

# VORTEX NEWSLETTER

*As autumn settles in and the year draws closer to its end, it's time for some updates from the VORTEX doctoral network! Welcome to the November 2024 edition of our newsletter. We will introduce you to the VORTEX's research areas that structure our discussions. Besides, the doctoral candidates have been very active in creating and communicating different outputs of their research. Likewise, our blog continues to thrive with valuable discussions and perspectives to various topics surrounding the doctoral network.*

*Enjoy this edition and stay tuned as we keep you updated on all the exciting activities within VORTEX.*

*Your editorial team - Laura and Lotta*

## VORTEX News

Did you know that VORTEX is structured around three research areas? While all our doctoral candidates are conducting research on radicalisation, three thematic subgroups were formed to promote an intensive and future-oriented exchange on similar topics. One group of doctoral candidates and their supervisors focuses on the internal dynamics of radical groups and individuals, and another on the social context of these radicalisation processes. The third research area deals with access points for measures of preventing and countering violent extremism. Our research areas serve not only as dialogical forums but also as analytically significant tools to ensure that the doctoral projects are conceptually and empirically relevant and feasible. They achieve this by enabling cross-referencing, adding comparative dimensions, and fostering empirical synergies. In the following, we briefly introduce the scope of the different research areas.

### Pathways of Radicalisation

Radicalisation is a complex, interactive process that occurs on both cognitive and behavioural levels, often supported by online and offline communities. It typically affects individuals or groups with a strong need for significance and involves co-escalation dynamics among radicalised groups and intervention efforts. Right-wing extremists and Islamist groups frequently exploit societal fears to fuel radicalisation. External influences, including the American alt-right, Russia, and ISIS, further impact radicalisation in Europe, particularly in socially disadvantaged or weakly governed areas. Radicalisation manifests in both religious and secular forms across national, transnational, and international levels.

Members: Orwa Ajjoub, Joshua Farrell-Molloy, Marzena Oliveira Ribas, Kristian Steiner, Corinne Torrekens

## Social and Political Contexts of Radicalisation

Equally relevant is the political, legal, and social response to these developments. Anti-terrorism policies have sometimes resulted in harsh laws that compromise human rights (particularly, but not exclusively, outside Europe) and grant intelligence agencies extensive surveillance powers. Concurrently, counterterrorism efforts have spurred a range of innovative preventive measures led by civil society organisations, state entities, or both. Balancing effective countermeasures with respect for human rights and the rule of law is delicate, as these interwoven processes risk undermining essential normative achievements and agreements upheld by the EU, the international community, and global society. Understanding and explaining these dynamics is crucial and calls for multidisciplinary research and collaboration between fundamental research and practice.

Members: Javid Ibad, Violette Mens, Heidi C. Piva, Massimo Leone, Sergiu Miscoiu, Torsten Bonacker

## Countering Radicalisation

Over the years, numerous research centres, governmental bodies, academic journals, and departments focused on terrorism and radicalisation have emerged. Following 9/11, attention to radicalisation has surged, yet much research and public debate still regard radicalisation as a unidirectional process that inevitably leads to violence. Current research is divided between security-focused approaches, which seek immediate, often punitive, solutions, and socio-cultural perspectives that view radicalisation as rooted in complex social, economic, and cultural factors requiring long-term intervention. Building on the work of the doctoral students, this research area has delved deeper into the concept of terrorism and prevention, its evaluation structures, as well as implementation practices. Over time, gaining access to the field site has also become a significant topic of discussion, as it is particularly sensitive in radicalisation research.

Members: Laura Stritzke, Rohan Stevenson, Camilla W. Gissel, Lotta Rahlf, Julian Junk, Leena Malkki, Tore Bjørgo

## The VORTEX Blog Series

VORTEX has its own blog series where our doctoral candidates regularly publish short pieces related to their work. Check it out at: <https://vortex.uni.mau.se/blog/>. The following blog posts have been published since the last VORTEX newsletter:

**OMAS  
GEGEN  
RECHTS**

Interview with a  
“Grandma against the  
Right” Activist

by Laura Stritzke

Digital Refuge: Under-  
standing the Community  
Dynamics of Extremist  
Groups

by Marzena Oliveira Ribas





### Populism, Conspiracy Theories, and the War Against Ukraine: Insights from the Academic Conference in Tallinn

by Violette Mens

### Presentation at the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of PACT

by Heidi C. Piva



### The Power of Stories: How Extremist Shape Beliefs Through Narratives

by Marzena Oliveira Ribas



### Problematising the political response to the Oulu attacks

by Rohan Stevenson



### Didier Fassin, Social Sciences in Times of Crisis - Book Review

by Violette Mens

## News from VORTEX doctoral candidates



Lotta Rahlf spent six weeks at the Centre for Research on Extremism ([C-REX](#)) at the University of Oslo to exchange ideas about learning and evaluation in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE). She also took the opportunity to conduct several interviews with politicians, practitioners, and researchers on how learning takes place in the Norwegian PCVE field and how institutionalised evaluation is. Indeed, various Norwegian stakeholders were very open to these topics and keen to explain the knowledge-based approach that underpins their multi-agency work.



Laura Stritzke just completed her secondment at Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) where her co-supervisor Corinne Torrekens and colleague Marzena Oliveira Ribas are based. She had the opportunity to present her conceptual framework and methodological approach to the “Group for research on Ethnic Relations, Migration & Equality” ([GERME](#)) which has provided her with different perspectives on the relevance of her research beyond the scope of extremism prevention. Further conversations with colleagues have also yielded valuable insights into the practices of prevention in Belgium.

## Research Output

Piva, H. C. (2024). Guiding interpretation towards deproblematization: A video interview with a Climate Change denier analysed as conspiracy theory. *Sign Systems Studies*, 52(1-2), 256-283. <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2024.52.1-2.10>

The research and transfer project PrEval (*Evaluation and Quality Management in Extremism Prevention, Democracy Promotion and Civic Education: Analysis, Monitoring, Dialogue*) has published a book with all research output of the second project phase, including chapters on a database for evaluations and on an international monitoring of evaluation that VORTEX doctoral candidate Lotta Rahlf was involved with: *PrEval Monitor, 1. Edition. 2024, Frankfurt/M.* <https://preval.hsfk.de/publikationen/preval-monitor>

## VORTEX at Conferences

- **Semiotics**
  - 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Warsaw, September 5, 2024 (Heidi C. Piva)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the “Populism and Conspiracy Theory” Project, Tallinn, September 25 - 27, 2024 (Heidi C. Piva)
- **Psychology**
  - Congress of the German Psychological Society, Vienna, September 15 - 19, 2024 (Laura Stritzke)

## Other News



Lotta Rahlf spoke to a student journalist about violence against political actors in Germany to support a training project organised by the Institute of Journalism Studies at the Technical University of Dortmund: <http://kurt.digital/2024/10/23/gewalt-angriffe-kriminalitaet-politiker/>



Check out new episodes of the **Europe Elects** podcast with Javid Ibad as co-host.  
Link: <https://europeelects.eu/podcast/>

Stay updated on our social media channels!



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