Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

# illiberalism Studies Program

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## Publications

### Five Lessons from the Study of Illiberalism

Marlene Laruelle draws out five takeaways from the field of illiberalism studies, showing how illiberalism grows through everyday life, shared values, and the internal contradictions of liberalism.

## From the ILLSP Team

### Le corps illibéral de l'idéologie vécue

Marlene Laruelle on the young American influencer Clavicular, looksmaxxing, and the fashioning of hierarchy.

### Our Age of De-enlightenment

Aaron Irion contends we are in an age of de-enlightenment and considers what it would mean to get out of this age, and if it's possible at all.

Rohan Mukherjee argues that recent Global South positions reflect not indifference to liberal order but long-standing frustrations with its illiberal practices. Mukherjee challenges the idea, often forwarded by Western countries, that the post-1945 world order was liberal, suggesting instead that "Western hegemony has often been coercive and exclusionary from the perspective of formerly colonized states." In acknowledging that, he shows that Global South actors "have historically demanded a more genuinely liberal order—one offering greater voice, equality, and institutional fairness—rather than an alternative illiberal system." That said, Mukherjee profiles the new "illiberal transnationalism" which unites populist and nationalist forces from both the North and South. The article concludes that a more decentralized and contested order presents both opportunities and risks for global cooperation.

Christina Cottiero et al. examine what the United States' retreat from international institutions means for the liberal global order. The authors claim that Trump's sovereigntist approach has hollowed out the multilateral architecture that liberal democracy depends on, but that "The likely result is not outright collapse but a fragmented world of overlapping regional orders with weakened universal institutions at the center, a shift that grows harder to reverse the longer it persists." Cottiero et al. stress the need for reengagement, but they do not argue from an idealist point of view. Rather, they claim that "international organizations have been among the most effective instruments of U.S. power."

Using Canada as a case study, Emily Laxer and Isabel Krakoff investigate "populist resonances" and how they shape democratic imaginaries. The authors analyze parliamentary debates in Ontario and Québec surrounding uses of the Notwithstanding Clause—a clause that allows legislatures to temporarily override sections of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Laxer and Krakoff treat the clause "as a venue through which governments articulate who the "people" are, what threatens them, and how democratic authority should be exercised in relation to rights, courts, and institutional constraints." They conclude that both provincial governments deployed populist justifications, but that these were conditioned by differing ideologies: "in Ontario, neoliberal framings of "taxpayers" limited legal resentment, while in Québec, nationalist constructions of the "people" enabled broader claims about parliamentary sovereignty and collective rights."

Joseph Gubbels unpacks post-liberalism and argues that its modern iteration is in fact a "second wave." The article traces the older strand of post-liberal theory, the "first wave," back to the works of four Canadian theorists between the 1960s and 1980s: Charles Taylor, Gad Horowitz, C. B. Macpherson, and George Grant. This older, distinctly Canadian, post-liberalism "shares the elements that unify today's post-liberals and, like other strands, is distinguished by its degree of anti-liberalism…and its positive project." Gubbels suggests that the first wave was "not just made-in-Canada but made-for-Canada, being influenced by and seeking to address Canada's unique context and problems." In the face of the more modern, reactionary post-liberalism, Gubbels claims that there is good reason to study and potentially revive this Canadian strand of post-liberalism.

Jon Mahoney suggests that, while the U.S. Constitution is one example of liberal constitutionalism, there are longstanding features of U.S. law that are at odds with liberal constitutionalism. By examining historical and recent Supreme Court rulings, Mahoney shows that illiberal democracy is an enduring feature in legal practice. He uses the term "real existing liberal constitutionalism" to identify law that "undermines liberal constitutionalism, yet whose defenders claim advances liberal constitutionalism."

*Latin American Conservatism and the Rise of the Far Right* is a comparative study of Latin American conservatism that traces its history, dialogues, interactions with former colonial powers, similarities and differences to Global North conservatism, and its relationship to the rising far right. The book "reveals that contemporary movements, fueled by populism, social media, and transnational influences, represent a new manifestation of a long-standing dilemma for Latin American conservatives, whose primary concerns have always been social, cultural, and political stability in a context where the legacy of the past is itself a potent source of division."

While populists' co-optation of liberal values is often seen as pure opportunism, Ben Van de Wall contends that the "co-optation of liberal values by right-wing populists follows from a distinctly liberal dialectic and, genealogically, represents a distinct strand of liberalism." Van de Wall fleshes out this theory by first suggesting that populism can be seen as an exemplary case of "identity liberalism." He then references two foundational texts of the right-wing populist Dutch Party for Freedom, demonstrating its indebtedness to liberalism and its relationship to the "Böckenförde dilemma"—the idea that a secular liberal democracy relies on moral values, social trust, and civic duty to survive, but cannot legally force or guarantee these moral foundations without losing its freedom. Van de Wall concludes that "The politicization of liberal values by right-wing populists proves to be an attempt to solve the Böckenförde dilemma by turning these values into a marker of identity. This results in a type of liberalism that turns the initially inclusive liberalism into a politically exclusive doctrine."

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