



Polarized Europe: Political Violence as a Reflection of Democracy

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I. Introduction: Europe on the Brink of a Nervous Breakdown

Europe entered 2025 as a continent increasingly resembling a political laboratory for testing stress resilience. From [Berlin](#) to [Copenhagen](#), from [Paris](#) to [Brussels](#), the number of incidents from the spectre of politically funded violence is growing from month to month. [Attacks on significant political figures](#), intense protest activities, [assassination attempts](#), and increasingly frequent [threats to journalists and public figures](#), to name just a few specific phenomena, reveal to us that deep polarization is no longer a marginal problem - but a systemic risk, which tests the resilience of European democracy.

[The data provided by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) shows that, during 2024, the number of violent incidents that can be categorized as instances of political violence is significantly increasing compared to previous years. Germany, France, and Denmark have become central points of this new phenomenon – each with its own socio-political specifics, but with one common denominator, found in the local population’s loss of trust in institutions and a strong sense of fragmentation of public space.

What was once a question of ideology is now a question of physical security. The democratic process is no longer a guarantee of the protection of dialogue, but, more and more often, an area of conflict. It follows that Europe is currently in a period when it must recognize - and acknowledge - that the violence present on European streets is not only a security problem, but also a democratic problem. A kind of mirror of institutional and collective weakness.

II. When Institutions No Longer Represent the Citizens

At the basis of contemporary European polarization lies the accumulated mistrust in institutions that have been a symbol of stability and consensus for decades. The democracies of Western Europe - like all countries that look at the European Union (EU) from the outside - are used to a peaceful transition of power in the EU countries, as well as a relatively high degree of government legitimacy; however, the decade we are witnessing is a clear indicator of the fact that the foundations of European democracy are unstable and seriously shaken.

Economic crises, inequality, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), as well as energy shocks and the growing gap between urban and rural communities, have created a peculiar feeling that institutions do not belong to "ordinary" people. This feeling of ostracism is most present in Germany, where, during 2024, [attacks on politicians were recorded](#), predominantly from the leading coalition. Moreover, protesters in this country [organized rallies](#) on numerous occasions, with the slogan "It is time to hear us", which has become a *leitmotif* of protests throughout the European Union.

In France, which is traditionally perceived as the capital of political resistance, the *Yellow Vest* (fr. [Mouvement des gilets jaunes](#)) is not only a symbol of labor revolt anymore, but a symbol of a chronic political frustration. Continued protests during 2024, when, among others, [anarchists](#), [neo-Fascists](#), [right-wing](#), and [disappointed liberals](#) were all present in the streets, have shown us that the demarcation line does not follow ideology anymore, but exclusively the attitude towards the system.

In Denmark, which, albeit, has for many years been presented as an example of democratic stability, a series of attacks on [high-ranked politicians](#) and [local press](#) during the fall of 2024 stresses the fact that not even the "Northern



model” is immune. The public space is becoming increasingly toxic, and the social dialogue is increasingly shorter, louder, and more unpleasant.

III. Algorithmic Arena: Digital Echo-Chamber

Polarization in Europe is no longer taking shape only in parliaments and media, but also in digital echo-chambers, generated by platforms like *X* (formerly *Twitter*), *TikTok*, and *Telegram*. Algorithms that favor destabilization at the expense of truth have become the modern catalyst of political mistrust.

[Research conducted by the University of Amsterdam](#) shows that users who spend more than three hours a day on social networks are twice as susceptible to conspiracy theories, perceiving them as legitimate and credible. It is this research that points us to the problems that all modern societies are potentially facing, given the general prevalence of social networks, especially among young people. Because of that, it is not surprising that, in Germany, during the last local elections, held in 2024, more than [500 synthetic video footage and photo-montage](#) were recorded, of which the majority was generated with the help of [tools from the machine learning specter](#), and with the final goal of spreading influence on the population that gathers the majority of information via Internet, thus neglecting traditional media.

Technologies of this type, essentially based on artificial intelligence tools, and especially generative artificial intelligence, have enabled the production of [deepfakes](#), i.e., synthetic audio and video materials and photographs/images, that are used, in this context, predominantly for the discreditation of political prisoners or for inciting ethnic tensions and [cleavages](#) within a society. The fact that an increasing amount of such content is originally produced outside the European Union, although it is essentially targeting "old European" countries, is particularly worrying, which unequivocally transforms the issue of digital polarization into a question of strategic security and geopolitical calculations.

In addition, there is an obvious fragmentation of public discourse: instead of a collective public, there is a series of isolated communities, which no longer share common informational reference points. In this way, Europe not only wakes up a common, collective narrative, but also the ability to conduct a rational discussion within the Union.

IV. Violence as a Political Message

The increase in political violence, in fact, is by no means exclusively a spontaneous outpouring of anger - because spontaneity in collective action is often equal to fantasy - but a clear form of political communication. The previously mentioned attacks on representatives of state bodies and authorities, in fact, in such cases, become a way of articulating dissatisfaction in societies that believe less and less in institutional mechanisms.

In France, which has been suffering from systemic protests of the local population for a long period, during 2024, [more than 30 attacks](#) on public officials were recorded, while in Germany, some parties were forced to cancel political rallies for security reasons. The political reports of both countries point to the fact that the attackers so far, in most cases, did not express clear ideological motives for carrying out attacks - their aggression was mainly an expression of general distrust, not necessarily in the political programs of the ruling coalitions, but in the ruling system as a whole.



The previously described phenomenon is particularly dangerous for democratic systems, because it undermines the very foundation of the legitimacy of government. If political disagreement is more often resolved on the street, then institutional mechanisms lose their mediating function. In this way, Europe is gradually sliding into a state of "controlled anarchy", in which institutions exist but actually have no real power to shape social flows.

V. Democracy in Defence: Between Repression and Reform

The reactions of European governments so far to the growing violence indicate that the line between the protection of democracy and democratic retrogression is indeed thin. Germany and France have increased [the powers of police forces](#), thus enabling, above all, tightened [control over content shared in cyberspace](#), while in Denmark and the Netherlands, [digital literacy programs for the local population](#) and numerous civil education programs were launched. However, for now, the effects of the said policies are limited.

The problem lies in the fact that the mentioned state institutions are trying to solve the crisis of trust with technical means - increased control, supervision, and regulations - instead of political inclusion and social dialogue. In this way, they risk contributing to the creation of new social divisions.

What is conspicuously absent from the strategies of European Union states facing the rise of political violence on the streets is a new form of social contract: a democratic model that would be more resistant to misinformation, inequality, and digital manipulation. Without such an approach, Europe will continue to live in a vicious circle of responding to crises instead of finding solutions to them.

VI. Conclusion: Democracy under Stress-Test

The polarization we are witnessing on the European continent, and more importantly within the borders of the European Union, is really not a current phenomenon, but a structural problem. It is an essential reflection of the weakening of traditional party systems, social inequality, and the insufficient ability of institutions to communicate with their own citizens in a timely and timely manner, while respecting the principle of truthfulness. Therefore, political violence became the visible face of a deeper process - a crisis of confidence.

Faced with this challenge, Europe has three paths leading to potential answers to the current crisis:

1. **Institutional adaptation**, which would once again redefine relations between the state and the citizen, paired with the strengthening of transparency and public participation;
2. **Digital resilience**, which would develop mechanisms for the fight against disinformation and define an ethical framework for the use of artificial intelligence; and
3. **Cultural rehabilitation of dialogue**, by which politics would return to the space of rational debate, instead of living in the space of symbolic war, as is currently the case.

If the countries of Europe are not ready for such moves, it is indicative that the year ahead will become the year in which the old continent stumbles and loses control over its own democratic narrative. European democracy will survive only if it gets rid of its own fear - fear of citizens, fear of changes, and fear of its own borders. Otherwise, political violence will not only be an exception, but a mirror of the new, restless, and destabilized Europe.