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Themed Section: Bringing the Researcher In: Methodological and Ethical Challenges to Studying Far-Right and Anti-Gender Mobilisations

EDITORIAL

Bringing the researcher in: methodological, ethical and institutional challenges to studying far-right politics and anti-gender mobilisations

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Anti-democratic, anti-pluralist and anti-emancipatory ways of thinking and being are increasingly seeping into public debates across polities and gaining political currency around the world. Many researchers have closely examined what, in our view, are the complex imbrications of racism (articulated under the guise of nativism, as well as islamophobia and anti-Semitism), accentuated fascist tendencies (dressed up as illiberal and authoritarian longings) and anti-egalitarian, anti-gender ideas and those against the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other non-binary categories (henceforth LGBT+) in far-right politics in different national and transnational contexts, contributing to an ever-expanding literature in the field (see Camus and Lebourg, 2015; Wodak, 2015; Hochschild, 2016; Blee, 2018; Froio et al, 2020; Mondon and Winter, 2020; Nissen, 2022; Kondor and Littler, 2023; de la Torre, 2025). Consequently, the rationale of this themed section is to ‘bring the researcher in’ to the ongoing conversations in the field, with the scope to examine the complex dynamic between the researcher and their intersectional positionality, on the one hand, and the methodological, ethical and institutional challenges they encounter in researching far-right politics and anti-gender mobilisations, on the other. To do so, we have calibrated the theoretical focus of this themed section to account for both far-right politics and anti-gender mobilisations while nonetheless acknowledging their discreet distinctiveness (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 13–14). We did this because, in recent years, scholars have argued persuasively that the concept

of 'gender' has become 'the right's rallying cry' (Graff and Korolczuk, 2021: 16) in the context of growing anxieties around modernity and social change (Ferree, 2021). These anxieties have been weaponised by a diverse range of actors across the world (see Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018; Bogaards and Pető, 2022; Norocel and Paternotte, 2023; Ayoub and Stöckl, 2024; Korolczuk et al, 2025; Norocel and Pettersson, 2025). Among the consequences of their growing influence is the vociferous contestation of knowledge production, whereby researchers and universities are targeted by both institutional and grass-roots far-right mobilisation (Paternotte and Verloo, 2021; Segers, 2025). Notwithstanding this, to date, there is little explicit focus on the specific methodological, ethical and institutional challenges inherent to the study of anti-gender mobilisations – a much-needed area of focus that this themed section contributes to.

Consequently, we have bridged our interest in methodological and ethical approaches to research on anti-gender mobilisation and built upon the quickly growing body of methodological literature on researching the far right (see Blee, 2018; Toscano, 2019; Ashe et al, 2020; Vaughan et al, 2024). We did so by means of the concept of the 'far-right continuum' (Norocel, 2023), which draws attention to the ideological connections spanning parliamentary radical-right populist parties, extreme-right parties and movements outside parliaments, extremist movements, subcultures, and networks, further expanded by means of xenophobia, racism and populism. Key to the understanding of this construct is gender through the mobilisation of strictly cis- and heteronormative understandings of sex/gender and traditional ideals of the reproductive heterosexual nuclear family.

From this theoretical starting point, Norocel and Segers (2026) first explore how research on the far-right continuum benefits from centring researchers' own intersectional subjectivity, thereby arguing that unequal demands for emotional labour in academia perpetuate existing inequalities, and emphasising the urgent need for more institutional awareness and support. Thereafter, Brown and Vaughan (2026) analyse how the neoliberal pressures of competition and for impact in the UK higher education undermine considered ethical reflections and, in consequence, how researchers risk causing harm while researching far-right politics. They conclude that in/through researchers' framing of their research and dissemination activities, minority communities are most likely to suffer the negative effects. Băluță and Băluță (2026), in turn, map out scholars' positionality in the context of attacks on gender studies in Romania, which are part of a process fuelling epistemic injustice and reinforcing knowledge control in the country. They note that violence dehumanises gender scholars, framing them as threats to justify marginalisation, and underscore that exposing scholars' delegitimisation is important in addressing issues of epistemic injustice. Shevtsova (2026) observes that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has intensified the challenges in researching the far right and anti-gender mobilisation in the country, in particular, the way local researchers encounter unique complexities as they navigate the dual roles of insiders and outsiders. Shevtsova argues that the concept of critical feminist friendship may be useful when striving for academic integrity while ensuring personal safety.

Moving the focus beyond Europe, Cruz (2026) discusses the challenges of conducting ethnographic work among far-right LGBT+ activists in Brazil, highlighting the relational, contingent and intersectional power dynamics that

mould research encounters. More clearly, Cruz explains the way he navigated and managed his presence in the field with the help of visible (gender, sexuality and race) and invisible (social, cultural and mobility capital) ethnographic tools. Finally, anchored in personal experiences from the US context, Mattheis (2026) examines how the online harassment of scholars has remained underacknowledged by institutions more widely, even though it is a strategic practice of far-right and anti-gender metapolitics, targeting especially marginalised scholars. Mattheis argues compellingly that feminist care ethics provide a useful lens for the analysis of online harassment as a structural problem.

We hope the readers of the *European Journal of Politics and Gender (EJPG)* find these contributions analytically compelling and empirically nuanced in pushing the boundaries of knowledge further on this pressing topic. We are confident that they will constitute excellent starting points for further critical reflections on the methodological complexities of studying far-right politics and anti-gender mobilisations and encourage more detailed discussions about the ethical challenges of and institutional responsibilities towards researchers engaging in such important work.

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Ov Cristian Norocel is an associate professor (docent) and senior lecturer in gender studies at Lund University, Sweden. His work applies an intersectional lens to the study of radical-right populist and far-right political communication, as well as anti-gender mobilisations, from a comparative perspective, with a focus on Europe (Finland, Sweden, Hungary and Romania).

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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