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Call for Papers

International Conference

Demography and the Radical Right: Past and Present

September 23–24, 2027, University of Fribourg (Switzerland)

The international conference will bring together historians, political scientists, demographers, and sociologists to examine how demographic arguments have been, and continue to be, mobilized by radical-right politicians, parties and movements to support their political agendas.

Since the nineteenth century, demography as a biopolitic project has been at the core of nation building processes. Fertility rates, death rates and migration statistics have helped nations and empires to control and govern their populations; demographers held highly important position within the colonial administration, and demographic data were used to theorise racial distinctions. Today, the resort to demographic arguments and data are taking new forms; from anxieties towards a demographic decline, discourses of 'overpopulation' and ecological concerns to populist and conspiratorial narratives based upon population "replacement," radical-right actors, including self-declared scientists and intellectuals, across Europe, the Americas, and beyond are drawing on demographic data, projections, and populist rhetoric to justify restrictive migration policies and ethnonationalist claims.

Substantial and stimulating research on this phenomenon is being produced across countries and disciplines yet no comprehensive, cross-disciplinary overview currently exists. Studies tend to remain disciplinary siloed nationally confined. Identifying the strategies, arguments, and modes of production and weaponization of demographic data for radical-right political agendas seems all the more urgent at a time of growing threats to democratic institutions and rising hostility toward migrants. The conference aims to offer a first state of the art of the different ways in which national and local radical-right parties and movements have resorted to demographic arguments, and circulated them across national borders and historical periods. It will foster an interdisciplinary conversation on the subject.

Objectives

The conference has three main objectives:

1. **Mapping the field.** To establish a comparative state of the art of existing research across countries, languages, and disciplines on the use of demographic arguments by radical-right actors.
2. **Historical, contemporary and transnational research**: To discuss concepts, methodological tools and theoretical approaches for analysing the transnational and global dimensions across the past and present.
3. **Building interdisciplinary dialogue.** To bring historians, demographers, sociologists and political scientists into direct conversation.

Themes and Suggested Topics

We welcome papers addressing, but not limited to, the following themes:

- **Genealogies of demographic arguments among radical-right actors.** Historical trajectories of population thinking, pronatalism, eugenics, and "demographic decline" or 'overpopulaton' discourses from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the present.
- **Replacement narratives and conspiracy theories.** The production, circulation, and mainstreaming of "Great Replacement" and related "population replacement" narratives, from the margins to mainstream politics.

- **Political strategy and communication.** How national and local radical-right parties resort to demographic statistics (fertility rates, migration flows, environmental data, ethnic/religious composition, crime and social statistics) in electoral campaigns and policy proposals.
- **Gender, reproduction, and demography.** Pronatalist and "birth-rate" politics, and their entanglement with anti-migration, anti-LGBTQ+ and nationalist agendas.
- **Comparative and transnational perspectives.** Circulation of demographic arguments and tropes across national contexts, parties, and movements.
- **Conceptual dialogues.** On fascism, populism, radical- and far-right ideologies in relation with demographic issues.

Submission and Organisation:

Please submit:

- Please submit an abstract (300–500 words, including research question, methodology/sources, main argument), and a short biographical note (max. 150 words, including institutional affiliation) by email to conference_demography2027@unifr.ch by 1 February 2027. The acceptance of the proposal will be communicated by 1 March 2027.
- Proposals presenting comparative/transnational case studies, are particularly encouraged. We especially welcome contributions from early-career researchers.
- If the proposal is accepted, a written paper (approximately 4,000 words) must be submitted by 1 September 2027.
- The conference language is English
- Accommodation and subsistence expenses will be covered by the convenors.

The conference is organised by the Department of Contemporary History, University of Fribourg, and the Research Observatory for Regional Politics, University of Lausanne

Conference organisers: Oscar Mazzoleni, Caroline Rusterholz, Damir Skenderovic
Conference coordination: Pascal Gadient