

Decolonial Critiques of the Far-right

Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät Universität Potsdam.

Sommersemester 2026

When: Tuesdays: 14:00–15:30, from 14.04.2026 to 21.07.2026.

Location: Building 3.06. Room S28.

Instructor: Dr. Luciano Santander.

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Office hours: By appointment.

Description of the seminar

Far-right movements have become central actors in democratic backsliding, articulating social anxieties through authoritarian, exclusionary projects. This seminar introduces M.A. students to decolonial approaches in critical social theory, using the global far-right to question how social science defines the “far-right,” “democracy,” and “modernity.”

Combining key texts in decolonial thought, fascism studies, and empirical research on Europe and the Americas, it interrogates Eurocentric frameworks such as the Populist Radical Right and their attempted universalization. Students develop reflexive, comparative perspectives on knowledge production and contemporary critical theory.

The seminar critically examines the Populist Radical Right framework and its Eurocentric assumptions, asking how far-right concepts travel beyond Europe and where they break down. Readings cover decolonial theory, fascism and authoritarianism, and empirical studies on racism, religious conservatism, “anti-gender” mobilization, authoritarian neoliberalism, and security politics in Europe and the Americas.

Through text-based discussions, short analytical papers, and research sketches, students practice reflexive methodology, explore comparative designs, and connect theoretical debates to their own positionality and ethical dilemmas in studying the far-right.

Conditions to pass:

- Reading the basic texts
- Regular active participation
- **July 31: final essay.** At the end of the course, a short essay applying the course theory to a real-life case.

Weekly structure, content, and learning goals for the seminar

The following table outlines the seminar’s week-by-week structure, summarizing the main thematic focus, core activities and readings, and the specific learning goals associated with each block. It is meant to provide an overview of how the course integrates decolonial theory, critical social theory, and empirical research on the far-right into a coherent teaching plan.

Week(s)	Thematic focus	Content & activities (incl. literature)	Learning goals
1–2	Democratic backsliding and the far-right	Introduce global debates on democratic backsliding and the far-right.	Understand why far-right politics pose a challenge for critical social theory.
3–4	Fascism, and the PRR framework,	Critical social theory to understand the differences between fascism and far right. Read core PRR	Explain the PRR framework, recognize tensions between universalizing frameworks and context-specific trajectories, and identify first Eurocentric assumptions in contemporary science.
5–6	Decolonial theory and the coloniality of knowledge	Introduce decolonial concepts and connect them to debates on fascism and authoritarianism	Become familiar with central debates in decolonial theory; relate them to contemporary research on the far-right and authoritarianism.
7–9	Comparative frameworks and criticism of contemporary social science	Examine how comparative frameworks are built. Discuss Eurocentric designs and the hierarchy of cases in far-right research.	Critically assess how social-scientific concepts and methods are constructed; reflect on how design choices shape what counts as “valid” or “generalizable” knowledge.
10 - 14	Empirical cases: Europe and the Americas	Europe: far-right parties, nativism, and mainstreaming. Americas: conservative backlash and authoritarianism. Group work: apply decolonial lenses to one of these studies.	Compare far-right projects across regions beyond simple diffusion models; explore where categories such as “populism,” “nativism,” and “authoritarianism” travel well and where they present problems.
15	<i>Student projects and synthesis</i>	Final discussion revisiting key questions: Eurocentrism, coloniality, and the role of critical theory today.	Articulate how critical theory can be practiced in a global context; present and defend a small empirical-theoretical project; consolidate comparative and critical skills developed in the seminar.

Readings per week:

Week 2 – 21.04:

- Mudde, C. (2007). Constructing a conceptual framework. In *Populist Parties in Europe*, Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>
- Pirro, A. L. P. (2023). Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept. *Nations and Nationalism*, 29(1), 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860>

Week 3 – 28.04:

- England, C. M. (2022). Karl Polanyi and the Rise of Fascism. *New Political Science*, 44(4), 628–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2022.2129199>
- Griffin, R. (2022). Ghostbusting Fascism?: The Spectral Aspects of the Era of Fascism and Its Shape-Shifting Relationship to the Radical Right. *Fascism*, 11(1), 59–86. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-bja10041>

Week 4 – 05.05:

- Rovira Kaltwasser, C., & Zanotti, L. (2023). The populist radical right beyond Europe. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 22(3), 285–305. <https://doi.org/10.1075/JLP.22136.ROV>

Week 5 – 12.05:

- Castelli Gattinara, P. (2020). The study of the far right and its three E's: why scholarship must go beyond Eurocentrism, Electoralism and Externalism. *French Politics*, 18(3), 314–333. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-020-00124-8>

Week 6 – 19.05:

- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>

Week 7 – 26.05:

- Santander, L. (2026). Tying loose ends (too) tightly: The populist radical right framework and its contextualization in Latin America. *Rostocker Informationen zu Politik und Verwaltung*, 41(1).

Week 8 – 02.06:

- de Jonge, L., Georgiadou, V., Halikiopoulou, D., Kaltwasser, C. R., & Tanscheit, T. (2025). Is the far right a global phenomenon? Comparing Europe and Latin America: A scholarly exchange. *Nations and Nationalism*, 31(1), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.13074>
- Kestler, T. (2022). Radical, Nativist, Authoritarian—Or All of These? Assessing Recent Cases of Right-Wing Populism in Latin America. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 14(3), 289–310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X221117565>

Week 9 – 09.06:

- Lorimer, M. (2021). What do they talk about when they talk about Europe? Euro-ambivalence in far right ideology. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(11), 2016–2033. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1807035>

Week 10 – 16.06:

- Payne, L. A. (2023). The Right against Rights in Latin America: An Analytical Framework. In *The Right against Rights in Latin America* (pp. 29–58). British Academy. <https://doi.org/10.5871/bacad/9780197267394.003.0002>

Week 11 – 23.06:

- Biroli, F., & Caminotti, M. (2020). The Conservative Backlash against Gender in Latin America. *Politics & Gender*, 16(1), E1. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000045>

Week 12 – 30.06:

- Cutrona, S., Dammert, L., & Rosen, J. D. (2025). Conceptualizing Mano Dura in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 67(2), 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.32>

Week 13 – 07.06:

- Belle, E & Faury, F. (2024) Going local, going mainstream? An ethnographic study of two French cities governed by the Rassemblement National. *Government and Opposition*, 60(1), 1–16

Week 14 – 14.07:

- Pertwee, E. (2020). Donald Trump, the anti-Muslim far right and the new conservative revolution. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43(16), 211–230. doi.org

Week 15 – 21.07:

- No readings