

ANTI-SYSTEMIC EXTREMISM IN SERBIA

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KEY POINTS

- ◆ Anti-systemic extremism (ASE) tends to rise during major crises (e.g., COVID-19, economic and migration crises, the war in Ukraine) that erode public trust in democratic institutions. In Serbia, authoritarian tendencies and ongoing political instability provide particularly fertile ground for ASE;
- ◆ ASE is not a single ideology but a framework uniting actors who reject the institutions of the dominant system, as well as the principles upon which democratic society is based, often seeking to replace the current order with a more authoritarian, nationalist, or theocratic one;
- ◆ In Serbia's context, ASE grows amid public distrust in institutions, media manipulation, weak rule of law, and disappointment with the EU integration, focusing its critique primarily on the "global establishment";
- ◆ Six groups were analyzed, ranging from populist (e.g., *We – Voice from the People*, *MOBA Movement*) to openly extremist (*Zentropa*, *Zbor*, *Serbian Action*). While some operate within mainstream politics, others promote violence, racism, or clerical authoritarianism;
- ◆ Across these groups, recurring elements include: rejection of representative democracy, populist "people vs. elites" rhetoric, nationalism, clericalism, conspiracy theories, and anti-globalism. Some employ violent or exclusionary tactics, especially against migrants and minorities.

INTRODUCTION

Anti-systemic extremism (ASE) particularly grows, and its proponents gain prominence, during and after major societal crises to which the ruling class and system institutions fail to provide an adequate response. This was the case, for example, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2008 economic crisis, the migration crisis that peaked in 2015, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These events contributed to the erosion of trust in the institutions of nowadays democracy and, consequently, the rise of extremist ideas and movements. According to research from the University of Amsterdam, in the 2022 elections across 31 European countries, 32% of citizens voted for anti-system parties, compared with 20% of the population in the early 2000s who supported such parties.¹ In Serbia, the government's authoritarian tendencies and the now almost permanent political crisis provide fertile ground for anti-systemic extremism, thus further endangering democratic institutions and human rights.

This paper analyses ASE in Serbia, focusing on the ideologies and activities of its main proponents, but including socio-political context too. We selected six groups for analysis, each distinct from the others, which – compared to other extremist groups – demonstrate the strongest opposition to the dominant system and norms and, to varying degrees, explicitly advocate systemic change that runs counter to democratic principles and human rights. The analysis relies primarily on the selected groups' websites and media reports on their activities, while also providing a quantitative overview of their presence on social media.

THE PHENOMENON OF ANTI-SYSTEMIC EXTREMISM

Although it has roots in the ideas of radical leftists and anarchists movements from the 19th and 20th centuries, today's anti-systemic extremism (ASE) is predominantly a phenomenon of the right.² Understanding this phenomenon is complicated by the fact that ASE is not a monolith ideology or movement, but rather a socio-political framework that encompasses various ideas, groups, and individuals whose common denominator is dissatisfaction with the ruling system in the broadest sense and rejection of the government authority.³ The ASE narrative is directed against the institutions of the current order – such as government, courts, media, or universities – as well as against the principles upon which democratic society is based, such as equality, freedom, popular sovereignty, and the universality of human rights.

The distinction between legitimate criticism of the ruling system and class on the one hand, and anti-systemic extremism on the other, is sometimes blurred but nonetheless important. First, the legitimate criticism is fact-based and rational, while ASE relies heavily on conspiracy theories about "evil elites" that are factually incorrect.⁴ Second, legitimate criticism of the system, even a radical one, proposes changes that do not endanger basic democratic principles such as popular sovereignty, or the universality of human rights. ASE does not merely criticize the current system and elites, but the democratic order itself, advocating for its replacement with a system that would represent a step backward in terms of equality and democracy. For example, every leftist anti-capitalist movement is inherently anti-systemic, since capitalism is today a global system. However, criticism of capitalism is not necessarily opposed to democratic principles, equal rights for all, or the sovereignty of the people – quite the opposite. Right-wing anti-systemic extremists, on the other hand, typically call for a return to the "good old days," which is often an imagined past state that represents a regression compared to the current one.⁵

A recent internationally known example of an anti-systemic extremist movement is the “Reichsbürger” movement in Germany. Supporters of this movement reject the authority of the German state, claiming it has no right to govern and that the German Empire never ceased to exist, with the defeat and consequences of World War II being solely the result of foreign occupation. They express their discontent through activities such as refusing to pay taxes or surrender illegal weapons.⁶ One of the dominant features of ASE is conspiracy theories.⁷ The most well-known example is QAnon, which claims that politics and media are controlled by a group of Satanists running a child trafficking ring for sexual exploitation. There are also theories about the destruction of the “white race” and all the structures it has built. One such theory is “Eurabia” – a theory that claims EU leaders have secretly agreed with Muslim leaders to Islamize and Arabize Europe through Muslim migration.⁸

ANTI-SYSTEMIC EXTREMISM IN SERBIA

Criticism of the system in nominally democratic but essentially undemocratic and often authoritarian regimes – such as Serbia today – is not necessarily anti-systemic extremism. In such regimes, power is exercised through informal channels and rules that do not reflect the system defined by the constitution and laws.⁹ In that case, anti-systemic criticism and actions by individuals and movements are often directed against this informal system of rule and strive to reestablish order in accordance with the constitution and laws.

Serbia has been grappling for many years with politically passive citizens – people who have lost faith in the system and its institutions. The reasons for this are numerous. While global crises such as economic turmoils or the COVID-19 pandemic have affected Serbia as well, there are also locally specific factors. For example, the prolonged and extremely slow EU integration process has brought few tangible benefits to Serbian citizens, turning many against the EU and pro-EU actors and policies. In addition, the EU’s support for Balkan *stabilocrats*, as well as potentially harmful projects – such as lithium exploitation in Serbia – carried out at the expense of the rule of law and democracy, have further eroded trust in both European and national institutions tasked with protecting human rights and democratic processes.¹⁰

Moreover, the Serbian government’s tight grip on the majority of media outlets, combined with widespread distortion of facts, has created a situation in which citizens no longer know whom to trust. Almost one third of the Serbian citizens believe that Serbia is not a democracy, while half of them believe that democracy does exist, but with flaws.¹¹ The majority of citizens believe that the state institutions are corrupt and under the influence of various foreign and domestic actors, which lowers their trust in nominally democratic institutions.¹² Finally, decades of hardship – from the wars of the 1990s to the often-disappointing economic transition – have left large segments of the population economically exhausted, lacking both the time and energy to stay informed or engage in political processes.¹³ Under such circumstances, Serbia has become fertile ground for ASE.

We analyzed six ASE groups that differ significantly from one another. One of them, *We – Voice from the People*, belongs to the political mainstream – they participated in elections and entered national and local parliaments. Their platform is not extremist; it more closely resembles that of a typical conservative populist party. Nevertheless, *We – Voice from the People* was included in our analysis primarily due to their promotion of highly bizarre conspiracy theories, as well as their opposition to so-called “global elites,” rather than Serbian ones. The other organizations and groups analyzed express more explicit anti-systemic views: some openly reject representative democracy and the principle of equality, while others engage in violent actions, attempting to assume the role of law enforcement. What all the analyzed groups have in common is their opposition to the “global establishment” – not necessarily to the domestic one.

ANTI-SYSTEMIC EXTREMISM GROUPS IN SERBIA

We - Voice from the People

We – Voice from the People is a right-wing populist movement that won 4.82% of the popular vote in the 2023 parliamentary elections, securing 13 seats in the parliament. The movement was launched in March 2023 with a video presentation on its official YouTube channel, which soon became one of its primary platforms. *We – Voice from the People* was founded by seven men, all of whom had been frequent commentators on the pro-regime Happy TV, earning them the nickname “Happy Coalition.”¹⁴ Among them, the most prominent was Dr. Branimir Nestorović, a pediatric pulmonologist who gained public attention during the COVID-19 pandemic for his controversial and false statements about the virus¹⁵ and vaccines.¹⁶ However, Nestorović and another co-founder left the movement in February 2024 and formed a new group, *We – Power of the People*, which currently holds six seats in the National Assembly.

We – Voice from the People is a populist movement that claims to have a direct insight into the will of the people. In their founding presentation, they proclaimed:

“We are truly a voice from the people. We share the fate of the people. We feel, and we ourselves bear, the burden of our people; we share the people’s concern for our common future and that of our children; we know the aspirations of our people, and we know how many of us are ready to fight for our country and for our people.”¹⁷

Some of the movement’s key programmatic principles include: the assertion that sovereignty over Kosovo is the central issue of Serbian statehood; the rejection of EU integration as a strategic goal for Serbia; the protection of the right to legal firearm possession; the reorganization of the armed forces with the primary aim of “keeping Kosovo and Metohija within Serbia”; increased investment in agriculture; and the “decolonization of Serbia” from Western political, economic, and cultural influence.¹⁸ According to its stated principles, *We – Voice from the People* is not an anti-systemic or extremist organization but rather a conservative populist movement ideologically aligned with other right-wing nationalist political forces in Serbian society. However, the movement’s most prominent figure, Dr. Nestorović, is widely known for his public advocacy of anti-science claims, conspiracy theories, and strong opposition to the global establishment – although not to the Serbian establishment.

Until the split of the movement into two fractions, Nestorović was largely its personification, drawing authority from his successful pediatric practice. Despite the movement’s eventual participation in the 2023 elections, Dr. Nestorović had previously stated: “We were formed as an anti-system phenomenon. Therefore, we will not take part in the elections just to replace [the current power holders], as has been the case until now. [...] We want to change the system itself.”¹⁹ In contrast to this declared anti-system stance, *We – Voice from the People* not only took part in both parliamentary and local elections but was also seen by many as a Trojan horse against the opposition forces and for the ruling coalition.

Dr. Nestorović, who used to be the movement’s informal leader, rose to prominence at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, when he stated that “the coronavirus is the silliest virus in the history of mankind” and encouraged women to go shopping in Milan – despite the city being one of the areas hardest hit by the virus at the time.²⁰ He soon became a star on right-wing YouTube channels, most notably the *Balkan Info* show. During his media appearances, Dr. Nestorović has made numerous claims ranging from the bizarre to the dangerous. Among other things, he has spoken about portals to other dimensions allegedly controlled by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), shadowy global rulers seeking immortality, and unorthodox – and potentially hazardous – methods for curing cancer and COVID-19.²¹

Despite the highly bizarre conspiracy theories associated with *We – Voice from the People*, they did not deter voters or sympathizers – on the contrary. The movement’s appeal likely lies in the fact that it does not oppose the Serbian establishment, but rather targets the global one – an approach that resonates with the dominance of nationalism in Serbian society, as well as with longstanding grievances and a sense of injustice among the Serbian people. While criticism of global elites and the many economic and political injustices they perpetuate is both legitimate and necessary, unsubstantiated conspiracy theories do not offer a valid alternative. On the contrary, by appealing exclusively to emotion, such narratives undermine citizens’ capacity for critical thinking and open the door to various forms of abuse of power.

We – Voice from the People has the strongest digital presence among the analyzed actors. Their Telegram channel has 6,592 subscribers, with a relatively low engagement rate of 9%, which can be explained by the large number of posts – around 120 per week – making it difficult for the audience to actively engage with every post. On Facebook, they have 22,000 followers, while Instagram has 5,901, and Twitter/X has 4,257 users (table 2). These data clearly indicate that *We – Voice from the People* is the most prominent digital actor, with a particular focus on Facebook as the main platform for content distribution.

MOBA Movement

The MOBA Movement was founded in October 2023 through the merger of several previously existing groups. It is a right-wing populist movement, ideologically similar to *We – Voice from the People*, though significantly less popular and largely absent from the political mainstream. The movement advocates for systemic change, specifically calling for the abolition of representative democracy and professional politicians, and the introduction of direct democracy. Their vision of direct democracy is presented as follows:

“The state will be governed through direct democracy. We will not have professional politicians. Citizens will directly decide on all important social issues. Politics will serve the citizens, and political engagement will be limited to one year. It will be an honor for a citizen to serve their people – of course, without compensation – because the state is defended by personal example and love for the community.”²²

The economic policy of the MOBA Movement is strongly isolationist and based on the idea of “economic self-reliance, drawing on our national resources and the expertise of professionals from both within the country and abroad.”²³ However, the proposed economic program contains internal contradictions: while rejecting the “imposed neoliberal concept”²⁴ of economic activity, it simultaneously calls for liberal economic policies within the country, support for entrepreneurship, and even the development of a national cryptocurrency, the “Vinkoin.”²⁵ In essence, the MOBA Movement advocates for a liberal economy, but strictly within national borders.

Another contradiction appears in its vision of systemic change: while promoting a radically new political system, the movement also insists on upholding the current constitution – particularly with regard to the issue of Kosovo and claims to Serbia’s territorial integrity. As with other right-wing movements and parties, Kosovo holds a central place in MOBA’s ideology. The movement claims that Kosovo is under occupation and calls for its reintegration into the Serbian constitutional order, as well as the annulment of all Brussels Agreements related to normalization of relations and the initiation of criminal proceedings against those who signed or facilitated them.²⁶

The MOBA Movement also advocates for increased militarization of society and emphasizes traditional values, such as “returning the school and education system to the framework of Serbian history, culture, and tradition.”²⁷ Conspiracy theories and unscientific claims also play a prominent role in MOBA’s narratives. Notably, the movement promotes the idea that Serbs are descendants of the ancient Vinča civilization, which dates back more than 7,500 years and is considered the cradle of European civilization. Furthermore, they allege that this “truth” has been deliberately hidden from the Serbian people for decades.²⁸

The MOBA Movement has a relevant digital presence. It has 1,840 subscribers on Telegram with a high engagement rate of 32% and an average of 60 posts per week, indicating active communication. On Facebook, it has 14,000 followers, while its Instagram account is significantly larger with 24,200 followers, reflecting a strong visual impact. Twitter/X has 2,575 followers. Overall, MOBA demonstrates consistent and engaged activity across multiple platforms (table 2).

People's Patrols

People's Patrols is an informal right-wing group best known for its anti-migrant actions, which emerged in February 2020. The Patrols intercepted migrants on the streets of Belgrade and distributed flyers prohibiting them from being outside migrant centers between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., as well as from gathering in groups of more than three during the day. The group's self-proclaimed leader, Damnjan Knežević, explained that the actions of People's Patrols were coordinated by around thirty men who had previously been active in various "patriotic" movements and associations. "We are not the government, we are not the police, we will respond in the people's way, and that does not benefit anyone," he warned in 2020.²⁹

The group carried out actions outside Belgrade too, in several towns and cities with migrant centers. There, they harassed not only migrants, but also taxi drivers and restaurant owners who provided services to them.³⁰ In Sombor, the group hung posters on the streets displaying photographs and personal information of individuals who had provided accommodation to migrants. The police forwarded the case to the city's Prosecutor's Office, which ultimately decided not to press charges.³¹ Knežević himself admitted that the group had beaten migrants "in self-defence" before handing them over to the police.³²

People's Patrols are also known for their anti-vaccine stance. In September 2021, the group participated in a rally in Belgrade opposing mandatory COVID-19 vaccination, COVID passes, and the testing of children in schools. The rally was described by the organizers as "anti-globalist," rooted in the belief that vaccination is part of a globalist agenda that threatens the Serbian people and their traditions. Immediately after the protest, several individuals prevented *N1* reporter Vanja Đurić from doing her job by interrupting her on camera. Đurić later stated that she was attacked by members of People's Patrols.³³

Like all other Serbian far-right groups, People's Patrols are firmly opposed to Kosovo's independence and to negotiations between Serbian and Kosovo authorities. On February 15, 2023, they organized a protest in front of the Presidency building in Belgrade against the French-German proposal for the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, accusing the Serbian authorities of committing national treason. Members of the Gendarmerie prevented the protesters from entering the Presidency building. However, the Public Prosecutor filed an indictment against People's Patrols leader Damnjan Knežević and Dejan Zlatanović, a journalist for the right-wing portal *Srbinfo*, for their actions between February 12 and 15 – specifically, for inciting the violent overthrow of the President of the Republic both online and during the rally. The case is still ongoing.

All of People's Patrols' narratives are rooted in anti-globalism and Serbian nationalism – specifically, in the conspiracy theory that a global elite is running the world in opposition to the interests and identity of Serbian people, with the current Serbian government acting as their puppet. Even their xenophobic, anti-migrant rhetoric is grounded in conspiracy. For instance, Damnjan Knežević claimed that the Serbian government planned to grant residence to 750,000 migrants due to obligations under EU law.³⁴ Additionally, the xenophobic right in Serbia circulated the narrative that the government was using pandemic lockdowns as a cover to secretly settle migrants in the country. People's Patrols are anti-systemic, opposing both the Serbian regime and the so-called "global system." Although informal and ideologically aligned with many other far-right groups, what sets them apart is their call for citizens to take justice into their own hands and effectively reject institutional authority.³⁵

People’s Patrols dominate on Telegram with 9,995 subscribers and a very high engagement rate of 45%, posting about 30 times per week, which indicates active interaction with their audience. They have a modest following of 818 on Facebook, while their presence on Instagram and Twitter/X is somewhat stronger, with 1,243 and 996 followers respectively (table 2). This group primarily uses Telegram as their main channel for communication and influence.

Zentropa

Zentropa is an international network of ultra-nationalist organizations with branches in Latin America, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, and Serbia. Although they operate independently, all branches share a common goal: to promote a different vision of nationalism, which they refer to as “revolutionary nationalism”.³⁶ The Serbian branch of Zentropa is anti-systemic in that it is explicitly anti-democratic. Instead of endorsing democratic values, they promote an ideology rooted in “blood and soil.” They reject mainstream politics – including traditional forms of nationalism – and embrace a revolutionary worldview. Zentropa is, to varying degrees, openly fascist. For example, they idolize and uphold the legacy of British politician Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists. “Such a personality managed to create a true national movement, defending his country from the clutches of the Comintern and capitalism,” stated a post on Zentropa’s now-defunct website.³⁷ In recent years, the group has organized memorials in honor of General Milan Nedić, the head of the Nazi puppet regime in Serbia during World War II.³⁸ On social media, Zentropa also regularly commemorates members of fascist organizations, such as the Italian Social Movement.

Zentropa’s core narratives do not shy away from racist tropes, including concepts like “the European man,” “blood and soil,” “eternal principles woven into the genes of our people.”³⁹ Unlike many other far-right groups in Serbia, Zentropa emphasizes a different aesthetic for modern nationalism and criticizes what they call “nationalist kitsch” – the glorification of the past – which they view as outdated and disconnected from contemporary realities. Instead, they promote a forward-looking nationalism that seeks to adapt to the current zeitgeist.⁴⁰ Zentropa’s activities in Serbia are closely tied to Klub 451, a venue in Belgrade where they frequently gather and organize movie nights, book fairs, art exhibitions, and host international far-right groups and individuals.⁴¹ The group disseminates its messages through the Serbian edition of the international magazine “ZentroMag”, as well as through its YouTube channel, where it hosts two podcasts – one focused on history and mythology, and the other on current socio-political affairs.⁴²

Zentropa has a moderate Telegram community with 2,585 subscribers and a solid engagement rate of 33%, although they post infrequently, about three times per week. They have around 1,500 followers on Facebook, while Instagram is a much more popular platform with 5,142 followers. Their presence on Twitter/X is negligible, with only 31 followers (table 2). This indicates that Zentropa’s primary influence and activity come through Instagram and Telegram, while their presence on other networks remains marginal.

Zbor

The Serbian National Movement Zbor (hereinafter: Zbor) is a far-right organization that draws inspiration from the historical group of the same name, which operated in Yugoslavia between the two world wars and promoted fascist ideology. Zbor is an anti-systemic movement that characterizes the democratic system as a “political virus” and a “negation of authority.”⁴³ Their website states:

“The SNP Zbor rejects systemic struggle, i.e., a struggle that aims to change, improve, or replace the existing system with another system through partisanship, advocacy for democratic elections and voting, union struggle, public expression of dissatisfaction and protest rallies, and work in non-governmental organizations.”⁴⁴

Although Zbor claims to reject “anti-systemic struggle” aimed at replacing the current system, in practice they are an anti-systemic movement: they advocate for the creation of a “parallel system” that would coexist with the current societal order without directly confronting it.⁴⁵ Zbor’s vision is built on seven main pillars: a specific interpretation of Orthodox Christianity known as Svetosavlje,⁴⁶ preservation of racial purity, patriarchy, a cult of conquest, estate-based and absolute monarchy, chivalry rooted in neo-feudal principles, and an alternative educational system based on a counter-reformation of modern education.⁴⁷

According to Zbor’s ideology, some of the greatest evils facing the Serbian people are liberalism, democracy, Marxism, communism, pacifism, and multiculturalism. The source of all these evils is identified as the “Judeo-Masonic cult,” which, as Zbor claims, “works day and night to establish the anti-Christ empire.”⁴⁸ While Zbor formally rejects active confrontation with the current system, it implicitly endorses violence by denouncing pacifism and portraying war as essential to maintaining the vitality of the people. According to *Balkan Insight*, Zbor established a patriotism school called *Saint George*, which they promoted in a call for applications by describing the organization as an “ultra-elite movement and elite combat unit,” referring to prospective participants as “soldiers.”⁴⁹

Zbor has a very limited Telegram audience with only 152 subscribers but with high engagement rate of 35% despite infrequent posting (3 times per week). It has no presence on Facebook or Instagram, while on Twitter/X it has 351 followers (table 2). These data indicate that Zbor’s digital activity is minimal.

Serbian Action

Serbian Action is one of the longest-standing and most recognizable far-right organizations in Serbia. Its ideology is distinctly clerical and ethno-nationalist, with elements of neo-Nazism. The group is anti-systemic, opposing democracy, including parliamentary elections and individual rights, and instead advocates for an Orthodox monarchy, where the monarch’s legitimacy is justified by the concept of divine will.⁵⁰

According to the group’s webpage,

“the prudent order prescribed by Serbian tradition and faith implies a monarchical form of state power. The people’s submission to a monarch anointed by God represents both a symbolic and practical expression of national consent, placing the governance of the ‘Ship of the State-People’ in God’s hands. For these reasons, Serbian Action regards a true monarchy – led by an Orthodox ruler, whether in fraternal and paternalistic Russia or in Serbia itself – as the ideal state system.”⁵¹

In terms of economic organization, Serbian Action opposes both capitalism and communism, advocating instead for a so-called “middle system” that incorporates private, state, and collective property. However, the organization emphasizes that economic prosperity depends on a spiritual transformation – namely, the adoption of Christian values and the strengthening of national identity.⁵² In contrast to Marxist ideas, Serbian Action asserts that human beings are primarily spiritual in nature and that spiritual needs outweigh material ones. According to BIRN, Serbian Action maintains international ties with neo-Nazi, white supremacist, and other far-right organizations in Germany, Romania, Greece, Poland, Russia, and the United States.⁵³ Additionally, some of its members have fought in Ukraine on behalf of Russian-aligned groups, despite the Serbian Criminal Code prohibiting participation in foreign conflicts.⁵⁴

In 2014, a member of Serbian Action was arrested in Belgrade for inciting violence against the Roma population by distributing anti-Roma flyers branded with the organization’s insignia.⁵⁵ Serbian Action is also one of the main organizers of an annual memorial honoring Milan Nedić, a Serbian Nazi collaborator during World War II.⁵⁶

Serbian Action has 2,623 subscribers on Telegram with a solid engagement rate of 36% and an average of 10 posts per week. They have no presence on Facebook and Instagram, while on Twitter/X they have 197 followers (table 2). This indicates that Serbian Action’s online activity is primarily focused on Telegram, where they regularly engage their audience despite a relatively modest overall following.

COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Although the analysed ASE groups differ in structure, focus, size, and popularity, they share a deep and open antagonism toward representative democracy (with the exception of *We – Voice from the People* that in practice does not reject it), egalitarianism, multiculturalism, and what they perceive as the “global establishment.” While some of these groups are openly neo-Nazi, racist, and/or clerical, others resemble more traditional conservative nationalist forces within Serbian society. However, even those that do not immediately appear anti-systemic are prominent promoters of conspiracy theories about global elites.

Table 1: Comparative Overview of ASE groups

	We - Voice from the People	MOBA Movement	People's Patrols	Zentropa	Zbor	Serbian Action
Against (representative) democracy						
Against domestic establishment						
Against global establishment						
Conspiracy theories						
Populism						
Focus on Kosovo						
Xenophobia						
Racism/ Neo-Nazism						
Clericalism						
Violence/ violent threats						
Rejection of modernity/ Return to tradition						

	Absent
	Moderate/Implicit
	Strong/Explicit

The analyzed groups display varying degrees of opposition to the democratic system, state institutions, and international actors, and promote exclusionary or reactionary worldviews rooted in tradition, identity, and populism. Rejection of representative democracy and hostility toward the global establishment are the most prominent themes across the spectrum. *We – Voice from the People* is the only group that, as a parliamentary actor, does not oppose representative democracy. While most portray existing institutions as corrupt, illegitimate, or traitorous, their critique is typically directed more toward global establishment than national authorities. This aligns with the broader dominance of nationalism and anti-Western sentiment within Serbian society.

Some groups – particularly *We – Voice from the People*, MOBA, and People’s Patrols – employ populist rhetoric that constructs a binary between “the people” and “the elites,” claiming to represent the authentic will of the nation. This rhetoric appeals to an allegedly threatened ethno-national identity, under siege from both internal and external enemies. Others exhibit openly racist and/or neo-Nazi leanings, reflecting a broader pattern: the more fringe the group, the more explicitly fascist its orientation.

Conspiracy theories are a central discursive tool for most of the groups analysed. They rely heavily on such narratives to explain both domestic and international developments. These theories often intersect with anti-globalist and anti-Western sentiment, portraying the global establishment not only as a threat to Serbian identity but also to public health and survival – particularly through anti-vaccine narratives.

Clericalism is a dominant element in Zbor and Serbian Action, which both frame Orthodoxy as the core of Serbian identity and propose a return to a theocratic or religiously guided society. The rhetoric of returning to tradition is strong in most groups but particularly emphasized by MOBA, Zbor, and Serbian Action.

While explicit violence is not a universal feature, groups like People’s Patrols and Serbian Action are known for violent rhetoric or actual physical intimidation, especially against migrants, Roma people, and other minorities. The threat or use of violence is often justified as a form of defense against perceived existential threats.

Table 2: Social Media and Telegram Presence of Selected ASE Groups⁵⁷

	We - Voice from the People	MOBA Movement	People’s Patrols	Zentropa	Zbor	Serbian Action
Telegram channel subscribers	6,592	1,840	9,995	2,585	152	2,623
Engagement rate on Telegram channel	9%	32%	45%	33%	35%	36%
Telegram post frequency (weekly average)	120	60	30	3	3	10
Facebook followers	22,000	14,000	818	1,500	/	/
Instagram followers	5,901	24,200	1,243	5,142	/	/
Twitter/ X followers	4,257	2,575	996	31	351	197

The analysis of these actors’ digital presence reveals clear differences in their communication strategies and the platforms on which they build their influence. *We – Voice from the People* leads in total follower count, particularly on Facebook, but records a low level of engagement on Telegram due to the high frequency of posts. MOBA Movement combines a moderate Telegram community with a strong Instagram presence and high engagement, demonstrating effective use of visual content. People’s Patrols dominate on Telegram, where they gather the largest audience and achieve strong interaction, while their activity on other networks remains secondary. Zentropa maintains a balance between Telegram and Instagram, with Instagram serving as their key platform; despite posting less frequently on Telegram, they retain a stable and loyal audience. Zbor has a small but proportionally active community on Telegram and limited presence on Twitter, indicating a focus on a narrowly defined target group. Serbian Action is almost entirely focused on Telegram, where it sustains a solid level of engagement, while its lack of activity on other platforms underscores a more closed communication strategy. Overall, these differences highlight a spectrum of approaches – from actors aiming for broad visibility, to those targeting highly engaged groups, to organizations that rely on a small but ideologically cohesive community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS – HOW UNIQUE SERBIAN ANTI-SYSTEMIC EXTREMISM IS?

While ASE at the global level is seen as an extremist current that rejects mainstream institutions and norms widely accepted within today's democracies, its Serbian variant is focused primarily on the "global establishment" rather than domestic elites. ASE groups in Serbia are pronouncedly ethnic nationalist and therefore tend to avoid criticizing the national government, as they share right-wing nationalist positions. Consequently, the political mainstream in Serbia does not perceive ASE groups as a significant threat.

The prevalence of ethnic nationalism in Serbian society is generally conducive to the existence of ASE groups. While they remain a marginal political force, they hold a certain appeal for dissatisfied citizens who have lost faith in democratic institutions and processes. Moreover, interpretations rooted in conspiracy theories rather than facts undermine the capacity for critical thinking and rational public debate about the democratic deficit and other pressing political issues in today's Serbia.

Since Serbia's regime does not perceive ASE as a threat to their interests, the responsibility for countering this phenomenon falls entirely on those parts of society that oppose the current regime – civil society, opposition parties, independent media, and the academic community. Combating ASE requires not only deconstructing its narratives but also rebuilding trust in democratic institutions and processes, through including citizens in decision-making processes and paying particular attention to those who have lost trust in institutions. Under present circumstances, this is a difficult but necessary task for all democratic forces within Serbian society.

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POLICY BRIEF / 4

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