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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Solidarity as an Infrapolitical Tool of Repression in a Far-right Online Community

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ABSTRACT: This article examines how solidarity, typically understood as a relational resource for emancipation, can function instead as a mechanism of informal repression within far-right digital communities. Drawing on a 15-month netnographic study of *Le Bastion*, an online self-help network organized around a far-right influencer, the article introduces the concept of *mutilated solidarity*--a form of relational bonding that reproduces ideological conformity rather than enabling political subjectivation. Combined with a revised reading of Scott's *infrapolitics*, the study proposes the concept of *inverted infrapolitics* to describe horizontal, affective, and symbolic forms of control. Through discourse analysis and thematic mapping, it shows how emotions such as shame, pride, and fear are mobilized to normalize virilist, hierarchical values under the guise of fraternity. This article contributes to the critical sociology of solidarity by rethinking the affective infrastructures of ideological reproduction in far-right online spaces, and foregrounds the ambivalent role of care in contemporary political subjectivation.

KEYWORDS: Infrapolitics, Solidarity, Soft Repression, Far-Right, Digital Communities, netnography

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1. Introduction

Solidarity is often presented as a foundation of collective mobilization and a central lever of political action. As a relational norm, it is associated with principles of mutual aid, mutual recognition, and shared resistance to oppression (Gould, 2020; Scholz, 2008). Numerous studies regard it as an essential mobilizing resource in social struggles, whether feminist (Ferguson, 2009; hooks, 2015), anti-racist (Hooker, 2009), or trade union

(Donnelly, 2016; Zschache et al., 2020). However, this positive conception tends to overlook the ambivalent uses of solidarity. Even the dominant forms often framed as desirable --- whether articulated as human, civic, social, or emancipatory solidarity --- are embedded in a Euro-modernist genealogy marked by implicit exclusions, notably along racial, gendered, and colonial lines (Conway et al., 2021). Far from being universal, these forms are historically situated and carry normative assumptions that shape their political uses and their potential for inclusion. As such, solidarity can also operate as a mechanism of exclusion, normalization, or surveillance, contributing to the deactivation of dissensus, the disciplining of behavior, and the reproduction of implicit power relations (Esping-Andersen, 2015; Quadagno, 1994; DuFord, 2022).

To better understand these particular forms of solidarities, this article mobilizes two conceptual frameworks rarely articulated together: the theory of infrapolitics by James C. Scott (1990) and the concept of mutilated solidarity (Boursier, 2023 ; DuFord, 2022). Mutilated solidarity is a form of solidarity that retains the appearance of a bond (mutual aid, support, partial recognition), but whose purpose is self-destructive (it aims to destroy social ties). This mutilated solidarity is based on mechanisms of conditional adhesion and ideological regulation. It relies on informal, implicit and often non-verbalized interactions, which help to stabilize a normative order. To grasp how these interactions operate, we draw on the concept of infrapolitics.

While Scott defines infrapolitics as a form of discreet resistance from the margins, we propose here an inverted reading: infrapolitics can also become a mode of internal repression, exercised horizontally within an ideologically structured group. This repression is based on shared affects, narratives, gestures and norms, which produce an implicit ideological order. It mobilizes shared affects -- i.e. emotionally resonant experiences --- such as shame, fear, or pride --- circulated among group members, shaping what is felt and how it is expressed (Chouliaraki & Bale, 2025) - to align subjectivities with group expectations. Crossing this reading with the concept of mutilated solidarity, we analyze how solidarity, far from always being emancipatory, can become a tool of normative alignment, social control and ideological reproduction. The article is based on a 15-month ethnographic survey of an online self-help community structured around an extreme right-wing influencer. This community, active on Discord and Telegram, presents itself as a support space aimed at the social and personal success of its members. But analysis of the interactions reveals a more constraining dynamic, where solidarity is based on adherence to an authoritarian, anti-egalitarian and nationalist worldview (Carter, 2018). This study allows us to observe how solidarity functions as a mechanism of conditional integration, in the service of a shared ideological order.

The article is structured in five parts. The first returns to the theoretical frameworks mobilized, articulating the concepts of infrapolitics, mutilated solidarity and soft repression. The second presents the fieldwork and the netnographic method. The third analyzes the regulatory practices observed in the community, through self-narratives, surveillance, humor and affect. The fourth discusses the effects of this conditional solidarity on members' trajectories. Finally, the conclusion returns to the contributions of the concept of repressive infrapolitical solidarity for the analysis of online collectives.

2. Mutilated solidarity as inverted infrapolitics

Far from opposing solidarity and repression head-on, the aim here is to show how certain forms of solidarity can become instruments of repression. As such, the analysis articulates two currents in the literature: the theory of infrapolitics and the critical literature on solidarity.

2.1. Mutilated solidarity: from democratic potential to disciplinary regulation

Solidarity is often understood as a positive normative principle, guaranteeing relational justice, political inclusion and mutual recognition (Bayertz, 1999; Scholz, 2008). However, as Nathan Rochelle DuFord (2022) has shown, this conception relies on a series of political conditions that are not always met. In particular, when solidarity is mobilized within hierarchical, authoritarian or ideologically homogenizing structures, it can lose its democratic function of co-constructing the common and become an instrument of symbolic control and normalization.

With this in mind, we use the concept of mutilated solidarity (Boursier, 2023) to designate forms of mutual aid, support or partial recognition which, although apparently supportive, lack --- or actively undermine --- the emancipatory political potential often normatively attributed to solidarity. Solidarity is said to be mutilated when it is conceived or practiced in such a way as to 1/ degrade the social conditions of interdependence, by weakening the social bonds necessary for its sustainable reproduction; 2/ fragment the possibility of a common good, by reducing solidarity to individualizing or competitive logics, incompatible with a collective construction of emancipation. For example, the widespread use of private charity to meet essential social needs (food, housing, health) illustrates a form of mutilated solidarity: by replacing social rights, it weakens collective interdependence and depoliticizes inequalities (Duvoux, 2009). In place of state-sponsored social justice, it installs a logic of individualized moral assistance (criterion 1). Some forms of neoliberal solidarity, such as entrepreneurial mentoring in "reintegration" programs for the unemployed, are also based on the idea that everyone can "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" (Voirol, 2020). They fragment the conditions for a collective consciousness by emphasizing individual adaptation rather than structural transformation (criterion 2).

In contrast, feminist intersectional and transnational approaches conceive of solidarity as a practice of coalition across differences, grounded in the mutual recognition of intersecting oppressions and the negotiation of power asymmetries (Conway et al., 2021, xvii). From this perspective, mutilated solidarity represents its inverse: rather than accommodating diversity and fostering inclusive political bonds, it seeks to erase difference in favor of homogeneity, ideological conformity, and hierarchical order.

Mutilated solidarity is therefore to be understood as a truncated and instrumentalized form of solidarity, within which the mutual aid bond is captured by power dynamics (Boursier, 2023). To understand this capture, we use the concept of infrapolitics.

2.2 Infrapolitics: a relational reading of discrete forms of power

The concept of infrapolitics of subordinate, formulated by James C. Scott (1990), refers to the discrete practices by which subaltern groups resist domination without open confrontation. By distinguishing the public transcript - the official, compliant, observable discourse - from the hidden transcript - the rumors, gestures, affects, silent refusals or intimate narratives escaping authority - Scott proposes to shift political analysis to the margins, the interstices of power, the rituals of everyday life. Infrapolitics thus makes it possible to think about the relational and situated dimension of domination, highlighting forms of negotiation, accommodation or latent resistance in contexts of structural inequality.

This approach has had a major influence on theories of symbolic domination (Wedeen, 1999), silent agency (Abu-Lughod, 1990), and recent work on political subjectivation in digital environments (Chouliaraki, 2021). However, these perspectives tend to insist almost exclusively on the subversive potential of infrapolitics, reducing it to a repertoire of ruses, stealth strategies or survival practices in the face of oppressive power.

Our proposal is to shift this reading by suggesting that infrapolitics can also be the vector of an endogenous reproduction of domination, including in peripheral, subaltern or communal spaces. To capture this dynamic, I use the term *inverted infrapolitics*. Unlike Scott's (1990) infrapolitics, inverted infrapolitics refers to implicit sometime hidden and everyday practices emerging from actors who perceive themselves as marginalized, and who may indeed experience marginality in certain respects, but who are not structurally dominated to the same degree as the subaltern groups in Scott's work. While retaining Scott's emphasis on the micro-social, affective, and situated nature of political regulation, inverted infrapolitics redirects these dynamics toward the defense -- rather than the subversion --- of hierarchical norms, framing hegemony as being under threat.

A key feature carried over from Scott's original formulation is the presence of a "hidden repertoire": unwritten rules, coded affects, and implicit sanctions that operate out of public view, yet structure the boundaries of belonging and dissent. In the case studied here, this hidden repertoire does not shield the dominated from the powerful; rather, it shields the group's internal hegemonic order from erosion.

In far-right digital political communities, this phenomenon is particularly salient. Far from being chaotic or disorganized spaces, these environments implement intentional yet implicit regimes of moral regulation --- unwritten but widely understood rules --- based on rhetorical virility, mutual surveillance, symbolic humiliation and an obsession with ideological purity (Baele et al., 2020; Norocel, 2023; Ganesh, 2025). We observe a form of solidarity policing, in which "deviant" affects - doubt, empathy, dissent, ambiguity - are actively disqualified, and where belonging is based on implicit mechanisms of normative alignment.

This dynamic of inverted infrapolitics can be interpreted as a perverse modality of mutilated solidarity: the bond of loyalty or community belonging is mobilized not to support collective transformation, but to normalize subjectivities, sanction deviations and preserve the group's symbolic unity, even at the cost of silence, erasure or latent violence.

2.3. Solidarity and infrapolitics: towards a framework for soft repression online

This articulation allows us to go beyond the heroic or romantic vision of infrapolitics as a space of resistance. It leads us to consider that the margins are not necessarily liberating.¹ In Scott's original formulation, infrapolitics takes place in the margins because heavily dominated groups cannot engage in visible acts of resistance or liberation. In our case, these margins are of a different nature: they are not structurally dominated but composed of actors who perceive themselves as marginalized due to the loss - or perceived loss - of privileges historically afforded to them by unjust social structures based on gender, race, sexuality, and/or class. Within this context, solidarity does not function as a lever for political equalization, but as a vector for the alignment and internalization of hegemonic norms. It is based on shared affects - fear, shame, pride,

1. By combining the concepts of infrapolitics (Scott, 1990) and mutilated solidarity (Boursier, 2023), it becomes possible to think of a repressive infrapolitical solidarity: a form of social bond that, under the guise of mutual aid, produces ideological, affective and behavioral regulation in a digital context. As Nancy Fraser (1990) reminds us, subaltern counterpublics are not inherently emancipatory; they can also become reactionary spaces that reinforce dominant norms.

disgust² - that define the boundaries of what can be said and what can be thought, transforming members into co-agents of repression in the name of group well-being, loyalty, or protection from the outside world.

From this perspective, the work of Myra Marx Ferree (2005) offers a particularly fruitful conceptual framework with the concept of soft repression. Rather than opposing coercion and persuasion head-on, Ferree highlights the forms of symbolic exclusion - such as ridicule, stigmatization or moral disqualification - that make it possible to restrict the expression and legitimacy of social movements, particularly feminist ones, without resorting to physical violence. These forms of repression are all the more effective because they operate in the institutions of civil society (family, school, media, activist sphere), are based on hegemonic cultural norms and mobilize diffuse but powerful affects - shame, fear of rejection, desire for conformity.

Although it shares with *soft repression* (Ferree, 2005) an emphasis on symbolic exclusion, ridicule, and normative discipline without overt coercion, *inverted infrapolitics* designates a specific configuration in which these techniques are embedded in a moral economy of loyalty and vigilance. Here, repression is not simply reactive; it is proactively cultivated through everyday interactions to police boundaries, align subjectivities, and reassert an imagined hegemonic stability. This concept thus makes visible how practices rooted in a self-ascribed or partial marginality can act as active agents of ideological reproduction. The mechanisms of *soft repression* specific to this configuration are therefore best understood when situated within the broader relational logic of *inverted infrapolitics*.

In the digital spaces of the far right, these mechanisms are systematically exploited. Recent work on online radicalization shows that mocking humor, viral memes, antifeminist parody or coded insults (such as "feminazi", "wokeist", "NPC") function as tools of moral disqualification and ideological homogenization (Ging, 2019; Ebner, 2020; Nagle, 2017). Through these devices, the digital far right produces particularly effective forms of soft repression, marginalizing dissenting voices by making them laughable, emotionally toxic or politically suspect. Activist cyberstalking - often orchestrated in the form of collective raids against journalists, academics or feminist activists - operates not only as a threat, but above all as a symbolic setting down, aimed at disqualifying speech, producing silence or internalizing self-censorship (Massanari, 2017; Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

In this way, soft repression enables groups that conceive of themselves as marginal to deploy, in and from civil society, a form of inverted cultural domination, based not on direct coercion, but on affective and discursive exclusion (Ganesh, 2025). This dynamic differs from a counter-cultural stance in that it does not seek to create an alternative cultural order opposed to the mainstream. Rather, it operates as a conservative reorientation of existing hegemonic values, pushing them toward more exclusionary and hierarchical interpretations. In this sense, it functions as an inverted cultural domination: not the subversion of dominant norms, but their reinforcement and radicalization, akin to a cultural "Overton window" shift toward the authoritarian end of the spectrum.

Far from being a state strategy, this soft repression is here endogenous, viral, communal - and constitutes a central lever in the metapolitical enterprises of the far right online (Norocel, 2022). Metapolitics refers to the strategic effort to transform cultural values, common sense, and symbolic norms as a precursor to political

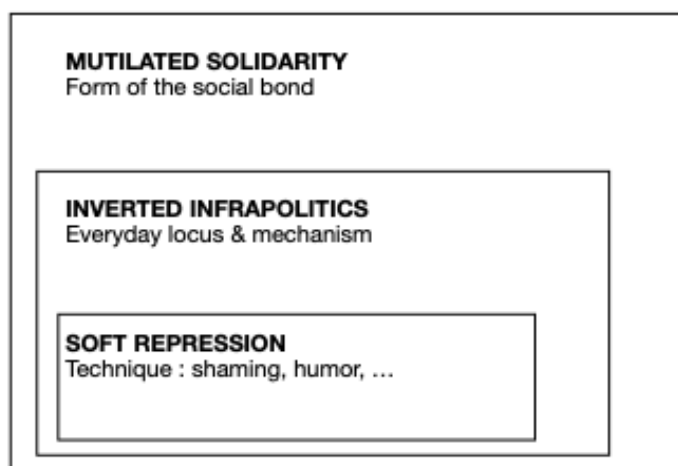
2. On the broader genealogy of these affects, see Illouz (2023), who identifies fear, disgust, resentment, and national pride as core emotional repertoires of contemporary far-right populism, operating as boundary-making devices rather than merely individual feelings.

change (Ganesh, 2025). Rather than seizing institutional power directly, metapolitical projects seek to reshape the ideological terrain by embedding specific worldviews into everyday discourse and affective life (Bures, 2023).

This model allows us to consider how political communities, without access to a monopoly of legitimate violence, can nevertheless produce powerful effects of control. In digital spaces, these logics are reinforced by the virality of content, asymmetrical attention regimes and the performativity of humor or derision (Askanius, 2021 ; Schradie, 2019). Within this framework, soft repression becomes an ordinary mode of collective governmentality, exercised through the rhetoric of solidarity, loyalty or authenticity.

It is therefore possible to conceive of certain forms of infrapolitics as the ordinary effects of a successful metapolitical strategy. Recent work (Foessel and Ollion, 2024) describes how the far right infiltrates everyday life, affects and shared evidence. Their use of the term infrapolitics remains fragile, however, insofar as it is not clearly distinguished from metapolitics. Rather than opposing them, we can think of them together: metapolitics seeks to valorize certain already hegemonic social dispositions - attachment to the nation, traditional moral order, rejection of marginalized groups - and infrapolitics designates the moment when these dispositions are internalized as self-evident, without recourse to explicit ideological discourse. Metapolitics operates at the level of cultural norms and worldviews through an intentional discursive and political project aimed at achieving cultural hegemony, whereas infrapolitics refers to more implicit and self-evident practices embedded in everyday life. Thus, eating meat or expressing a national preference are not in themselves political acts; but in a context structured by metapolitics, they can become implicit markers of allegiance, reinforcing a normative order without ever having to be named.

Figure 1. - Conceptual nesting of solidarity, infrapolitics and repression. The outer layer (mutilated solidarity) describes the type of social bond. Within it, an intermediate layer (inverted infrapolitics) captures how regulation unfolds in everyday interactions. At the core, soft repression refers to the specific techniques.



Source: Author

Taken together, these three concepts provide an analytical lens for studying how solidarity can function as a mechanism of ideological regulation. Mutilated solidarity designates the form of the social bond: a

relationship that retains the appearance of mutual aid while serving exclusionary and hierarchical logics. Inverted infrapolitics specifies the everyday, horizontal mechanisms through which this bond is enacted and monitored among peers, through implicit norms, affective pressures, and informal sanctions. Soft repression, finally, refers to the concrete techniques---ridicule, shaming, moral disqualification---by which dissent is silenced and conformity is enforced. Rather than three separate processes, these layers operate in tandem: mutilated solidarity enables soft repression through inverted infrapolitics. This framework guides our empirical analysis of how seemingly supportive relational ties contribute to the reproduction of ideological order within far-right online environments.

3. Observations in a socio-digital context

3.1. Ethnographic method in socio-digital context

The analysis is based on a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2002; Branthonne, 2019), understood as a method of ethnographic inquiry applied to digital communities. This approach makes it possible to articulate prolonged observation of an online space - here, a Discord server named *Le Bastion*³ - with an interpretative reading of discursive interactions, affective regularities and implicit structures of legitimation. Following Kozinets' (2002) proposal, netnography aims to capture the social meanings produced within specific digital ecosystems, taking seriously the cultural density of textual exchanges as forms of collective life. It thus enables us to produce a situated reading of digital uses in their political, symbolic and affective dimensions.

Given the ideological orientation of the group studied and the potential risks for the researcher, the observation was conducted under a fabricated identity designed to pass as an ordinary user.⁴ This form of deception --- common in digital ethnography on extremist or high-risk communities --- was necessary to ensure the safety of the researcher and to preserve the authenticity of interactions, while minimizing the risk of drawing attention to the research activity. The group, its members, and all excerpts cited have been anonymized, with identifying details altered or omitted to prevent any traceability. This posture implies a long immersion in the observed space, between October 2022 and January 2023, without active participation but with a daily presence in the main discussion channels, notably the General channel. My participation remained minimal and non-intrusive: I only intervened when directly addressed or when participation was structurally required to maintain my presence in the group (e.g. mandatory polls or votes). This withdrawn approach is in line with methodological debates on the role of the researcher in sensitive digital terrains. As Branthonne et Waldispuehl (2019) points out, unobtrusive observation makes it possible to minimize the effects of disruption and preserve the authenticity of interactions.

The empirical material analysed consists of non-private textual exchanges posted in thematic channels visible to all members (n = 16,256 text messages). These channels functioned as semi-public spaces where content is archived server-side. All usernames and potentially identifying elements were anonymised. Data analysis was based on a dual logic: on the one hand, an inductive description of interactional scripts, forms of

3 "Le Bastion" is a fictitious name used here to preserve the anonymity of the community studied.

4 The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board of the Université de Montréal, which was my home institution at the time of data collection.

self-narrative and affective uses of solidarity; on the other, a critical analysis of discourse inspired by the work of Sengul (2025), enabling us to identify rhetorical strategies (victim narratives, euphemization, humiliating humor) as well as implicit forms of ideological regulation. Netnography was thus mobilized as a framework for thinking together the dynamics of ideological sharing, surveillance and socialization in a normative discursive environment. In this sense, the aim of the analysis is not so much to catalogue explicit hate speech as to understand how a community is constituted as a space for the production of subjective norms, legitimate affects and conditional solidarities.

3.2 An online community of reactionary mutual aid

Le Bastion is a French-speaking digital community founded in 2021 by one of the most-followed far-right influencers on French-speaking social media. Closely connected to figures such as Papacito, the Raptor, Bruno le Salé, Valek, and Léo des Phylogynes. The founder positioned the community as both a space of mutual aid and an ideological training ground for a predominantly young male audience. Some prominent figures of the French far-right digital sphere contribute to the network by providing training through video capsules or interviews. The founder claims to have left higher education out of rejection of a system he describes as ideologically biased, elitist and out of touch with reality. This personal story of rupture fuels the legitimization of his community project, presented as a cultural, educational and existential alternative for a mainly young, male audience in search of bearings.

The network was launched simultaneously on Telegram and Discord. The Discord server, accessible by invitation, served as the organizational heart, with up to 900 members at its peak. *Le Bastion's* Discord server was structured around several dozen text channels organized by theme. This modular architecture aimed to cover all spheres of members' daily lives, while promoting autonomy, competence and community cohesion. In addition, the server offered channels geared towards internal coordination (Announcements, Role & Regions App), individual progress (Health & Wellbeing, Productivity, Bodybuilding, 30-Day Challenge), and pragmatic mutual aid (Jobs, Taxation, Physio-Biomecha Testing). A series of specialized lounges also offered training resources in technical or entrepreneurial fields: Crypto, E-commerce, Finance, IT, Real Estate, English Language, Business, Marketing, etc. Other, less central spaces were dedicated to creative productions (Creations, Digital Paintings, Books, Video Editing, Music), digital culture (Video Games, Short Instagram, Insta Page Tiktok, Mangas NFT), or more informal and anecdotal exchanges (Anecdotes, Testimonials, No Mic's Land).

Among all the channels, some were particularly active and constituted the central nodes of interaction: General, Seduction, Finance, Presentations, Your services and Copywriting. These spaces concentrated the bulk of daily discussions, advice and biographical narratives, reflecting members' key preoccupations with social relationships, economic development and symbolic recognition. This thematic distribution, combined with the implicit prioritization of the most frequented channels, illustrates the group's desire to structure a multifunctional community, invested in personal development, gender relations, technical learning and economic collaboration, while ensuring a strong discursive framing via its most active channels.

The organization maintains a presence on both Discord and Telegram. Discord functions as the main digital infrastructure, concentrating most of the everyday activity, knowledge-sharing, mentorship and ideological discussion. Telegram, by contrast, is used primarily for logistical coordination: local chapters are organized by geographic region and serve to facilitate offline meetups. During the period of observation, I was included in

one such regional Telegram group (approximately 30 members), which organized two offline gatherings (a restaurant meeting and a hike). I did not attend these in-person activities. Given this division of labor between platforms, focusing on Discord provides access to the core communicative and interactional dynamics of "Le Bastion," while Telegram adds information about local coordination rather than discursive content.

The network's identity is based on a logic of "protection", which *Le Bastion* makes explicit through a series of publications on Instagram, notably in a story featuring its emblem (a sword surrounded by twigs) and the three fundamental pillars of its project. The first pillar is identified as knowledge: members have access to a library of in-house content (podcasts, videos, documents) aimed at training them in areas related to personal development, persuasive expression and economic autonomy (copywriting, marketing, communication, etc.). The second pillar is strength: this focuses on physical consolidation through the weekly practice of combat sports, in particular boxing, following on from a former combat club project (a fight club). These training sessions aim to reinforce endurance, assertiveness and collective cohesion. The third pillar, presented as fraternity, refers to all interpersonal relationships, community rituals and mutual aid between members, both online and in the coordination of offline activities. This relational dimension forms the emotional basis of the group, conceived as a space of belonging and mutual loyalty.

Based on an optional self-declared survey conducted by the server administrators, 513 out of approximately 900 members provided information on their socio-professional category (Table 1). Respondents were mainly concentrated in marketing and web-related occupations (26%), followed by students (22%), crafts (14%) and finance (12%). These categories were predefined by the administrators and reflect the community's orientation toward digital entrepreneurship rather than a sociological classification. As participation to the survey was optional and limited to roughly half of the members, these data should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative.

Regarding demographic traits such as gender, race or socioeconomic background, no systematic data collection was conducted and such attributes were not explicitly requested by the administrators. Based on usernames, avatars, self-presentations and interactional cues, the group appeared overwhelmingly male. Only one member explicitly self-identified as a woman, and three others appeared to be women based on indirect cues, suggesting that female participation was extremely marginal. This aligns with findings on male-dominated digital subcultures oriented toward entrepreneurship, performance and antifeminist worldviews.

Although the network officially closed in 2023 to make the group more selective according to its creator, some of its former members and coordinators continue their activities via other digital channels or related projects. Over a period of two years, *Le Bastion* has thus built up a hybrid, structured community structure, combining digital tools, training practices, group culture and a desire for territorial roots.

4. Solidarity as a Factory of Compliant Subjectivity

The concept of the alternative counterpublic (a contraction of ultra-alternative) proposed by Copeland (2024) sheds light on the dual dynamics of inverted infrapolitics at work in the community studied. Taking up Nancy Fraser's criticism of the Habermasian model (1990), Copeland distinguishes between ultra-alternative counterpublics and subaltern counterpublics: while the latter emerge from structural exclusion, the former are formed around resentment linked to a perceived loss of power, and not to an initial lack of access to the public

sphere. Within this framework, the observed group presents itself publicly as a stigmatized and marginalized collective - a counter-public opposed to a supposed feminist or progressive hegemony. But its internal exchanges reveal an entirely different dynamic: that of a reinforcement of internal hierarchies, normative symbolic control, and informal mechanisms of moral regulation akin to what Ferree (2005) calls soft repression.

More precisely, two forms of this soft repression are to be found in group practices: at the micro level, processes of ridicule serve to discredit members who deviate from the collective's implicit norms, thus reinforcing a surface ideological conformity; at the meso level, a strategic use of stigmatization makes it possible to marginalize certain internal positions or delegitimize critics, consolidating group cohesion around a victimized narrative. The alternative counter-public thus operates in a paradoxical register: it asserts a position of domination in the public sphere, while reinstating mechanisms of symbolic domination in its private spaces. This ambivalence - minoritization displayed externally, domination reproduced internally - constitutes a discursive regime peculiar to alternative counterpublics, which aim not at equality or inclusion, but at the restoration of a hierarchical order deemed legitimate. It's not so much a question of emancipation as of reasserting a lost authority, by forging an *entre-soi* of consolation and control.

Excerpts from the "Presentation" Channel

"Tired of wasting my time with people who don't get it, at least here we speak the truth. Goal: get back in shape and build something solid, for me and my own." (IronWolf_93)

"Cut ties with my old crowd, too much follower mentality. I want to level up, surround myself with reliable guys, and stop depending on those who make decisions for us." (Bastion_Rogue)

"Done with the lazy mindset this country pushes. I'm here to get back to real values, surround myself with people who aren't afraid to put in the work and stand their ground." (IronOak_17)

"Here to improve, stop rotting away. If you don't move, no one will do it for you." (VigilantBear)

The following subsections aim to show how the group's public transcripts participate in the elaboration of a counter-hegemonic discourse of victimization, which mimics subaltern rhetoric while defending traditional hegemonic positions (gendered order, fiscal nationalism, moral authoritarianism). Private transcripts, on the other hand, reveal a solidarity operating as a form of inverted infrapolitics: not a tactic of discreet resistance by the dominated, but a collective micro-discipline reinforcing the group's ideological order. This disjunction between emancipatory façade and internal authoritarian practices allows us to read solidarity not only as a mode of affective adhesion, but as a tool of ideological conformity within a counter-public that seeks not inclusion, but the restoration of domination.

4.1. Self-Narratives as Rituals of Ideological Alignment

Presentation messages are one of the first public transcripts performed within the group. They help to build an image of a stigmatized and deserving community, by reproducing the rhetorical codes of a narrative of personal regeneration after a phase of decline. This staging of a shameful past, followed by a commitment to self-

discipline, contributes to the self-construction of the collective as an alternative counter-public: a minority, fighting against a world perceived as degenerate. Yet these narratives are highly standardized, and deviations are quickly mocked, according to a logic of normative ridicule typical of soft repression at the micro level (Ferree, 2005). Recognition comes not from sincerity, but from conformity to the collective script. This presentation device thus becomes a technique of affective and ideological alignment, within a space that tolerates only compliant subjectivities.

These presentations borrow directly from the discursive codes of life coaching and masculinist entrepreneurship, as circulated by the network's creator in his own content (videos, newsletters, Telegram publications). Members take up his keywords ("cloud", "sovereignty", "independence", "loyalty", "retreat", etc.) and adopt a reflexive posture in line with them: having failed, but wanting to succeed, having let themselves go, but now ready to rise. Far from designating a stable identity, this self-narrative acts as a legitimizing rite: it enables each individual to negotiate his or her place in the community by showing that he or she has understood its implicit rules, that he or she knows how to reproduce its rhetorical codes and dominant affects. This type of explicit judgment, formulated by an active member of the General Channel - "You're not doing the job, you're surprised you're not making progress, but there's nothing magical about it" - sanctions any posture perceived as wait-and-see, and illustrates the way in which symbolic recognition depends on conformity to the performance narrative.

In this sense, these presentation narratives have a dual function. On the one hand, they operate as a narrative alignment tool: they reduce the diversity of individual trajectories to a shared scenario of decline followed by regeneration. On the other hand, they serve to resolve a central tension of male subjectivity within the community. Many members describe personal situations perceived as contradictory to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity promoted by the group (unemployment, isolation, psychological suffering, emotional or material dependence). The biographical narrative enables them to make sense of this discrepancy, framing it as a temporary ordeal that does not call into question their value, provided they affirm their desire for transformation. Thus, failure is only acceptable if it is recounted as the starting point for an ascent that must be achieved alone, through discipline, willpower and merit.

4.2. Seduction as a lever for politicization

Table 1 reports the distribution of thematic codes assigned to 5,001 text messages drawn from the Discord server. Coding was performed at the level of the message, and a single message could produce multiple occurrences (i.e., multi-label coding). The coding scheme was deductive and based on a predefined dictionary of themes implemented in MaxQDA, and all coding was performed by a single coder. Percentages indicate the share of total coded occurrences. The most frequent theme---heterosexual seduction (23.28%)---reflects the high salience of masculine performance and gendered self-presentation across channels rather than the activity of a single dedicated "seduction" channel.

While the "seduction" channel presents itself as a space for mutual affective support, it functions above all as a private, normative transcript, revealing the virilist grammar that structures the community. Far from allowing a plurality of masculine experiences, this space frames and sanctions emotions through processes of affective stigmatization, in the sense of Ferree (2005), which operates at a meso level: naming and disqualifying behaviors perceived as weak, deviant or gender-bending. Far from the image of a supportive,

vulnerable collective projected to the outside world, the private transcript of the "seduction" channel reveals a disciplinary logic, where solidarity becomes conditional and corrective. This reversal fully illustrates the dynamic of the alternative counter-public: a space where male complaint becomes proof of lucidity, and where the dominant gendered order is reaffirmed as a natural truth.

Far from allowing a plurality of masculine experiences, this solidarity is built on a process of affective homogenization, where listening and caring are reinterpreted through a logic of hierarchy and performance. Care becomes an instrument of informal control, a form of soft repression (Ferree, 2005): affects deemed "weak" (love, doubt, guilt) are disqualified by derision and the staging of a conquering masculinity. The support offered by the collective is thus conditional and normative: its aim is not to welcome emotions, but to channel them into a script of virilist resilience. One member declares: "Seduction is like working out or boxing, you have to work your mind and not cry", underlining the analogy between bodywork and the shaping of affect - characteristic of neo-fascist masculinities (Tebaldi and Burnett, 2025). An influent member summed up this vision on the general channel: "Stop with your moods, you're not in a Care Bears' home here".

These discourses are particularly powerful vectors in the group, since flirting is the first topic of discussion (See Table 1). The theme of women - most often in the context of a current or past relationship of one of the members - which is part of essentializing and objectifying narratives, is also part of a masculinist discourse of male-female differences and male victimization.

The intervention of rare women in the network sometimes disrupts exchanges. The anti-gender position is then disrupted and becomes the subject of negotiation in the interpretation of ordinary phenomena such as women's feeling of insecurity in the street. One woman who spoke on the subject qualified her testimony by pointing out that a woman can also aspire to be virile in order to avoid feeling insecure in the street. She describes herself as virile. Some (male) members rebound on this woman's comments, ironizing that all the women in the network are "bonhommes", unlike the "leftists" who only network with "effeminate men".

Table 1. - Themes most discussed in text conversations

Themes	Occurrences	Percentage
<i>Heterosexual seduction</i>	1164	23.28
<i>Economy</i>	853	17.06
<i>Education & vocational training</i>	676	13.52
<i>Men</i>	556	11.12
<i>Women</i>	381	7.62
<i>Culture (video games excluded)</i>	303	6.06
<i>Insults</i>	240	4.80
<i>Video games</i>	233	4.66
<i>Self-help practices</i>	150	3.00
<i>French politics</i>	123	2.46
<i>Armed conflicts around the world</i>	103	2.06
<i>Feminism</i>	70	1.40
<i>Immigration</i>	61	1.22
<i>Religion</i>	46	0.92
<i>Health & hygiene</i>	42	0.84
Totals	5001	100.00

The intervention of female members often reinforces the anti-egalitarian stance, as they agree with most of the anti-feminist and masculinist comments, believing that they are here "to meet real men". To be treated as equals, the women in the group must adopt a masculine gender performance, but this excludes them from any affective relationship with the men in the group. This tends to underline the impossibility of envisaging male-female equality.

Excerpts from the female members' interventions

"Yeah, I'm fine pushing harder... but you can still open the door for me." (RoseWolf)

"I'll do my part, you do yours." (ShadowBelle)

The last comment alludes to a complementary (but unequal) division of tasks within a couple, reinforcing traditional gender roles despite women's partial adoption of "masculine" codes to integrate.

Although explicit discussions of immigration represent a small share of the coded corpus (1.22%, 61/5,001 occurrences), the theme operates as a background matrix rather than as a discrete topic. Immigration functions as an unspoken horizon that renders work and family formation more difficult, feeding into a civilizational narrative according to which contemporary young men struggle to "succeed" (find stable employment, build a household) due to demographic and cultural threats. In this sense, references to employment (17.06%) and seduction/couple formation (23.28%) indirectly stage anxieties about demographic decline without naming immigration explicitly. This articulation corresponds to a broader pattern in the French far right, where economic and intimate life are reframed as domains of civilizational survival, and immigration is invoked less as a policy issue than as a diffuse condition shaping prospects of work, marriage, and social reproduction (Boursier, 2022, 2025).

5. Control Through Humor, Humiliation and Competition

The solidarity that underpins *Le Bastion* is not confined to explicit gestures of mutual aid and cooperation. It also operates in more diffuse, affective, and normative forms that share with what James C. Scott (1990) calls *infrapolitics* their informal and implicit character. Yet, unlike Scott's formulation --- which describes the discreet resistance practices of heavily dominated groups --- what is observed here corresponds to an inverted *infrapolitics*: informal and implicit modes of control within a politically cohesive community, aimed at reinforcing rather than challenging hegemonic norms.

In this context, solidarity becomes a vector of informal discipline: it corrects, guides and sanctions, without ever declaring itself as such. By presenting itself as a form of fraternal benevolence, it is in reality a mutilated solidarity (DuFord 2022), which channels emotions into a regime of virile performance and disqualifies any expressive otherness.

In this space, mocking humor, virile challenges and the denunciation of the "weak" operate as sorting technologies, stabilizing an exclusive fraternity. We find here the imprint of the alternative counter-public, where solidarity functions as a test of ideological conformity, not as a lever for emancipation. The predominance of interactions based on male homosociality contributes to the valorization of hegemonic masculinity. This valorization leads not to solidarity as understood as "power with one another", but more as individual acts that seek to maintain dominance, "power-over" others and undesirables (DuFord, 2022, p. 83). Their actions are therefore not designed to reinforce power with other men, but to exert power over the women they feel have offended them.

5.1. Ridicule as a Mechanism of Silencing and Discipline

Humor is particularly appreciated by the far right online, as it helps justify aggressive and discriminatory behavior, minimizing its negative impact (Vey & Perrier, 2022). In *Le Bastion*, this function structures homosocial interaction. It creates and maintains a sense of belonging through the sharing of a common sense of humor (Steer et al., 2020).

A significant proportion of exchanges (around 10%) take the form of text jokes or images (GIFs) containing insults or mockery. Half are aimed at other members of the group, or at public figures liked by the group. The other half targets the group's political enemies (women, feminists, homosexuals, Muslims, Jews and leftists). These observations partially echo those of Cristina Flesher Fominaya (2015) in her analysis of humor within Madrid's autonomous movements. In these collectives, laughter also serves as a regulator of tensions, a marker of belonging, and a means of implicitly managing conflicts.

In *Le Bastion*, internal conflicts do not give rise to any explicit regulation procedure. They are contained and neutralized by ridicule, according to a logic of emotional minimization. When a disagreement or complaint is expressed, it is immediately reframed by irony, mockery or accusations of ingratitude. In an exchange observed on the #No Mic's Land channel, one member blames the team for a loss of meaning in the project: he is immediately mocked by another who writes: "Step 1: pay for a personal development service. Step 2: play LoL vocally. Step 3: complain. Step 4: want to 'talk quietly'". Humor here acts as an affective mechanism of decedibilization: by deriding the request for discussion, the group maintains the appearance of consensus without ever addressing the substance of the disagreement. This dynamic of disqualification is reflected in formulas that have become almost proverbial on the server: "Are you going to cry or are you going to create content?", which makes emotional expression an obstacle to community productivity.

Unlike the autonomous collective observed by Flesher Fominaya, where humor coexists with spaces for debate and can target external adversaries, *Le Bastion* uses laughter as a substitute for any formalized internal regulation. As Scott (1990) notes, infrapolitics works by dodging and avoiding: it serves to neutralize dissent by turning criticism into a lapse in taste or a sign of immaturity, thereby preventing the emergence of any productive controversy.

Moreover, far from targeting figures or institutions in positions of power (as in the collective observed by Fominaya), the humor observed here focuses on members deemed deviant or non-conforming, reducing empathy toward them and consolidating a virilist and hierarchical order. This internal orientation turns humorous cohesion into a tool of ideological and disciplinary control, rather than a critical resource directed outward.

That said, even in *Le Bastion*, humor also plays a structuring role in creating affective bonds and developing friendships within the group. When addressed to members of *Le Bastion*, it often represents the only form of affection members express in writing. Whether in the form of affectionate nicknames, shared stories, or recurring jokes, laughter produces a common language that facilitates mutual recognition and the feeling of belonging to a "we" (Knight, 2010).

By reducing empathy for those who fall outside majority norms (Steer et al., 2020), it facilitates their exclusion from the political vision unfolding in the community. Humor thus fully plays its role as a "social marker" enabling individuals to signal their belonging (Knight, 2010; Sinkeviciute, 2019). Thus, in *Le Bastion*, humor reinforces social cohesion (Knight, 2010) while excluding individuals who don't fit the group's norms. Humor is therefore the main vehicle not only for hatred, but also for friendship.

5.2. Mockery and Irony as Tools of Belonging and Exclusion

Humor in *Le Bastion* is not just a regulatory mechanism: it acts as a weapon of gentle ostracism, making it possible to exclude without excluding, to marginalize without banishing. Through a double-trigger rhetoric - ironic on the surface, disciplinary in depth - it codifies legitimate ways of expressing, criticizing or positioning oneself. In an extract from the general channel, one member proposes a discussion on the evolution of the group. Another responds immediately: "When you come to someone's house, you don't change the color of the curtains when you don't like it. You adapt... or you don't come back". The humorous, metaphorical form of the comment makes it possible to invalidate the criticism without coming across as authoritarian: humor operates here as a technique for calling someone to order, socially acceptable because it's disguised. Mocking humor also targets attempts at intellectual distinction: "Bro, you've read three Jordan Peterson books and you think you're ready for *Le Bastion*? 🧠", reinforcing an anti-elitist ethos based on loyalty rather than knowledge.

This type of posture is part of a troll aesthetic directly inherited from the digital culture of jeuxvideo.com's 18-25 forum. This forum, historically perceived as a space for juvenile, sarcastic and provocative expression, became one of the hotbeds of the French fachoosphere in the years 2000-2010. It saw the emergence of the first nuclei of radical male online mobilization, and served as a springboard for figures such as Alain Soral, whose videos were massively relayed, commented on and hijacked on this forum (Montagner, 2020). The atmosphere that reigns there - a mixture of dark humor, playful aggression and the staging of cynicism - still structures many extreme right-wing online spaces today.

In *Le Bastion*, this trollish culture manifests itself in the trivialization of verbal humiliations, the use of mocking nicknames and disparaging analogies, and the revival of figures of speech from forums. Messages such as "don't bother being a victim", "this isn't UNESCO", or "you're fragile or something" are part of this discursive economy, where humor depoliticizes tensions while reaffirming a symbolic hierarchical order. The use of laughter is therefore not neutral: it serves to define the group's boundaries, to disqualify expressions deemed too serious or too sensitive, and to reproduce virilist norms through shared derision.

5.3. Meritocratic Solidarity and the Virilist Logic of Performance

One of the clearest expressions of mutilated solidarity in *Le Bastion* lies in the normalization of performance as a condition of belonging. Mutual aid is neither unconditional nor based on equality of principle: it is conditional on the member's productive usefulness, on his or her ability to "create value", in the words used by the network's trainers. The insistence on independence, entrepreneurship and productivity is evident both in training courses and in informal exchanges: "if you don't invest yourself, you won't progress".

This system of interaction functions like a competition, in which everyone is called upon to prove their social and economic profitability. This logic excludes not only the unproductive, but also the complainers: "Guys who complain, you contribute nothing, you tire everyone out", reminds one member, linking emotional expression to social uselessness. Here we find a clear variation of what Elsa Dorlin (2011) conceptualizes as dark care: a form of care that is constrained, asymmetrical and disciplinary, in which care is not freely offered, but imposed on certain people, with the aim of control rather than support. In this framework, care is instrumentalized to reward effort, channel emotions and disqualify any form of vulnerability or dependence. Active members congratulate progress, encourage discipline and offer targeted "support" - but this support is always conditional on individual performance. Here, care is captured by a meritocratic and virilistic logic, which aims less to support than to produce a compliant subject.

For example, in an exchange on the #Productivity channel, a member shares his mental exhaustion after several weeks of effort: the only response he receives is an injunction to "get up earlier" and "get out of your comfort zone". Similarly, the encouragement given in the #Muscultation channel never values listening to one's body or taking care, but insists on surpassing oneself, on pain, on regularity, in a logic of competitive stoicism. This mutilated version of care - virilized, utilitarian, authoritarian - evacuates the relational and horizontal dimension of care, turning it into a disciplinary mechanism. As the founder explains in an internal message about the Group's re-founding: "When you offer a quality service, don't hesitate to set high prices. This will serve as a natural barrier to discourage malicious or poorly qualified people." Care is thus accessible only to the deserving, and the rest are excluded in the name of a requirement for community excellence. In this configuration, dark care not only produces exclusionary effects: it becomes the heart of a mutilated solidarity, where the appearance of care conceals a logic of prioritization of lives worthy of support.

5.4. A Mutilated Solidarity: From Collective Promise to Political Disengagement

The dynamics observed at *Le Bastion* reveal a form of solidarity that does not lead to collective politicization, but to ideologically marked individuation. Far from fostering the emergence of a shared political consciousness or a collective project for social transformation, the mutual aid offered steers individual trajectories towards "survival" strategies: personal development, economic optimization, physical improvement. This orientation suggests a withdrawal from politics, not in the sense of apathy, but a refocusing on individual performativity as the only legitimate form of emancipation. Crucially, this individuation is not neutral: it is articulated through hegemonic masculine (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) norms of self-reliance, emotional stoicism, competitiveness and anti-dependence, which turn performance and survivalism into gendered modes of subjective self-entrepreneurship (Gill, 2007; Ganesh, 2020). The collective then functions as a gas pedal of self-discipline, where solidarity becomes a spring of subjective self-entrepreneurship, capturing the impetus of politicization to channel it towards projects of self-transformation, not of the common world. This does not mean, however, that such individuation is devoid of political content. On the contrary, the cultivation of

performance, resilience and survivalism can contribute to the formation of political subjectivities aligned with authoritarian personality (Adorno, 1982), illustrating how individuation and reactionary politics can go hand in hand. This paradox is rooted in a highly standardized discursive structuring, where the self-narrative constitutes a codified rite of adhesion. Far from being a space for confrontation between subjectivities, the collective imposes a rhetorical mimicry based on shame, willpower, discipline and meritocratic ascension. In this context, solidarity appears as a mutilated form in the sense proposed by DuFord (2022): it retains the outward signs of mutual aid (listening, support, encouragement) but revokes the political conditions of democratic inclusion. Group membership is based on ideological and affective conformity, not on recognition of the plurality of experiences. Thus, any narrative divergence is interpreted as political dissonance, and as such, disqualified.

This homogenization of narratives is part of a logic of inverted infrapolitics, in which the public transcript - the display of a performative, aligned self - becomes the primary site for the exercise of power. Taking up Scott's (1990) conceptualization, infrapolitics no longer appears here as a space of silent resistance, but as a regime of affective micro-regulation, through which the group encodes and validates admissible subjectivities. Private transcripts - exchanges in small groups, direct messages, sub-forums - reveal forms of horizontal repression: ostracism, mockery, accusations of softness or betrayal, symbolic sanctions. Far from being places of free expression, these spaces become the heart of an inverted infrapolitical device, which guarantees the ideological stability of the group without the need for explicit injunctions. It's an implicit but highly constraining normative order, where emotional control is exercised in the name of "fraternity". This dynamic finds an illuminating echo in the concept of the alternative counter-public (Copeland, 2024). *Le Bastion* is not just a community of mutual aid: it is a space of resistance against a world perceived as degenerate, feminized and ideologically corrupt. It borrows the discursive forms of the subaltern counter-public, positing itself as minority and marginalized, but inverts its political substance. Where subaltern counterpublics seek emancipation from a dominated position, alternative counterpublics express resentment stemming from a position perceived as fallen (Copeland, 2024). It is not lack of access to public debate that defines them, but the belief that they have lost a historical right to centrality - a right to domination. In this context, mutilated solidarity becomes the mechanism for affective integration into a counter-public that aims not at transforming the world, but at restoring an imagined hierarchical order.

This conceptual triangulation - mutilated solidarity, inverted infrapolitics and alternative counterpublic - makes it possible to think together the subjective, structural and ideological dimensions of repression in reactionary online collectives. Where the classic analysis of militant communities' values forms of bonding as levers of politicization and transformation, the case studied here shows that there are also collectives where solidarity operates as a lock. It binds without freeing, it cares to discipline, it listens to correct. It produces a rigid, self-sufficient and depoliticized "us", which makes loyalty an end in itself. This reverse victim positioning, typical of the alternative counter-public, is expressed bluntly in the General channel: "Today's society is designed for the fragile and the assisted, we're here to take back what's ours." This claim to centrality reaffirms a hegemonic position that has fallen by the wayside. Thus, solidarity, far from being the opposite of repression, becomes its intimate and affective infrastructure - that by which order is reproduced in the margins, in silence, in the name of care.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined how solidarity, far from being inherently emancipatory, can operate as a mechanism of informal repression within ideologically cohesive far-right digital communities. By articulating the concepts of mutilated solidarity and inverted infrapolitics, the analysis contributes to a critical reconceptualization of solidarity as a potentially ambivalent relational form --- capable not only of fostering mutual aid, but also of enforcing ideological alignment and normative discipline.

The empirical investigation of *Le Bastion*, a now-defunct online self-help community organized around a far-right influencer, highlights how solidarity is mobilized to maintain ideological cohesion through affective regulation, symbolic sanctioning, and moral surveillance. Drawing on a 15-month netnographic immersion, the study documents how community practices --- ranging from self-narratives and seduction advice to humor and peer ridicule --- serve to normalize a worldview centered on virilist masculinity, meritocratic competition, and hierarchical loyalty.

Three main findings emerge from this analysis. First, solidarity within *Le Bastion* takes the form of mutilated solidarity, a conditional regime in which care, support, and recognition depend on ideological, affective, and behavioral conformity. Second, this regime produces inverted infrapolitics: micro-practices of horizontal regulation that operate beneath formal authority. Third, these practices crystallize as soft repression (Ferree, 2005), relying on ridicule, moral disqualification, and internalized shame rather than overt coercion. These dynamics are not marginal or subcultural but participate in broader processes of metapolitical normalization, through which far-right values diffuse across everyday routines and emotional grammars.

The article's main theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating how infrapolitics --- traditionally associated with subaltern resistance (Scott, 1990) --- when inverted can also operate as a mode of informal and implicit repression. It thereby complicates romanticized readings of informal politics and highlights the need to attend to the affective infrastructures of ideological reproduction. At the same time, the study refines the concept of mutilated solidarity, conceptualizing it as a relational regime that instrumentalizes care to enforce conformity and depoliticize dissent.

Several limitations must be acknowledged: this study concerns a single, relatively homogenous, self-selected community, and relies on observational traces without access to offline trajectories or reflexive accounts. Future research could compare similar communities across ideological spectrums or include interviews to better understand how individuals internalize or resist normative pressures. Despite these limitations, the study sheds light on the covert mechanisms through which far-right groups forge ideological adhesion --- not through explicit propaganda, but through everyday interactions that dress control in the language of solidarity.

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