



The Anti-Islamic Movement. Far right and Liberal?

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Abstract

This thesis is about the anti-Islamic turn and expansion of the far right in Europe and beyond between 2001 and 2017. The anti-Islamic far right has undergone four waves of expansion in this period, driven by terror attacks and other moral shocks. Their leaders and ideologues have varied backgrounds ranging from far-left to far-right before joining the anti-Islamic cause. The anti-Islamic expansion of the far right builds on an ideological duality. Whereas their hostility toward Muslims and defense of traditions continues the legacy the older far right, the simultaneous inclusion of modern gender norms and other liberal positions are historically at odds with the far right. Their online, organizational networks mirror the strategic ambiguity present in their ideology. They connect with Christian conservative and pro-Israeli groups as well as LGBT, women's rights and animal right groups. Many of their members express views in line with this duality. Based on these findings, this thesis indicates that anti-Islamic initiatives in Europe and beyond comprise a transnational movement and subculture characterized by a semi-liberal equilibrium. The anti-Islamic turn and expansion is thus also a liberal turn and expansion. Rather than being interchangeable and inconsequential, the anti-Islamic expansion of the far right demonstrates who the enemy is matters.

The semi-liberal equilibrium is challenged by three factors: (1) the expansion of their network into Eastern Europe with the inclusion of traditional extreme right groups; (2) the presence of extreme activists harboring anti-democratic, racist and anti-Semitic views; and (3) the belief that Western civilization is facing impending doom at the hands of Islam and those who practice it. The equilibrium is therefore fragile.



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Bio

Lars Erik Berntzen is a PhD researcher in the Department of Political and Social Science, European University Institute and Researcher at the Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo. His research focuses on ideology, emotions, networks and political violence, with an emphasis on the anti-Islamic far right in Western Europe and North America.