

**PROPAGANDA AND THE DANGER OF EXTREMIST CURRENTS -
RECURRING THEMES AND MANIFESTATIONS IN THE
MODERN AND RECENT HISTORY OF ROMANIA AND EUROPE**

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***Abstract:** Romania, like many other countries, has been exposed to the influence of extremist propaganda in various forms throughout its recent history. From the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century to contemporary movements of political and social extremism, propaganda has played an essential role in shaping public opinions and mobilizing the masses. This article explores the evolution of extremist propaganda in Romania, from the interwar period to the present, analyzing its mechanisms, its impact on society, and ways to combat this phenomenon.*

***Keywords:** extremism, propaganda, Romania, politics, social.*

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Extremism is one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary society. In a globalized world, where information flows rapidly and without borders, extremist propaganda has gained significant ground, influencing opinions, attitudes and behaviors. This article explores the mechanisms of extremist propaganda, its impact on society and ways in which we can counter this dangerous phenomenon.

Europe, a continent with a rich and complex history, has witnessed the rise and decline of extremist movements that have used propaganda as a primary tool to achieve their goals. From the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century to contemporary movements of political, religious and social extremism, propaganda has played a key role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing the masses. This article explores the evolution of extremist propaganda in Europe, analyzing its mechanisms, its impact on society and ways to combat this phenomenon.

The European continent was a fertile ground for extremism in the 20th century, influenced by two world wars, totalitarian regimes and profound social changes. After World War II, extremism took on new

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forms, adapted to the realities of a globalized and digitalized world. Propaganda was an essential tool in spreading extremist ideologies and recruiting followers.

The following are some examples of extremist propaganda:

Extremist propaganda in the interwar period: Fascism in Italy, Benito Mussolini used propaganda to promote the fascist ideology, based on nationalism, authoritarianism and anti-communism. Its messages were omnipresent in the media, art and education; Nazism in Germany, Nazi propaganda, led by Joseph Goebbels, was one of the most effective in history. It promoted racial ideology, anti-Semitism and the personality cult of Adolf Hitler; extremism in other European countries, fascist and far-right movements emerged in Spain, France, Great Britain and other countries, using propaganda to achieve their goals.

Propaganda in communist regimes in Eastern Europe: cult of personality, leaders such as Stalin, Ceaușescu and Honecker used propaganda to consolidate their power and promote their image as infallible leaders; control of information, all forms of media were state-controlled, and access to external information was strictly limited; repression of dissent, propaganda was used to demonize political opponents and justify repression.

Extremism and propaganda after World War II: right-wing extremism: neo-Nazi and far-right movements continued to promote xenophobic and anti-immigration messages; left-wing extremism; left-wing terrorist groups, such as the Red Army Faction in Germany, used propaganda to justify their violent actions; religious extremism: In recent decades, religious extremism, especially Islamist extremism, has become a major threat in Europe.

Romania, like many other countries, has been exposed to the influence of extremist propaganda in various forms throughout its recent history. From the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century to contemporary movements of political and social extremism, propaganda has played an essential role in shaping public opinions and mobilizing the masses.

Extremism refers to the adoption of radical ideologies, which promote values and practices outside accepted social norms.

Propaganda, on the other hand, is a tool used to spread these ideologies, manipulating the perceptions and emotions of the public. Extremist propaganda is based on simplistic, polarizing and often disinformational messages, which exploit the fear, resentment and frustrations of individuals.

History of extremist propaganda - from the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century to contemporary terrorist groups, propaganda has been an essential tool for recruitment and mobilization. Notable examples include

Nazi propaganda, which promoted racial and anti-Semitic ideology, or the propaganda of communist regimes, which glorified the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the digital age, extremist propaganda has evolved, adapting to new technologies and communication platforms. Romania has experienced various forms of extremism in the 20th century, influenced by the geopolitical context and social changes. The interwar period was marked by the rise of fascist and legionary movements, and the communist regime promoted totalitarian propaganda. After the 1989 Revolution, extremism reemerged in new forms, adapted to the realities of a democratic and globalized society.

Extremist propaganda in the interwar period - the legionary movement: the most notable extremist movement in interwar Romania, the Iron Guard, used propaganda to promote its nationalist, anti-Semitic and anti-communist ideology. Its messages were based on glorifying the national past, criticizing political elites and promoting violence as a means of action. The role of the church and intellectuals: some clergy and intellectuals supported the legionary movement, contributing to the legitimization of its propaganda.

Having a social impact, legionary propaganda polarized Romanian society, exacerbating ethnic and social tensions. After World War II, the legionary movement was banned, but its ideology continued to influence groups and individuals in contemporary Romania.

Historical context of the legionary movement:

The legionary movement emerged in the 1920s as a reaction to the political and social instability in interwar Romania. Founded by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the movement promoted an ideology based on extreme nationalism, Orthodoxy, and antisemitism. The Iron Guard gained popularity among the masses, using propaganda to achieve its goals. Antisemitic messages were ubiquitous, presenting Jews as enemies of the nation.

Propaganda tools: The legionary movement used newspapers, pamphlets, rallies, and religious symbols to spread its messages.

The cult of Codreanu's personality; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was presented as a national hero and martyr, and his image was used to mobilize followers. Impact of legionary propaganda on Romanian society - social polarization: Legionary propaganda exacerbated ethnic and social tensions, contributing to the rise of antisemitism and violence. Political influence - the legionary movement gained political support and influenced the Romanian government in the 1930s. Repression and decline - in 1941, the legionary movement was banned, and many of its leaders were executed or imprisoned.

Holocaust denial in Romania:

Historical context - during World War II, Romania was involved in the Holocaust, participating in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews. After the war, the communist regime minimized or denied Romania's involvement in the Holocaust.

Propaganda under the communist regime (1947-1989):

Ceaușescu's personality cult - communist propaganda promoted the image of Nicolae Ceaușescu as an infallible leader and savior of the nation. Messages were omnipresent in the media, education, and public life. Repression of dissent - propaganda was used to demonize political opponents and justify repression. Information control - all forms of media were controlled by the state, and access to external information was strictly limited.

Extremism and propaganda after the 1989 Revolution, the resurgence of nationalist extremism: after the fall of communism, nationalist and xenophobic movements began to promote anti-Western, anti-EU, and anti-minority messages. Role of the media: Some television stations and publications promoted extremist messages, exploiting the fear of change and nostalgia for the past.

Religious extremism: Marginal groups have used religious rhetoric to promote intolerant agendas.

Mechanisms of extremist propaganda:

Polarization: Extremist messages divide society into “us” versus “them,” creating a sense of belonging for those who identify with the group and hostility toward others; Emotional exploitation: Fear, anger, and resentment are used to mobilize supporters; Disinformation - Fake news and conspiracy theories are spread to undermine trust in institutions and promote extremist agendas; Online recruitment - Social platforms allow extremist groups to reach a wide audience and recruit members, especially vulnerable youth. Thus, extremist propaganda can lead to: increased violence and hate crime, erosion of social cohesion, and trust in institutions.

Radicalization of individuals and the formation of terrorist groups: Political and social instability, which can affect entire nations; Holocaust denial in the post-communist era - after the 1989 Revolution, some historians, politicians and extremist groups began to deny or minimize the Holocaust in Romania; propaganda tools - Holocaust denial was used as a propaganda tool to promote nationalist and anti-Semitic agendas.

Legionary extremist propaganda in the post-communist era:

Reemergence of legionary movements - after the fall of communism, movements and groups inspired by legionary ideology began to promote nationalist and anti-Semitic messages. Role of the media - some television stations and publications promoted extremist messages, exploiting the fear of change and nostalgia for the past; religious extremism - marginal groups used religious rhetoric to promote intolerant agendas. Impact of legionary extremist propaganda and Holocaust denial on Romanian society: political polarization - extremist propaganda contributed to dividing society between supporters and opponents of extremist movements. Growth of intolerance: Xenophobic and anti-minority messages led to increased discrimination and hate crime; erosion of trust in institutions; disinformation and conspiracy theories undermined trust in government, the media, and science.

Strategies to combat legionary extremist propaganda and Holocaust denial: education and media literacy; promoting critical thinking and the ability to identify reliable sources; online regulation - implementing policies to limit the spread of extremist content on digital platforms; international cooperation - exchanging information and resources with other countries to combat extremism; promoting tolerance - awareness campaigns to combat intolerance and discrimination.

Extremist propaganda in the digital age:

Social media and extremism - online platforms have become important spaces for the spread of extremist messages. Far-right and anti-establishment groups use Facebook, Twitter and other networks to recruit followers. Conspiracy theories - in Romania, conspiracy theories about vaccines, the COVID-19 pandemic or foreign influence have been used to promote extremist agendas.

Deepfakes and disinformation - modern technologies allow the creation of fake content that can be used to manipulate public opinion. Contemporary extremist currents; religious extremism - groups like ISIS use propaganda to recruit followers and justify terrorist attacks. Political extremism - far-right or far-left movements promote anti-democratic and xenophobic ideologies.

Extremist nationalism - promotes national superiority and hostility towards other ethnic or cultural groups.

The role of technology in the spread of extremist propaganda:

The internet and social media have transformed the way extremist propaganda is distributed. Algorithms amplify controversial messages, and obscure platforms provide safe spaces for radicalization. Deepfakes and

other advanced technologies pose new challenges in combating disinformation.

Extremist propaganda poses a serious threat to global peace and stability. To combat this phenomenon, it is essential to understand its mechanisms and implement effective prevention and intervention strategies. Education, international cooperation, and the responsible use of technology are key in this fight. Disinformation has been an essential tool in the arsenal of extremist parties in Romania, used to manipulate public opinion, promote political agendas, and consolidate power. In the digital age, disinformation has taken on new dimensions, becoming faster, more accessible, and more difficult to counter.

Definition of disinformation:

Disinformation refers to the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information, with the aim of manipulating public opinion or promoting certain agendas. In the context of extremist parties, disinformation is used to create confusion, polarize society and consolidate electoral support.

Historical context of extremism and disinformation in Romania:

Romania has experienced various forms of extremism in its recent history, from the legionary movement of the interwar period to contemporary far-right or anti-establishment parties. These parties have used disinformation as a tool to achieve their goals, and in the digital age, this phenomenon has become more prevalent and sophisticated.

Mechanisms of disinformation by extremist parties:

Fake news: The publication and dissemination of fabricated or distorted news to serve a political agenda.

Conspiracy theories: The promotion of narratives that claim that certain groups or institutions are conspiring against the population. Image and video manipulation: Using edited or out-of-context images and videos to support false messages. Fake accounts and bots: Creating fake accounts or using bots to amplify extremist messages on social media.

The impact of disinformation on Romanian society:

Social polarization: Disinformation contributes to the division of society and the increase of social tensions.

Erosion of trust in institutions: Fake news and conspiracy theories undermine public trust in the democratic system. Increase of intolerance: Extremist messages promoted through disinformation contribute to the normalization of intolerance and discrimination. Strategies to combat disinformation:

Education and media literacy: Promoting critical thinking and the ability to identify reliable sources; online regulation: Implementing policies

to limit the spread of extremist content on digital platforms; international cooperation - exchanging information and resources with other countries to combat disinformation; fact-checking - creating organizations and platforms dedicated to verifying information and combating fake news. Disinformation by extremist parties in Romania's recent history represents a significant threat to democracy and social cohesion. Through education, regulation, and cooperation, Romania can counter this phenomenon and promote a more informed and resilient society.

Historical context of political extremism in Romania:

These extremist movements have attempted to capture the political scene through a variety of methods, including propaganda, violence, and electoral manipulation. Mechanisms of extremists capturing the political scene: populist messaging - the use of simplistic and emotional messages that exploit voters' fear and resentment;

Disinformation - the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories to undermine trust in institutions and gain electoral support; violence and intimidation - the use of violence and intimidation to eliminate political opponents and create a climate of fear; electoral manipulation - the use of illegal or immoral tactics to influence election results.

The Legionary Movement and the Attempt to Seize the Political Scene

Interwar Context - The Legionary Movement, also known as the Iron Guard, was the most notable extremist movement of the interwar period; Messages and Tactics - The Iron Guard used nationalist, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist messages to gain popular support; Violent tactics, including political assassinations, were used to eliminate opponents; Political Impact: The Legionary Movement managed to gain significant support, influencing the Romanian government and politics in the 1930s.

Political Extremism in the Communist Era

Repression of Extremism: The communist regime banned all forms of political extremism, including right-wing ones. Underground Resistance - Some far-right groups continued to exist clandestinely, promoting anti-communist and nationalist messages; Resurgence of political extremism in the post-communist era. Extremist parties: parties such as the Greater Romania Party (PRM) and the New Right have tried to dominate the political scene through nationalist and xenophobic messages; electoral campaigns - some politicians have used populist messages and disinformation to gain electoral support; electoral impact: Extremist parties have managed to gain significant support in certain regions and among certain social categories.

Political Extremism in the Digital Age

Social Media: Online platforms enable the rapid spread of extremist messages and the recruitment of followers.

Conspiracy Theories: Promoting narratives that claim that certain groups or institutions are conspiring against the population.

Foreign Influence Campaigns: Some states use political extremism to influence political processes in Romania.

Impact of Political Extremism on Romanian Society:

Social Polarization: Political extremism contributes to the division of society and the increase of social tensions.

Erosion of Trust in Institutions: Extremist messages undermine trust in institutions and democratic processes.

Growth of Intolerance: Promoting xenophobic and discriminatory messages contributes to the normalization of intolerance.

Strategies to Combat Political Extremism:

Education and Awareness: Promoting critical thinking and democratic values among citizens.

Online Regulation: Implementing policies to limit the spread of extremist content on digital platforms.

Strengthening institutions: Ensuring the independence and efficiency of the judiciary and other democratic institutions.

International cooperation: Sharing information and resources with other countries to combat political extremism.

The capture of the political scene by extremists represents a significant threat to democracy and social stability in Romania. Through education, regulation and cooperation, Romania can counter this phenomenon and promote a more tolerant and democratic society.

Defending the rule of law in the face of extremism in Romania's recent history:

The rule of law is a fundamental pillar of democracy, guaranteeing respect for the law, the protection of fundamental rights and the separation of powers in the state. In the face of the rise of extremism, the rule of law is often put to the test, and its defense becomes a key priority. In Romania, recent history has been marked by attempts by extremist groups and parties to undermine the principles of the rule of law.

Defining the Rule of Law and Extremism

Rule of Law: A system in which laws are applied equally, fundamental rights are protected, and the powers of the state are separated and balanced. **Extremism:** The promotion of radical ideologies that threaten democratic principles, including through violence, discrimination, and the undermining of institutions.

Historical Context of Extremism in Romania

Romania has experienced various forms of extremism in its recent history, from the interwar Legionary movement to contemporary far-right or anti-establishment parties.

Challenges to the Rule of Law in the Face of Extremism

- Social polarization: Extremism contributes to the division of society, making it more difficult to enforce laws uniformly.
- Attacks on institutions: Extremist groups seek to weaken democratic institutions, such as the judiciary or the media.
- Disinformation: The spread of fake news and conspiracy theories undermines trust in the rule of law and democratic processes.
- Violence and intimidation: Extremists use violence and intimidation to achieve their goals, creating a climate of fear and instability.

Defending the rule of law in the interwar period

The Legionary Movement: The Iron Guard posed a major threat to the rule of law in the interwar period, using violence and propaganda to achieve its goals.

Countermeasures: The government has taken measures to combat legionary extremism, including by banning the movement and arresting its leaders.

Defending the rule of law during the communist era

Totalitarian regime: The communist regime undermined the rule of law by exercising total control over institutions and repressing any opposition.

Underground resistance: Some groups attempted to protect the principles of the rule of law, but were violently repressed by the regime.

Defending the rule of law in the post-communist era

Democratic transition: After the 1989 Revolution, Romania began to build a functioning rule of law, but faced significant challenges from extremist groups.

Legal and institutional reforms: Implementing reforms to strengthen the rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary and combating corruption.

Extremist parties: Parties such as the Greater Romania Party (PRM) and the New Right attempted to undermine the rule of law through nationalist and xenophobic messages.

Defending the rule of law in the digital age

- Online disinformation: Social platforms enable the rapid spread of extremist messages, which undermine trust in institutions.
- Regulatory measures: Implementing policies to limit the spread of extremist content online.
- International cooperation: Sharing information and resources with other countries to counter extremism and protect the rule of law.
 - ✓ Strategies to defend the rule of law
 - Education and awareness: Promoting critical thinking and democratic values among citizens.
 - Institutional strengthening: Ensuring the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary and other democratic institutions.
 - Combating corruption: Implementing rigorous measures to prevent and combat corruption, which undermines the rule of law.
 - Inter-agency cooperation: Collaborating between the police, the judiciary and other authorities to counter extremism and protect fundamental rights.

The impact of defending the rule of law on Romanian society

Consolidating democracy: Defending the rule of law contributes to consolidating democracy and protecting fundamental rights.

Increasing trust in institutions: Citizens become more confident in democratic institutions and the legal system.

Reducing extremism: Through effective measures, extremism is countered, and society becomes more tolerant and inclusive.

Defending the rule of law in the face of extremism is a constant challenge for Romania, but also an essential priority for consolidating democracy and protecting fundamental rights. Through education, institutional reforms and cooperation, Romania can counter extremism and promote a more just and democratic society.

Extremism in 21st-century Europe

This article provides a broad analysis of extremism in 21st-century Europe, highlighting its manifestations, causes, impact and strategies to combat this phenomenon.

Extremism represents one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, having a significant impact on the political, social and economic stability of Europe. From terrorist attacks to the rise of populist and extremist parties, Europe is facing a variety of forms of extremism that threaten democratic values and social cohesion.

Definition of extremism

Extremism refers to the adoption of radical ideologies that reject democratic principles and promote violent or anti-establishment methods to

achieve their goals. It can take various forms, including religious, political, nationalist and social extremism.

Historical context of extremism in Europe

Europe has a long and complex history of extremism, from 20th-century fascism and Nazism to contemporary terrorist movements. In the 21st century, extremism has evolved, adapting to new social, political and technological realities.

Forms of extremism in 21st century Europe

Religious extremism: Terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda have carried out attacks in several European countries, promoting a radical Islamist ideology.

Political extremism: Far-right or far-left parties and movements have gained popularity, promoting populist, xenophobic and anti-EU messages.

Nationalist extremism: Movements that promote national superiority and hostility towards other ethnic or cultural groups.

Social extremism: Groups that promote violence and intolerance towards certain social categories, such as immigrants or the LGBTQ+ community.

Causes of extremism in 21st century Europe

Globalisation and migration: Increased migratory flows have led to social tensions and increased xenophobic sentiments.

Economic crisis: Economic instability and social inequalities have contributed to increased support for populist and extremist parties.

Technology and social media: Online platforms allow extremist messages to spread rapidly and recruit followers.

Political polarization: Increased political polarization has made extremist messages more attractive to certain segments of the population.

The impact of extremism on European society

- **Terrorist attacks:** Terrorist attacks have had a profound impact on public security and psychology.

- **Growing intolerance:** Extremist messages contribute to the rise of discrimination and hate crime.

- **Erosion of trust in institutions:** Disinformation and conspiracy theories undermine trust in government, media and science.

- **Political instability:** The rise of populist and extremist parties brings political instability and undermines democratic processes.

Strategies to counter extremism in Europe

- ✓ **Education and awareness:** Promoting critical thinking and democratic values among citizens.

- ✓ **Online regulation:** Implementing policies to limit the spread of extremist content on digital platforms.

- ✓ International cooperation: Sharing information and resources between countries to combat extremism.
- ✓ Social integration: Programmes to enhance the integration of immigrants and other marginalized groups.
- ✓ Combating corruption and inequalities: Measures to reduce social and economic inequalities, which are fertile ground for extremism.

Extremism in 21st century Europe poses a significant threat to democracy, security and social cohesion. Through education, regulation and cooperation, Europe can counter this phenomenon and promote a more tolerant and democratic society.



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