

# VORTEX NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the third edition of our newsletter of 2025! As we move slowly towards the end of the second year of the PhD, new insights from our doctoral candidates are beginning to emerge. All our doctoral candidates are engaged in field work and data analysis, uncovering preliminary findings and sharpening their approaches.*

*In this edition, we are excited to share not only a selection of new blog posts published since our last newsletter, but also highlights, surprises, and unexpected findings from our research.*

*We look forward to the steps ahead and sharing more of our journey with you.*

*Your editorial team*

*Anna, Lena, Laura and Lotta*

## 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:

**Laboratory Workshop: Natural Language Processing and AI Tools Applied to Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences**



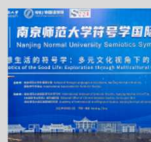
By Heidi Campana Piva



**Before the Missiles, the Metaphors: How Words Shape Wars**

by Camilla Winde Gissel

**Presentation at the 2025 Nanjing Normal University Semiotics Symposium**



by Heidi Campana Piva



**Right-Wing Populists and Religion: More Than Just Instrumentalization?**

by Marzena Oliverira Ribas

**Networking Conferences in the Field of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Opportunities and Challenges**



by Lotta Rahlf



**“Everything was Great”- Making the Most out of Feedback Methods in Universal/Selective Prevention for Monitoring**

by Laura Stritzke

## Research Insights from our VORTEX doctoral candidates

For many doctoral researchers, the empirical phase is one of the most exciting stages of the PhD journey. It's the moment when data are gathered, analysed, and interpreted; when ideas are connected, assumptions are confirmed - or sometimes challenged—and entirely new insights emerge.

To share a glimpse of this dynamic process, we asked our doctoral candidates to tell us briefly: What has surprised you? What has sparked your curiosity? The responses open a small window into their research worlds - enough to intrigue, inspire, and perhaps leave you wanting to learn more.

*“Having been working with far-right Telegram channels, I was surprised to see how much of their texts are written with an almost journalistic (almost-objective) rhetoric! It has been unexpectedly hard to flag conspiratorial lines of reasoning in certain groups. My current objective is to adapt my analysis methodologies so that I can also include these harder-to-flag text messages into my dataset. It has been challenging”*

**Heidi Campana Piva's** doctoral project is entitled “Fake und conspiracy: Disinformation dynamics and radicalisation”

*“I think I have been most surprised by how challenging it can be to work on a topic that is actively moving from the fringes into the norm, given how fast the political climate has shifted during the last two years.”*

**Joshua Farrell-Molloy** focuses on digital subcultures in his doctoral project

*“What has surprised me most is how the radicalization of mainstream right parties often happens in small, almost unnoticed steps rather than dramatic shifts. A highlight has been seeing how interactions with far-right actors influence mainstream politics in unexpected ways. I’m eager to keep exploring how these processes shape the future of liberal democracy.”*

**Javid Ibad** focuses on the radicalization of center-right parties, particularly in response to the influence of radical-right parties.

*“Not only do political approaches to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) vary significantly across Europe, but so too does the way in which these countries demand, produce, and engage with knowledge and evidence about their policies and funded initiatives. Evaluation and quality management play very different roles depending on the national context, and these differences are shaped by a range of contextual factors. Particularly striking though perhaps not surprising - is the observation that countries with comparatively stronger civil society involvement in P/CVE tend to have more institutionalized practices of evaluation and quality assurance. This relationship, and the challenges it entails, merits closer examination.”*

**Lotta Rahlf** systematically compares quality management in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism across Europe

*“Regarding what has surprised me in my work, I am in the middle of conducting interviews with both academics and practitioners in the French context and I was very surprised as to how little the academics have been consulted regarding the radicalization issue. “Regarding what has surprised me in my work, I am in the middle of conducting interviews with both academics and practitioners in the French context and I was very surprised as to how little the academics have been consulted regarding the radicalization issue. I think this is due to several things, namely the tense context in the academic sphere as to how to interpret the issue as well as the very strong influence of administrative bodies such as the national school of administration (ENA), of which most influential experts in the government come from. But this is still a working hypothesis, and I should dig deeper to confirm it.”*

**Violette Mens’** doctoral project is entitled “Dynamics of Knowledge Production: Understanding the Dominance and Diffusion of Security Cultures around Radicalization”

*„I have been fascinated by how fluid and negotiated social identities are: the same narrative frames can both glue constituencies together and sharpen their boundaries. A key insight is leadership as a mutual process of defining who we are and what we stand for. I plan work more on how boundary work and legitimacy evolve together to sustain or erode collective mobilization.“*

Orwa Ajjoub's PhD project explores radical religious rhetoric and its role in providing ideological justification for intra iihadi violence.

*“From Control in Schools to Support in Prisons*

*My fieldwork has challenged simple assumptions about where support and control belong, prompting a rethinking of prevention contexts. In both schools and prisons, some actors lean more toward security, while others emphasize support. When primary and secondary prevention overlap, practitioners must combine both approaches—working alongside security-oriented practices, while at the same time navigating dilemmas of transparency and trust with their target groups.”*

Laura Stritzke is concerned with the overlap of open and targeted prevention in schools and prisons.

## News from VORTEX doctoral candidates



### Heidi Campana Piva

In the past few months, Heidi has presented her work entitled "Seeking the Return to the Good Old Days: semiotic analysis of western right-wing conspiracy theories against multicultural policies" at the NNU Semiotics Symposium 2025, at Nanjing Normal University (China). She also participated in the panel "Conspiracy Theories As Discursive Practices Of Racism And Anticolonialism" at the 8th Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion at University of Vienna (Austria), where she presented her work entitled "A Case Study Of The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory And Anti-Muslim Discourse On Radical Telegram Groups". In addition, Heidi presented her work "Everything is Connected: Signs of a Conspiracy" at the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies at Tallin University together with her co-author Michele Cerruti from University of Turin. Heidi and Michele won the award for Best Student Presentation.



### Joshua Farrell-Molloy

In June Joshua was selected as a member of the European Commission's EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation's Thematic Panel on the "Management of Foreign Terrorist Fighters, Volunteers and their Families". He attended the panel's second meeting in Berlin, hosted by the Bundesministerium des Innern, which focused on case management and national threat & risk assessments involving European inmates held in SDF-controlled prisons in northern Syria. He also presented his PhD research at the "Men and Masculinities in Transition" conference, which was hosted at Stockholm University, where I received feedback on my second project article.



### Javid Ibad

Javid has completed his second Secondment at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo from April to June 2025. He is currently working on his publication, thesis, and is also preparing for two conferences where he is going to present.



### Violette Mens

Violette attended the Conference of the Standing Group on Extremism and Democracy entitled "New and Old Challenges of Populism and Radicalism" in London from the 9th to the 10th of June. Where she presented her work on the French radicalization scene and also attended her fellow colleague Camilla Gissel's presentation. She also organized a double workshop on "Scoping Research Horizons" and "Overcoming Research Barriers" with her colleague Aidan Gnoth at a conference in Marburg organized by the South East Asian University Partnership (SAUP), July 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>.



### Lotta Rahlf

Lotta Rahlf has been selected for the three-year mentorship programme of the EU Knowledge Hub, which aims to train a new generation of researchers and practitioners in the field of extremism

prevention. As part of VORTEX, Lotta also spent two months seconded to the Violence Prevention Network in Berlin, where she gained valuable practical insights into evaluation and quality management in extremism prevention. In addition to her work within the organisation, she also produced several outputs that are due to be published.

## Research Output

There is nothing to report here since the last newsletter, but that does not mean that nothing is happening at VORTEX! We are working on exciting projects, so stay tuned.

## VORTEX at Conferences

- NNU Semiotics Symposium 2025, Nanjing Normal University, China, June 6-8, 2025 (Heidi C. Piva)
- Panel "Conspiracy Theories As Discursive Practices Of Racism And Anticolonialism" at the 8th Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion, University of Vienna, Austria, July 8-12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (Heidi C. Piva)
- 14th Conference of the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies, Tallinn University, Estonia, June 11-13, 2025 (Heidi C. Piva)
- "Men and Masculinities in Transition" conference at Stockholm University (Joshua Farrell-Molloy)
- Conference of the Standing Group on Extremism and Democracy titled "New and Old Challenges of Populism and Radicalism" in London, June 9-10, 2025 (Violette Mens, Camilla Winde Gissel)

## Other News



Joshua Farrell-Molloy spoke to [France 24](#) for their piece on The Base, a transnational neo-Nazi terrorist organisation now being used as a tool in Russia's war against Ukraine



Jasmine El-Gamal sits down with Orwa Ajjoub for part two of their conversation on [the view from here](#) podcast, where they discuss the ever growing challenges facing Syrians since

the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 and the beginning of Ahmed Al-Sharaa's presidency, and what the international community should be doing to support Syrians.



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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