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*Call for Papers*

# **POLARIZED DEMOCRACIES: NEW LINES OF DIVISION IN EUROPE**

Workshop, June 11-12, 2026, Dresden

Organized by *Mercator Forum Migration und Demokratie*

Political polarization has become a recurring theme in debates about the state of European democracies. It shapes how citizens relate to political opponents, how parties position themselves, and how trust in democratic institutions is maintained or eroded. Polarization is visible across several arenas — including conflicts over values, identity, and social inequalities, as well as public debates about migration and cultural change, which often evoke strong emotional and moral reactions.

At the same time, scholarship cautions against overly dramatic or one-dimensional accounts of polarization that overlook its complexity, variation, and ambiguous democratic implications. Understanding when polarization becomes harmful — and when it reflects legitimate democratic contestation — remains an important analytical challenge.

This workshop brings together early career researchers (advanced doctoral and postdoctoral) from across Europe to examine how different forms of polarization emerge, how they intersect with issues such as migration and identity, and how they reshape democratic life. It aims to link empirical findings and theoretical perspectives on political and affective polarization, radical-right mobilization, media environments, and strategies for strengthening democratic cohesion and resilience.

The following thematic clusters will be discussed in the workshop:

- **Affective Polarization, Identity, and Democratic Cohesion:** Affective polarization has become a defining feature of political life in many democracies. This cluster invites contributions examining its causes, manifestations, and democratic consequences. How do social identities, moral convictions, and perceived cultural divides shape political antagonism? Papers exploring individual-level mechanisms, comparative evidence, or the interaction between affect, ideology, and social structure are particularly welcome.
- **Media, Misinformation, and Conspiracy Thinking:** Media coverage and digital communication strongly influence how migration and diversity are perceived. How do journalistic narratives, platform logics, and social-media dynamics shape affective polarization and reinforce polarizing storylines? What factors make certain groups more receptive to misinformation and conspiracy beliefs? We welcome interdisciplinary approaches combining insights from political science, sociology, psychology, and media research.
- **Radical Right Mobilization, Migration, and Party Competition:** Conflicts over migration and cultural identity remain central drivers of radical-right mobilization, providing fertile ground for actors who strategically amplify grievances and act as political entrepreneurs

of polarization. How do migration-related debates shape patterns of party competition and voter alignment? Conversely, how do radical-right narratives and political strategies redraw the boundaries of democratic contestation and pressure mainstream parties to adapt their positions? Comparative or country-specific analyses examining the reciprocal relationship between migration, polarization, and radical-right mobilization are particularly encouraged.

- **De-polarization and Democratic Resilience:** Beyond diagnosis, this cluster focuses on political-science perspectives on remedies and interventions. Which institutional reforms, party strategies, or participatory mechanisms can mitigate affective polarization and restore trust? We welcome theoretical and empirical papers addressing dialogue formats (citizens' assemblies, cross-partisan encounters), inclusive policy design, and democratic innovations that enhance cohesion in diverse societies.

### Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words (including research question, theoretical approach, and methods) and a short bio (max. 100 words) to [midem@mailbox.tu-dresden.de](mailto:midem@mailbox.tu-dresden.de) by 20 January 2026.

Selected participants will be notified by the beginning of February 2026. Funds are available to cover travel and accommodation costs for participants.

### Contact

For questions, please contact Dr. Oliviero Angeli (Scientific Coordinator, MIDEM):  
[oliviero.angeli@tu-dresden.de](mailto:oliviero.angeli@tu-dresden.de)

### Event place

The workshop will take place at the MIDEM research centre, Würzburger Str. 46, 01187 Dresden and will be held in English.