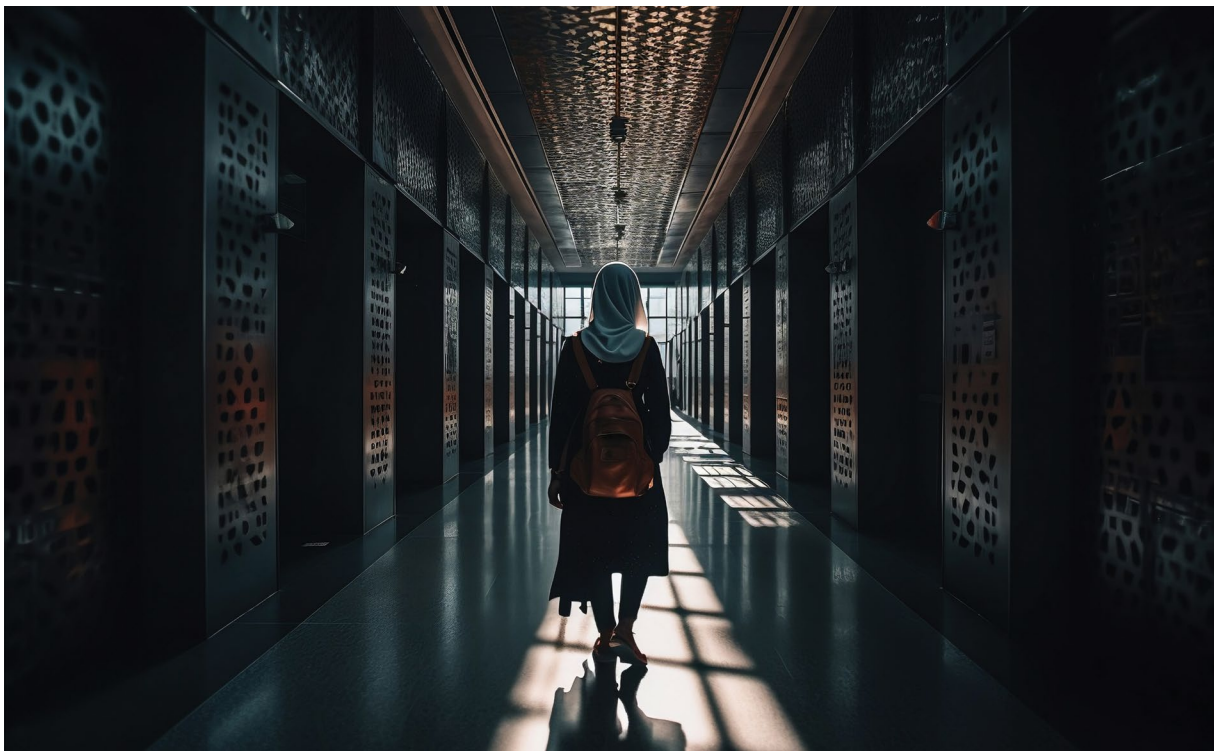


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An empathetic approach to youth radicalisation in Europe

Through multifaceted and in-depth qualitative research, an ERC-funded project sheds light on far-right extremism and Muslim youth radicalisation in Europe today.



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During the last decades, we find ourselves at a historical juncture marked by the escalation of ethnocultural and religious tensions in the EU, hit by two substantial crises, namely the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis. The ERC-funded [ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM](#) project utilised a single optical lens to analyse the factors and processes behind the radicalisation of two groups of European youths: the natives who support movements labelled as far-right and the migrant-origin self-identified Muslims.

Across two interview rounds scheduled in 2020 and 2021, the research team conducted 307 interviews in four European countries: [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), [France](#) and [the Netherlands](#). Native interlocutors were chosen from middle-sized to large towns away from metropolitan capital cities (Aalst, Dresden, Ghent, Lyon and Rotterdam) and self-identified Muslim interlocutors from capital cities (Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels and Paris).

"As a starting point, the project problematised the neoliberal political tendency to criminalise and pathologise radicalisation by reducing the concept to extremism and terrorism," explains principal investigator Ayhan Kaya. "Contrary to this understanding, many youngsters are prone to non-violent radicalisations resulting from a deeper search for reflexive awareness," argues postdoctoral researcher Metin Koca.

Understanding reactionary radicalism

According to the findings of ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM, those who feel neglected, excluded, marginalised, alienated and forgotten are likely to manifest a reactionary form of radicalisation that is often exploited by anti-systemic political and societal formations such as right-wing populist parties and movements.

One of the most surprising results seems to be that the density of Islamophobic discourse was much less than expected. The focus of the native youths was mostly on the socioeconomic, political, spatial and nostalgic forms of deprivation that they experience in everyday life.



The most effective deradicalisation strategy would be to create programmes that reduce the anger and anxiety caused by marginalising factors like unemployment and discrimination.

"The most effective deradicalisation strategy would be to create programmes that reduce the anger and anxiety caused by marginalising factors like unemployment and discrimination," suggests postdoctoral researcher Ayşe Benevento.

Another remarkable result was the realisation of how much all interlocutors appreciated talking about their everyday lives and communicating with the researchers about the hardships they experience. The latter are mostly related to different forms of intersectional discrimination, labelling, framing, exclusion and humiliation.

Both groups of youngsters appreciated the chance to share feelings and perceived discriminations. This led the researchers to initiate an act of active listening by generating the hashtag [#LendThemYourEars](#) through which the youngsters could communicate their expressions with the public using the project's [Twitter account](#).

Solidifying research findings for an effective deradicalisation process

Based on the [rich corpus of publications](#) the project has produced, the team will prepare policy recommendations for actors operating at local, national and transnational European levels.

One of the most important reasons for radicalisation among youth groups, according to project findings, is the fact that many state actors no longer invest in the formation of cultural, youth and community centres.

There is a need for popular culture, arts, music, dance, performativity and sports activities that bring young people together to communicate with each other. They can use these to express their feelings of alienation and structural 'outsiderism' not through ontological violence, but through aesthetic forms such as music, dance, graffiti, painting and sports. To this end, ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM aspires to engage civil society organisations, universities, schools and municipalities.

PROJECT

ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM - Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism: Culturalisation and Religionisation of what is Social, Economic and Political in Europe

COORDINATED BY

Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.1.1. - EXCELLENT SCIENCE - European Research Council (ERC)

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/785934

PROJECT WEBSITE

bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/homepage/brief-description/



No laughing matter: the use of online ‘fun’ as a tool for extreme speech

New research sheds light on how right-wing actors use fun to evade online regulations.

Social media platforms have become a powerful tool for far-right movements to spread extreme speech and ideology. They also present significant challenges for online regulation and moderation.

One researcher, Sahana Udupa, a professor of media anthropology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany, embarked on a project to explore the complex relationship between digital media and the political cultures of religious identities in India and its diaspora in the UK and Germany.

Udupa's ERC-funded project ONLINERPOL was inspired by her first monograph, an ethnography of news media and urban politics. During that work she observed major transformations in how people consumed and engaged with media.

"The vast expansion of smartphones and cheap data plans revolutionised the scene," she explains. "This shifting media scenario was a major infrastructural inflection point for historically shaped structures of power around religious and nationalist identities."



I was surprised by how vitriolic exchanges on online media are often experienced as enjoyment.

Fun as a right-wing strategy

One of the most significant outcomes of Udupa's research is her theory of 'fun as a meta-practice' of online extreme speech. She discovered that right-wing actors strategically use fun to evade regulatory attention and content filters.

"I was surprised by how vitriolic exchanges on online media are often experienced as enjoyment," she says.

For instance, fun allows for the formation of social bonds among users who share the same ideological positions. It is not about being funny but about trending the hashtag and making a mark in online discussions.

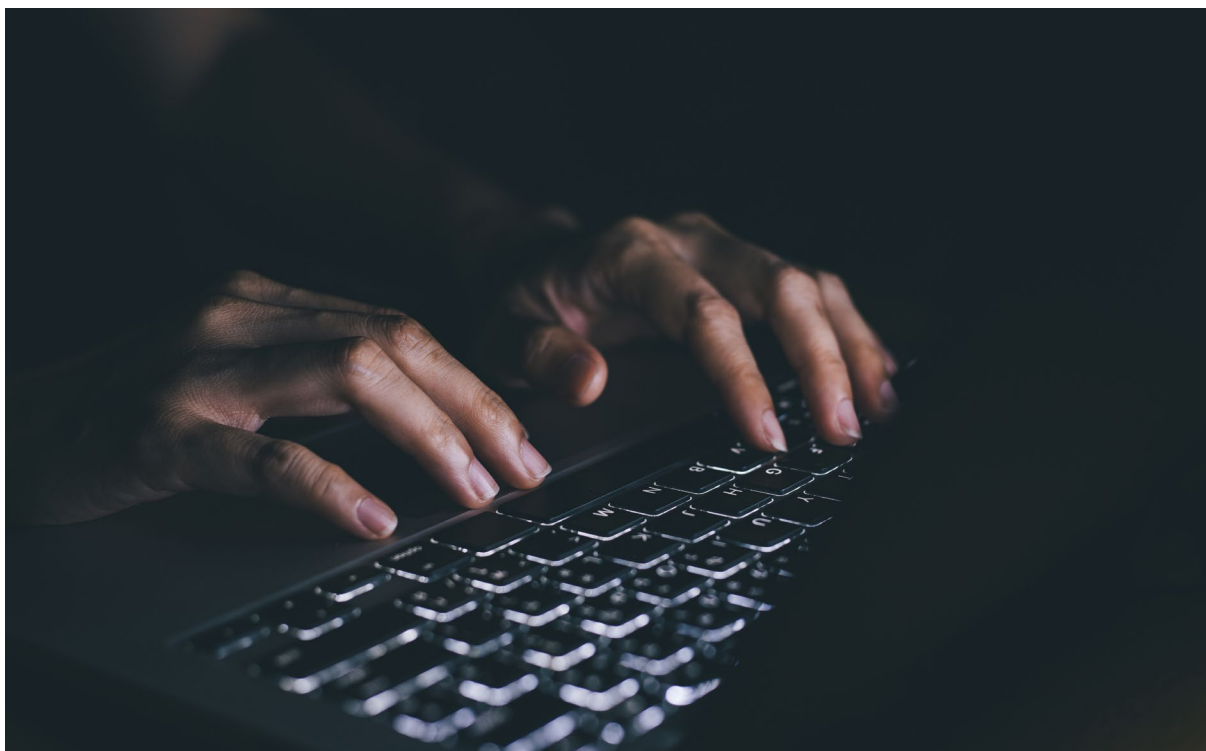
In countries such as Denmark and Germany, online fun has allowed far-right activists to escape strict regulations around speech while deriving pleasure from clever twists of words, suggestive phrasing and coded language.

"Fun lies in remediating memetic texts and infusing them with the splendour of pop cultural symbols – from Bollywood, Hollywood and regional cinema to folklore, local idioms and wordplays," Udupa elaborates.

Together with fact-checkers

To understand the regulatory implications of fun and complex culturally coded expressions in relation to right-wing political cultures online, Udupa teamed up with fact-checkers, AI developers and ethnographers. After building a collaborative coding model to detect problematic speech, they developed the framework of 'ethical scaling' as a critique of AI. It highlighted the significance of community involvement in the imagination and development of technology.

ONLINERPOL has contributed towards understanding how the internet has become a vital connective tissue of xenophobic and exclusionary nationalist politics globally. A recipient of the Francqui Chair in 2021 for her academic research in the area of extreme speech research, and a [Fall 2021 Joan Shorenstein Fellow](#), Udupa has also drafted a strategy paper for UN Peacekeeping concerning the challenges presented by hate speech in the online space.



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Looking ahead, she plans to continue researching different dimensions of digital cultures and strengthening [For Digital Dignity](#), a network of scholars and activists with a shared vision to foster enabling spaces of political expression online.

PROJECT

ONLINERPOL – Faith Online: Transnational Religious Politics on New Media in India and Europe

COORDINATED BY

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.1.1.

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/714285



Tackling violent extremism by examining the driving factors of radicalisation and resilience

Innovative training tools and guidelines to help policymakers and community leaders in preventing and mitigating violent extremism.

Violent extremism has gained increased attention from the research community within and beyond the EU. Scholars have mainly focused on the structural and individual drivers of violent extremism.

However, little attention has been paid to community dynamics that impact and are impacted by violent extremism. A better understanding is needed of the roles communities play, particularly the factors that make them resilient to violent extremism.



Dealing with the complex issue of violent extremism

The EU-funded [PAVE](#) project addresses the knowledge gap on how local communities promote and/or prevent religious or

ethno-political radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. “By generating new information about ways that local communities can counteract radicalisation, we provide valuable insights into the tools and mechanisms that the EU and other stakeholders can use in managing the various factors and contexts of violent extremism,” explains project coordinator Véronique Dudouet, senior research advisor at the Berghof Foundation in Germany.

The PAVE team conducted fieldwork and case studies on municipalities in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia). They explored political dynamics, the state’s role, and the relevance of past conflicts in violent extremism’s development and persistence. They also looked at the role of religious and civic education and media influences.

Results show that these factors have a dual role. Each can exacerbate or mitigate violent extremism. This depends on the context and the way relevant actors are involved. “Vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism are two sides of the same coin,” comments Dudouet.

Involving local actors in finding tangible, effective PVE measures

Findings also reveal that preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives can be successful only when actors such as civil society organisations, formal and informal religious leaders, government and administration representatives, security agencies and educators collaborate. A report presents the [main research outcomes](#).

Project partners created a [toolkit](#) on cross-regional vulnerability and resilience factors among diaspora communities in Europe for a broad audience, including public authorities and practitioners involved in PVE, social integration, social cohesion, intercultural programmes and education. The toolkit was developed together with an interactive [risk and resilience map](#) on transnational radicalisation dynamics between the EU, the Western Balkans and the MENA region.

Improving resilience within communities

Another [report](#) outlines policy guidelines for multi-stakeholder cooperation in PVE. In addition, [policy briefs](#) for all seven countries put forth concrete, targeted and implementable recommendations to foster community resilience against violent extremism.

The researchers are currently piloting five training modules. Available both online and offline, the modules can be tailored to the specific needs of the target audience by the training facilitator.

“PAVE is raising awareness of the continuing threat of violent extremism and its evolving manifestations along ideological and identity lines, especially as it unfolds alongside societal polarisation in MENA, the Western Balkans and EU Member States,” concludes Dudouet.

PROJECT

PAVE - Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA

COORDINATED BY

Berghof Foundation Operations gGmbH, Germany

FUNDED UNDER

H2020-EU.3.6., H2020-EU.3.6.1.3.,
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CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870769

PROJECT WEBSITE

pave-project.eu/



The multifaceted interrelationship between protest and democratic order

An ERC-funded project explored the function of political protest in contemporary social and political transformations within modern democratic societies.

In times of cataclysmic social transformation, a continuous updating of our interpretation tools regarding political expression is imperative. The ERC-funded [POWDER](#) project investigated the interplay of democracy and protest. More specifically, the researchers assessed whether contemporary protest movements influence the premises of democracy, and whether the democratic order gives rise to specific forms of protest.



It is important to understand how protest influences the way people perceive the democratic order and whether they can feel part of it or not, what horizons of experience are opened up by protest, and what social imaginaries about agency, community and conflict resolution emerge.

POWDER was divided into an overarching 'Theoretical Framework Project' and the following empirical sub-projects: 'Digital Protest Movements', 'No-border and refugee protest' and 'Rightwing Identitarian Protest'.

Deciphering the meaning and the function of protest today

The 'Theoretical Framework Project' focused on interpreting the meaning and function of political protest in modern democracies and developed [normative criteria](#) for assessing its democratic quality. "It is important to understand how protest influences the way people perceive the democratic order and whether they can feel part of it or not," explains principal investigator Christian Volk.



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Crucial here is the distinction between reformist protest – that expresses dissatisfaction, criticises and raises awareness on neglected issues, and pushes policymakers to meet its demands – and transformative protest – that initiates discourses of legitimacy about the structure of the democratic order and its specific modes of exercising power. Transformative protest, in turn, can be distinguished into emancipatory and non-emancipatory based on the political interaction that exists within protest collectives, between political opponents and the public.

This distinction is highlighted, for example, in the case of certain environmental movements as a threat to democratic order. “Protests in the face of the climate crisis have mobilised the concept of civil disobedience for their actions. New actors such as ‘The Last Generation’ perform politically motivated violations of basic rules of the democratic order as a means for democratic emancipatory struggles,” clarifies Volk.

The mechanics of protest in contemporary democracies

‘Digital Protest Movements’ focused on the ways digital activists seek to politicise issues of political participation, democratic decision-making and transparency through the design of digital technologies. “What emerges out of this research is a strategy of productive protest, when combined with a public critique of the power relations that emerge through the digital transformation of modern democracies,” explains research fellow Daniel Staemmler.

‘No-border and refugee protest’ unravelled the mechanisms through which protest and border struggles challenge and contest common presuppositions about the execution of democracy. “By claiming that questions of belonging and equal rights should not be structured through citizenship, the protests by irregularised migrants publicly articulate dissident interpretations of fundamental principles of democratic orders,” points out research fellow Laura Gorriahn.

‘Rightwing Identitarian Protest’ examined how contemporary grassroots right-wing movements organise their protest in the name of democracy. By claiming to defend free speech and represent the people, they structure their framing mechanisms around an ideology of exclusion. “In demanding the fallacious return to a homogenous people, they assault basic principles of democratic ordering,” notes research fellow Danniell Gobbi.

“Our research perspective has proven to be an advanced tool for understanding contemporary developments within democratic societies,” states Volk. “It seems important to us to continue disseminating these findings in the media and the political public sphere to help avoid premature devaluations of protest.” The team is currently in the process of preparing several co-authored papers for this aim.

PROJECT

POWDER – Protest and Order. Democratic theory, contentious politics, and the changing shape of western democracies

COORDINATED BY

Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany

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PROJECT WEBSITE

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Material grievances make some communities more receptive to violent extremism

In-depth case studies and regional comparisons shed new light on the dynamics of violent extremism in the Balkans, Middle East and North Africa regions.



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Literature published since 9/11 has improved our understanding of radicalisation processes and how groups that promote violent extremism operate. Despite its usefulness, this body of research has obstructed our awareness of the fact that most people

are not radicalised, even in areas that provide fertile ground for radical ideas. These so-called enabling environments are places of poverty that lack social mobility, leading people to feel hopeless about their future.

Investigating the foundations of local community resilience

The EU-funded [PREVEX](#) project explored why some communities are more likely to experience violent extremism than others. To answer this core question, empirical investigations were carried out on the ground in the Western Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel.

Findings from a broad range of studies revealed that even in the most enabling environments in the Middle East or the Sahel, the majority were not radicalised. These are detailed in multiple [project outputs](#) such as working papers, policy briefs, key stakeholder dialogues and podcasts.

Both individuals and local communities were very resilient to violent extremist ideas and groups. “This has huge implications for how we think about and design preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies, as this high level of local community resilience often is overlooked and ignored both in national and international approaches to P/CVE,” explains project leader Morten Bøås, research professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

Boosting societal resilience

The PREVEX team conducted case studies on the occurrence and non-occurrence of violent extremism, gathered the results and made regional comparisons. The emphasis was on how to strengthen resilience by examining the non-occurrence of violent extremism in enabling environments.

Strong focus on the non-occurrence of violent extremism was a key innovative aspect of the research. This is because most research on violent extremism deals with answering the question of why some people take up arms, instead of answering the reverse question of why people living in enabling environments often choose not to become involved in political violence. Therefore, P/CVE policies must incorporate knowledge of why individuals and groups resist such influence, even in enabling environments.

Project partners found that local resistance to radicalisation originated from a long, continuous tradition of religious tolerance and social moderation supported by traditional or religious

leaders who were themselves relatively moderate, appeared to be trustworthy and were relatively uncorrupted. However, these leaders must also deliver something that matters to the local community, and which strengthens the social cohesion in the community. If all these factors are present, it creates a ‘glue’ in society and constitutes a significant defence against radical ideas.

Rethinking P/CVE programming in the future

Equally important, they found that the journey into violent extremist insurgencies rarely starts with religious conviction. It is based on genuine material grievances about the lack of economic opportunities and education, as well as other types of local grievances.

“We discovered that the journey into violent extremism does not start with ideology or religious beliefs, but rather with much more genuine material grievances,” concludes Bøås. “Prevention strategies need to focus on the basis of material-based grievances, and not on programmes concerned with religion or ideology.”



We discovered that the journey into violent extremism does not start with ideology or religious beliefs, but rather with much more genuine material grievances.

PROJECT

PREVEX - Preventing Violent Extremism in the Balkans and the MENA: Strengthening Resilience in Enabling Environments

COORDINATED BY

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PROJECT WEBSITE

prevex-balkan-mena.eu/



Looking to the past: Docutube helps teens think, reflect and discuss religion

Researchers use the learning with history approach to promote *religious* and *convictional toleration* among European young people.

Today, many of the narratives on Europe feature conflicting views on the relationship between religion and society. The historical dimensions of these narratives have also been largely overlooked.

A greater understanding of these dimensions as well as the representations of religious coexistence in society can promote empathy and understanding and help society overcome the challenges of religious coexistence. It can further support

inclusive and reflective European societies – a key goal of the EU. Moreover, it can help break down barriers and diffuse radicalisation and extremism which have disrupted European societies, threatening peace and tolerance.

Meeting this societal need is the EU-funded *RETOPEA* project. “With a focus on teenagers, our aim was to address the issue of religious diversity through the *learning with history* approach,” says Patrick Pasture, project coordinator.



Supporting this goal, the project examined historical peace treaties and conflict settlements, as well as contemporary representations of religious cohabitation in culture and media.

A didactic tool for fostering tolerance and understanding of religious diversity

"Learning with history is a concept that is especially developed by didactics of history: it is used to invite young people to learn to think critically about the past and present by critically engaging with primary sources and to learn to contextualise properly, to situate a phenomenon in its contemporary context," explains Pasture.

RETOPEA used this approach to develop a didactic tool for stimulating toleration and peaceful coexistence among young people. The project also adapted it to formulate conclusions and advice to policymakers, especially for those who are engaged in interconvictional dialogue. "In the project, we use the term 'interconvictional' instead of interfaith or interreligious because the dialogue should not only engage religions but also people of no faith, secularists, as well as followers of non-institutionalised spiritualities," outlines Pasture.

Giving young people a platform: the educational 'toolkit'

Using this approach, RETOPEA developed an educational 'toolkit' for formal and informal educational settings (e.g. in museums, cultural centres).

"We asked young people to make a short documentary – called a 'docutube'," explains Pasture. This was in the style of a vlog, about religious toleration and coexistence. "As part of the toolkit, we made an extensive list of 'clippings': short extracts from peace treaties, eventually images, with some context as a starting point for a discussion and reflection and consequently of their docutube, filmed with a camera – in practice it could also be done with a smartphone," notes Pasture.

The result provides young people with a safe space to reflect and discuss their experiences, and it also increases their historical and religious literacy and develops their media skills. Open University has also developed a badged open course to teach educators to work with the methodology.

Promoting religious tolerance early on

"We can safely conclude that the methodology, while quite time-intensive, really works and young people enjoy doing it," reports Pasture.

RETOPEA found that young people are interested in talking about religion but feel like there is hardly any opportunity to do so. "So making space for that seems really necessary. Also, they are often very wary about the public discourse and the way religion is portrayed in the media," adds Pasture.

Overall, the project's approach paves the way for teenagers to think about religious cohabitation in a more nuanced, empathic way. "RETOPEA thus contributes to preventing radicalisation, improving ways of dealing with interconvictional conflict and promoting a more harmonious society," concludes Pasture.



RETOPEA thus contributes to preventing radicalisation, improving ways of dealing with religious conflict and promoting a more harmonious society.

PROJECT

RETOPEA - Religious Toleration and Peace

COORDINATED BY

KU Leuven, Belgium

FUNDED UNDER

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CORDIS FACTSHEET

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PROJECT WEBSITE

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Using machine learning to identify political violence and anticipate conflict

An EU-funded project is using machine learning to predict and provide early warning of the likelihood of conflict and violence in countries around the world.

In today's world, conflict and violence continue to cause unimaginable suffering and loss. Imagine being able to anticipate the emergence of organised, political violence and predict the likelihood of conflict in countries around the world in order to take measures to prevent violence.

That's exactly what researchers at Uppsala University in Sweden have been working on. Supported by the European Research Council, their project, called [VIEWS](#), is a major steppingstone towards the ability to assist affected populations before conflict erupts.

"We know that early warning systems are essential in preventing and mitigating conflict. But what's even more important is taking anticipatory action based on those warnings," says Håvard Hegre, the project's principal investigator. "If we can predict where and when conflict is likely to occur, we can work with governments and humanitarian organisations to take action before the situation deteriorates."

Putting algorithms to work

VIEWS uses machine learning algorithms to analyse a range of data sources, as well as socioeconomic factors, political developments and past instances of violence.

The system then assigns a risk score to each country, indicating the likelihood of conflict breaking out within the next 12 months, explains Hegre, who is a research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and Uppsala University's Department of Peace and Conflict Research.

Specifically, the system monitors all locations at risk and produces uniform predictions of the number of fatalities in impending state-based conflict. This is coupled with probabilistic assessments of the risks of state-based, non-state, and one-sided violence, at both country and sub-national levels.

While the national forecasts inform the local forecasts and vice versa, the two levels of analysis differ. They are separate assessments that should be interpreted in conjunction with each other.

For instance, models informing the national level forecasts consider valuable structural and historical factors. On the other hand, the sub-national level models accentuate effects from local compound risks related to demography, terrain, proximity to natural resources, local precipitation levels, droughts and conflict history in neighbouring areas.

Inspiration and promising results

According to Hegre, the main inspiration for VIEWS came from quantitative research on armed conflicts conducted since the 1990s. The research identified patterns in conflict occurrence, such as the fact that democracies rarely fight each other in interstate conflicts, and internal conflicts are more common in countries with a democratic system and poorer regions near international borders.

With this knowledge, Hegre and his team set out to develop a system that can forecast armed conflict and alert the international community to high-risk regions.



If we can predict where and when conflict is likely to occur, we can work with governments and humanitarian organisations to take action before the situation deteriorates.



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First piloted in Africa, due to the high number of conflicts on the continent, ViEWS expanded to the Middle East in 2022.

The impact of ViEWS is significant, particularly in regions where conflict is a recurring issue. By identifying areas at risk, governments and humanitarian organisations can take steps to address underlying causes of conflict and provide support to vulnerable populations.

Hegre is optimistic about the project's potential to be a game-changer in conflict prevention around the world.

"By providing decision-makers with timely and accurate information, we can work together to prevent the devastating consequences of conflict," he says.

For instance, ViEWS forecasts are available through an API that is updated monthly.

"We know the API is accessed by UN organisations – one UN office in particular has set up an internal 'dashboard' where the forecasts are juxtaposed with other information and used for their engagements with stakeholders," said Hegre.

As such, the project has contributed to a [UN report](#) that presents ViEWS forecasts.

"We continuously engage with international organisations and with governments that have internal early-warning systems," added Hegre. "We do not know exactly how much ViEWS is used – it is publicly available and we have not monitored usage very carefully, but we know that our system is seen as a benchmark and that many of the ideas we have tested out are making their way into their own modelling."

PROJECT

**ViEWS - The Violence Early-Warning System:
Building a Scientific Foundation for Conflict
Forecasting**

COORDINATED BY

Uppsala Universitet, Sweden

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A tumultuous decade for European democracy has seen the rise of populist movements, anti-European sentiments fuelling disintegration pulsions, and growing grassroots protests over issues ranging from racism to economic disparity. This comprehensively updated CORDIS Results Pack, including nine entirely new projects, features some of the innovative EU-funded research that helps us to understand the major political issues of the day and respond to the threats facing European democracy.



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