

Letter From the Editor

Issue 20.1 is a milestone for STAIR, as it leads the pair of issues which will be published during the journal's 20th anniversary. Founded in 2005, STAIR was an ambitious enterprise of doctoral students at St. Antony's College who wished to feature emerging and veteran scholars alongside each other in a peer reviewed journal about timely topics in International Affairs. Since then, STAIR's community of readers, contributors, and subscribers has grown well beyond the university, and we are delighted to announce that this year will be STAIR's first as a fully open access journal. With the College's support, we endeavour to bring STAIR to a broader audience than ever before, particularly in the Global South.

Our editorial team gave considerable thought to the title and framing of Issue 20.1. In orienting the Theme Section around the subject of "Fascism" we have aimed to simultaneously move beyond and welcome disagreement about the precise meaning of that word. We regard the very fact that the word 'fascism' is being used in political and scholarly circles alike with growing frequency and urgency a subject of interest in International Affairs unto itself. By "Fascism," we refer to a series of contemporary developments in right wing mass politics originating following the Global Financial Crisis. Whether best exemplified by right-wing political leaders with distinctly populist political brands (Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Jair Bolsonaro, Vladimir Putin, etc.), growing mainstream disillusionment with hallmark virtues and institutions of liberal democracy, or other emblems and events (see this issue's cover for a rather strange syncretism), we imagine nearly all readers and authors of this issue will implicitly recognize what this issue is about even if they disagree about what it is that is taking place before them.

In our experience reviewing submissions to this issue and corresponding with authors, event and podcast guests, and commentary contributors, reticence to use the word 'fascism' to describe contemporary right-wing politics, particularly in the West, is largely rooted in three rather pragmatic concerns. First, many regard today's right-wing populism as sufficiently distinct in content and practice from fascisms of the interwar period to use the same word for them both. Second, there are those who believe that other terms can analytically capture contemporary right-wing politics without the political baggage and prognosis that accompanies the word 'fascism.' Finally, there are those who do not regard the term 'fascism' as all that coherent to begin with, and question the value of applying what they regard as a troublesome term in a context where it may not be needed.

Other terms used to describe (aspects of) contemporary right wing politics tend to fall into two categories. The first are the trade vernacular of discrete policy communities whose scholarship on right-wing politics primarily serves the end of governance. Among these I would count “Euro-scepticism,” “democratic backsliding,” “institutional distrust,” and “mis/disinformation.” These terms refer to afflictions besetting the post-war international order, and they attract those seeking to write about ways to protect that order. As laudable as these aims may or may not be, they are explicitly secondary to this issue’s focus. Many journals have and continue to handle those issues well, whereas we hope to chart a different path. Another category of terms including “right-wing populism,” “populist nationalism,” the “New Right,” etc. either describe clearly novel or distinct elements of right-wing politics today which do not fit under the umbrella term of ‘fascism,’ or, as is especially the case with “right-wing populism,” tend to be used almost as ‘anti-terms’ by those who decidedly do not prefer the term ‘fascism.’ In our promotional material, outreach, commentary pieces, and podcast episodes, we have made abundantly clear that we welcome discussion about new kinds of right-wing politics alongside right-wing politics more akin to prototypical fascism. We are substantially more interested in how right-wing politics today differs from that of 10-15 years ago than we are in devoting an issue to very specific taxonomies of right-wing politics today since our aim is to understand the effect right-wing politics has on International Affairs, not the intellectual or political histories of right-wing thought unto themselves. Finally, we would rather invite open disagreement about the term ‘fascism’ and publish scholarship taking seriously the notion that today’s right-wing politics is fascist, even if only in part, than avoid a reckoning with that disagreement by eschewing mention of the term ‘fascism’ altogether.

Put simply, if a king is drawn and quartered in the street and new flags are raised in halls of government, analytical paralysis over whether that indeed constitutes a ‘revolution’ or an ‘uprising’ poorly serves those seeking to understand the pivotal transformations happening before them and the echoes or frontiers of history which may soon follow.

As ever, I am deeply grateful for the tremendous fortune I have had to work alongside our team. Brian, you excel as both manager and editor each day more than the last, and your pragmatic approach to the theme of this issue has been sorely needed as a counterweight to my many ridiculous ideas. Kye, I remember when Brian and I first reached out to see if you were interested in submitting a piece given how perfectly your expertise matched the issue’s theme. When we found out that you had independently applied to be an editor, we were almost unable to believe how perfectly everything had worked out. Your knowledge of the field and fearlessness in pursuing a theme as complex and even thorny as ‘Fascism,’ have been pivotal. Julia, all of STAIR is grateful that you chose to return after having started at STAIR midway through last year and taking multiple editorial responsibilities on such short notice. Your enthusiasm is both refreshing and persistent, and you are responsible more than anyone else for bringing interviews back to our publication.

To Yacine, thank you for carrying the General Section on your shoulders, and in so doing, allowing Brian and I to have our cake and eat it too when it comes to STAIR’s operational strategy. This year, publications received a record number of submissions,

and we have been able to manage that volume with a publications team smaller than the one I joined when I started at STAIR. We have all the advantages of a small, efficient team without any trade offs in quality or output. Your talent and dedication genuinely contradict conventional logic, and STAIR is better off for it. Elena and Theo, I think I brag about you two the most. The podcast episodes you have created are of such quality that they surpass that of the professional teams who run many of the other podcasts at this university. Hiring you two and getting out of your way are the two best decisions I have made in my time at STAIR. And to Emory, I give you my most heartfelt thanks for filling probably the most undesirable role at STAIR, not merely for having to navigate the constant uncertainty of the rapid financial and operational transformation STAIR is undertaking by becoming an Open Access journal, but more importantly, because you've had to do all of these things dragging me as deadweight behind you. Finally, to the reader, thank you for joining us in the ensuing pages and celebrating our 20th anniversary alongside our team.

Armin Safavi,

Editor in Chief