

Researching the Far Right: Methods, Challenges and Ethical Reflections

Seminar – Modul 4 Freie Universität Berlin
Masters' Program Sociology - European Societies

Lectures: Christin Jänicke & Rebecca Kittel

Time: Monday 16:15 – 17:45

Room: Garystr. 55 Room 323

Summer Term 2026

Course Description

Since the 2000s, the far right has gained increasing success in parliament, and broadened its influence in civil society. In this seminar, we will focus on the so-called *fourth wave* of postwar far-right politics, which is characterized by the mainstreaming and normalization of far-right actors and ideas, and how we can counter these developments.

This seminar explores the methods, challenges, and ethical considerations involved in researching the far right. Students will examine the various actors and movements within the far-right spectrum and learn how to empirically study these politically and socially significant phenomena. The course covers both qualitative and quantitative research methods, such as text-as-data or fieldwork approaches, addressing issues of access to hard-to-reach groups and the complexities of interpreting potentially problematic data.

A key focus of the seminar is the ethical dilemmas that arise when researching far-right ideologies. How can researchers engage with hate-filled content while maintaining their scientific integrity and social responsibility? How should research findings be presented to avoid amplifying harmful narratives? And how can researchers protect their mental health while engaging with potentially traumatic and highly distressing content related to the far right?

Through practical examples and case studies, students will gain insights into real-world research projects and engage critically with state-of-the-art literature on far-right movements. The course also encourages students to develop their own research questions, taking into account the methodological and ethical challenges inherent in studying the far right.

Office Hours

By email & virtual office hours

Christin Jänicke: christin.jaenicke@fu-berlin.de | Office hours: by appointment (please register via email)

Dr. Rebecca Kittel: rebecca.kittel@fu-berlin.de | Office hours: by appointment (please register via email)

Blackboard

All course literature is provided via Blackboard, which also hosts course information, discussion forums, and a platform for exchange between students. For questions regarding course literature, technical problems, or organizational issues, please contact one of the lecturers.

Course Objectives

At the end of the seminar, successful students:

1. will be familiar with the key concepts and theoretical approaches in research on the far right;
2. will understand the main scholarly debates about causes and consequences of far right actors in a comparative perspective;
3. will be able to situate far right research within broader debates on social identity, democratic backsliding and polarization;
4. will be able to critically evaluate current empirical studies on the far right;
5. will be able to formulate original research question related to the topics of the seminar;
6. will have reflected on strategies of researching and countering the far right.

Course Requirements:

Weekly attendance is required (3 absences maximum). If you cannot attend, please send an email in advance. Further requirements are:

- active participation in class discussions
- reading the mandatory literature
- posting short comments on the discussion forum before selected sessions
- giving one short in-class presentation (5–10 minutes)
- writing a term paper (depending on study regulation: old study regulation 3,000 words, new study regulation 5,000 words) or taking an oral exam (25 minutes)

Student Input Presentations

Each student must give one short in-class presentation (5-10 minutes, maximum 3 slides) during the seminar. Presentation should discuss one event that has been currently discussed in the news concerning the far right, e.g. far right party politics, far right protests etc.. These events should be connected to the topic of that given week. Students should aim to connect the events presentation in the news to academic literature.

Discussion Forum Posts

For selected sessions (marked with [post] in the schedule below), students are asked to post a short comment on that week's readings to the Blackboard discussion forum by Thursday before class. Posts should:

- relate to the assigned readings for that week
- highlight one aspect you found compelling or well-argued
- highlight one aspect you found problematic or underspecified
- include at least one question for discussion
- ideally engage with comments posted by fellow students

Students need to contribute forum posts for at least FOUR sessions (a total of eight sessions involves forum posts).

Seminar Paper or Oral Exam

You are required to complete either a seminar paper or an oral exam — not both.

Seminar paper (3,000 words including references for the old study regulation; 5,000 words for the new study regulation): Note that you must coordinate your topic with us by email before writing. Papers are due by 30 September 2026. Papers submitted without prior coordination will be treated as a no-show.

You can find helpful information in the [Institute's Term Paper and Presentation Guidelines](#).

Oral exam (25 minutes): Covers the mandatory readings. You will be asked to prepare a short thesis paper (no more than 1 page) in advance. Oral exams will take place in the final week of the seminar (July 13-17, 2026); the exact date will be announced during the seminar, and we will also discuss how to prepare for the exam.

The seminar is part of Module 4, "Culture and Values in European Societies," of the master's program in Sociology - European Societies. Note that modules 4, 5, and 6 have the same structure and examination requirements. All consist of a lecture and a seminar. For all three lectures, a written exam is required. The grades for the modules 4-6, however, are given in the seminar. In one module, the grade is determined by an oral exam. In the two other modules, the grade is based on term papers. The students are free to choose which of the three modules they want to take the oral exam in. It is not possible to do more than one oral exam

Academic Integrity

Students must comply with the university's academic integrity policy. Plagiarism of any kind is not tolerated. If you use AI tools in preparing written work, you must declare this and ensure that your use does not violate the rules of academic honesty. We will also talk about this during one of the sessions.

Weekly Schedule

Session	Date	Topic	Task
Part 1: The Far Right - Introduction			
1	13 Apr	What is the Far Right?	
2	20 Apr	The Fourth Wave of Far Right Mobilization	
3	27 Jun	Conceptualization and Definitions of the Far Right	Post
Part 2: Researching the Far Right with Quantitative Methods			
4	4 May	The Far Right in Parliament: Party Politics	Post / Student Presentation
5	11 May	The Far Right and (Social) Media	Post / Student Presentation
6	18 May	Introduction to Text-As Data - Hands on R Session!	Post / Student Presentation
<i>No session</i>	<i>25 May</i>	<i>Public Holiday</i>	
Part 3: Researching the Far Right with Mixed and Qualitative Methods			
7	1 Jun	The Far Right in Civil Society	Post / Student Presentation
8	8 Jun	The Far Right in Civil Society	Post / Student Presentation
9	15 Jun	Positionality, Intersectionality, and Research Ethics	Post
10	22 Jun	Field Research: Access, Safety, and Mental Health	Post
Part 4: Countering the Far Right & Wrap up			
11	29 Jun	Guest Lecture (TBC)	
12	6 Jul	Reflection	
13	13 Jul	Concluding Session + Funny Quiz	

Session 1 - Mon, 13 April 2026

Welcome and Introduction :)

Session 2 - Mon, 20 April 2026

Mudde, C. (2019). *The far right today*. Polity Press, pp. 10-23 (History)

Weisskircher, M. (Ed.). (2024). *Contemporary Germany and the fourth wave of far-right politics: From the streets to parliament*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 1-17 (Introduction).

Session 3 – Mon, 27 April 2026

Frankenberger, R., Baur, R., Rieger-Ladich, M., Schmid, J., Stauber, B., Thiel, A., & Thomas, T. (2023). Researching far right extremism—A transdisciplinary, lifeworld, and political culture perspective. *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 17(3), 275–295.

Miller-Idriss, C. (2020). *Hate in the homeland: The new global far right*. Princeton University Press, pp. 1-28 (Introduction).

Pirro, A. L. P. (2023). Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept. *Nations and Nationalism*, 29(1), 101–112.

Session 4 - Mon, 4 May 2026

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2018). Respectable radicals: Why some radical right parties in the European Parliament forsake policy congruence. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(5), 747–763.

Böckmann, L., Lange, S. L. de, Brack, N., & Rooduijn, M. (2025). Far-Right Illiberalism in the European Parliament. *Politics and Governance*, 13(0).

Session 5 - Mon, 11 May 2026

Völker, T., & Saldivia Gonzatti, D. (2024). Discourse Networks of the Far Right: How Far-Right Actors Become Mainstream in Public Debates. *Political Communication*, 41(3), 353–372.

Heft, A., Pfetsch, B., Voskresenskii, V., & Benert, V. (2023). Transnational issue agendas of the radical right? Parties' Facebook campaign communication in six countries during the 2019 European Parliament election. *European Journal of Communication*, 38(1), 22–42.

Additional:

Heinze, A.-S. (2025). Drivers of radicalisation? The development and role of the far-right youth organisation 'Young Alternative' in Germany. *International Political Science Review*, 46(1),

Session 6 - Mon, 18 May 2026 – Hands on R Session

- Please bring your laptop to class! With R and RStudio installed! -

Rooduijn, M., & Pauwels, T. (2011). Measuring Populism: Comparing Two Methods of Content Analysis. *West European Politics*, 34(6), Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2011.616665>

Wodak, R. (2020). Normalization to the right. Analyzing the micro-politics of the far-right. In S. Ashe, J. Busher, G. Macklin, & A. Winter (Eds.), *Researching the far right: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 336–352). Routledge.

Session 7 – Mon, 1 Jun 2026

Kopecký, P., & Mudde, C. (2003). Rethinking civil society. *Democratization*, 10(3), 1–14.

Gunzelmann, H. J., & Jänicke, C. (2025). Far-right contention in civil society: Multiple lenses on action repertoires, actors, and targets. *European Societies*, 1–41.

Additional:

Berman, S. (1997). *Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic*. *World Politics*, 49(3), 401–429.

Hutter, S. (2014). *Protest event analysis and its offspring*. In D. Della Porta (Ed.), *Methodological practices in social movement research* (pp. 335–367). Oxford University Press.

Session 8 – Mon, 8 June 2026

Veri, F., & Maier, F. (2026). Migration discourses from the radical right: Mapping and testing potential for political mobilization. *Political Psychology*, 47(1).

Lundberg, E. (2021). Guardians of democracy? On the response of civil society organisations to right-wing extremism. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 44(2), 170–194.

Additional:

Pietrzyk-Reeves, D. (2022). *Rethinking Theoretical Approaches to Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Toward a Dynamic Approach*. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*, 36(4), 1335–1354.

Session 9 – Mon 15 June 2026

Gelashvili, T., & Gagnon, A. (2024). One of the Boys: On Researching the Far Right as a Woman. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–22.

Segers, I. B., Gelashvili, T., & Gagnon, A. (2024). Intersectionality and care ethics in researching the far right. *Feminist Media Studies*, 24(5), 1219–1224.

Session 10 – Mon, 22 June 2026

Geelhoed, F., Busher, J., Massé, L. E. J. S., & De Pelecijn, L. (2024). In the Discomfort Zone: Emotional Labour and Reflexivity in Field Research on Extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–22.

Pruden, M. L. (2024). Burn after Reading: Research-Related Trauma, Burnout, and Resilience in Right-Wing Studies. *Journal of Right-Wing Studies*, 2(1).

Terra R. (2025). Guidelines and Reflection Questions for Research Practice

Session 11 – Mon, 29 June 2026

Guest Lecture

Session 12 – Mon, 6 July 2026

Reflections

Session 13 – Mon 13 July 2026

Wrap-up and funny quiz day