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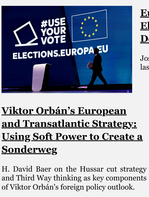
Publications

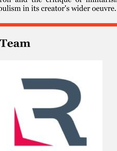


European Far Right Continued Electoral Advance in 2024, Despite Notable Setbacks

Joseph Cerrone on how far-right parties fared last year as much of the world went to the polls.

Viktor Orbán's European and Transatlantic Strategy: Using Soft Power to Create a Sonderweg

H. David Baer on the Hussar cut strategy and Third Way thinking as key components of Viktor Orbán's foreign policy outlook.



Between Tradition and Postmodernity: Populism and Critique in Hayao Miyazaki's The Boy and the Heron

Jesse Russell on the new film The Boy and the Heron and the critique of militarism and populism in its creator's wider oeuvre.

From the ILLSP Team

How the full-scale invasion accelerated Russia's mission as a 'civilization-state'

Gulnaz Sibgatullina explains how Russia has progressively escalated its mission to present itself as a 'civilization-state,' using its rhetoric to reframe global ideological debates.

In *Beyond Illiberalism: Rights, Rhetoric, and Reality in a Pluralistic World*, Robert Shepherd holds that there has never been a consensus on which rights all people are entitled and that the ostensibly universalist concept of human rights is tied to a global project rooted in colonialism, 19th-century liberalism, and post-War social democracy. Contra this picture of universality, Shepherd demonstrates that human rights are conceived, imagined, and promoted by dominant states and organizations working within a specifically liberal framework. By highlighting the reality of human rights advocacy in practice, the book then attempts to break down, in Shepherd's words, 'spurious Western divisions,' between so-called liberal and illiberal regimes, which are categorized as such based on their adherence to the liberal conception of human rights.

Reviewing three recent books on liberalism and the crises it faces today, Emma Planinc assists on a relational, dialectical, understanding of liberalism centered on a historicist account of it. She notes a disagreement between the works she reviews, two of which find the resources for liberal renewal *outside* of the liberal tradition itself, while the third advocates a turn inward, a quasi-spiritual exercise of diving deeper into the liberal waters in which those in the West swim. Planinc pushes back against this third vision, noting that the liberal waters in which Westerners swim are not "a vast and natural ocean" but rather a "fishbowl," meaning that there is, and always has been, "something outside." This perennial relationality between the liberal tradition and those traditions external to it explains the persistence and repetition of liberal crises and leads Planinc to conclude that the answer to today's crisis of liberalism can be found by resisting "turning liberalism into a comprehensive doctrine" and accepting or even embracing "the fact that its only chance of survival is foundationally reliant on its inability to rest in any one place, or to be any one thing."

In *Confronting Illiberalism: A Canadian Perspective*, Peter MacKinnon argues that liberalism and illiberalism compete for the attention of Canadians today, just as they do for many populations around the world. Placing Canada firmly in the camp of "Western democracies," the book suggests that Canada's heritage is a liberal one, founded on democratic institutions and politics, established freedoms, equality of opportunity, and a market economy. He argues that these values and more are being thoroughly attacked by illiberal forces, resulting in "diminished freedom of expression, a deteriorating political and policy environment, and fraying social cohesion." MacKinnon investigates the contours of these attacks, claims that are made in the name of freedom, political decline, the increase of hate crimes, the persistence of inequality, and the vulnerability of Canada's institutions before calling on Canadians to restore liberalism to a central place in their public lives.

Beginning from the premise that religion in illiberal contexts can be mobilized to support conservative reforms of gender, sexuality, and reproductive legal regimes, Nassiso Palazzo adds a level of granularity to the discussion by offering three theoretical perspectives on the role of Christianity in European countries with illiberal governments. The first stresses the contribution of Christianity to anti-gender backlash (doctrinal, institutional, and material). The second centers the distinct agency and contribution of illiberal politicians. And finally, the third perspective collapses binary oppositions under a queer theory framework (such as that between gender and religion, and illiberal politicians and their followers). Palazzo insists that adding granularity can help make sense of the current moment, characterized as it is by illiberal insurgencies.

Noting that the Dutch parliamentary far right has been considered a relatively liberal outsider to the gender politics of the European far right, Iris B. Segers calls attention to the *Forum voor Democratie* party (FvD) and its recent anti-*gender* mobilizations. Through a qualitative content analysis of the party's online activities, Segers shows how the FvD attacks 'epistemic institutions'—that is, ones that participate in the construction of knowledge, truth, and reality—by arguing that they disseminate knowledge about gender that is fundamentally threatening to society. These attacks are captured in the use of conspiratorial terms like "transgenderideology" and "woke." Parallel to these attacks, FvD promotes illiberal gender politics through the establishment of alternative epistemic institutions. Thus, Segers shows "how far-right actors may promote anti-gender politics by presenting themselves as 'alternative intellectuals' who seek to carve out an epistemic niche alongside the mainstream."

Alena Klukovavská and Vlastimil Havlík maintain that, while populism is extensively studied, anti-populism/the strategies conceived to counter populism are less so. They intervene in this space with a study focused on the populism/anti-populism divide and the communicative performance of the latter force. They suggest that anti-populists present themselves as the antithesis of populism through the construction of two identities: the populist "them" portrayed as polarizing, emotional, and irrational, and the anti-populist "us" portrayed as depolarizing, civil, calm, and knowledgeable. They test this suggestion through a quantitative content and frequency analysis of anti-populist social media posts in the Czech Republic from 2017-2021. Their results demonstrate that the aforementioned divide was present in the antipopulists' messages and that "it was associated with the strategic use of appeals to negativity, emotions, knowledge, and rationality." Given this, Klukovavská and Havlík conclude that "even though antipopulists claim to have a rational and fact-based approach, the bulk of their communication reveals an emotional component, contributing to the overall level of polarization."

Vladimír Naxera investigates transformations in populist communication by focusing on former Czech PM Andrej Babiš. Through a content analysis of all of Babiš and his ANO party's pre-election Facebook communications between 2013-2023, Naxera shows that populist communication remained high throughout the decade, but that "other (ideological) features accompanying populism transformed significantly." Significantly, the party moved away from its original focus on technocratic and managerial themes, pitting 'good experts' against 'bad ideologues' and party apparatchiks, and toward a nativism pitting 'good natives' against 'bad incomers.' Naxera concludes that in this respect, ANO and Babiš's transformation differs from the communication of a large part of other dominant Central European populist actors.

Carla Monteleone et al. analyze Hungary's role in EU foreign policy cooperation at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). They do so for the period 2004-2021, comparing and contrasting the country's behavior under the rule of mainstream parties until 2010 and thereafter under the rule of successive governments led by the populist radical-right Fidesz party. They pay particular attention to norm contestation and the extent to which a Fidesz-led Hungary has contested or adapted to the EU's culture of cooperation in its UNGA voting behavior. They conclude that "populist contestation dynamics at the level of foreign policy behavior are more limited than often assumed," and therefore conclude that the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy norms are rather robust.

Stephen Buttons contends that scholarship on Hungary since 2010, when the populist radical-right Fidesz party returned to power, has tended to center on the legal, economic, and geopolitical aspects of Fidesz' and Viktor Orbán's rule. Buttons widens this debate to centering the cultural aspects of this party's governance. He thus concludes that demonstrate the Orbán government's attempts to cultivate cultural hegemony. Buttons claims that successive Orbán governments have attempted a "systematic takeover" of public schools and universities in service of this goal. The effects of this can be seen insofar as "authoritarian control of the academic and artistic sphere makes it possible to marginalize any possible alternatives at home, and to transform conservative values shared by right-wing movements worldwide into a new national mainstream."

Acknowledging the support given by institutional and activist Christian networks to populist radical-right (PRR) parties globally, Francisco Batista investigates whether this same support can be observed in Portugal given its enduringly Catholic character and the recent rise of the PRR Chega party. Batista notes that the Portuguese Catholic Church and Christian social movements have traditionally supported traditionally center-right parties and, at least formally, their support for Chega remains non-existent today. However, Batista also demonstrates that despite "the lack of formal backing for Chega, some Christian social movements have shown their preference or support for Chega." He concludes that further research is needed to more thoroughly understand the depth of breadth of that support.

Brett Nicholls unpacks the Australian public's 2023 rejection of a constitutional referendum to add an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. During the campaign to reject the Voice, a 1980s text published by the extreme-right Australian League of Rights resurfaced. This text argued that Aboriginal claims for justice and land rights were a communist conspiracy, a talking point echoed by the campaign to vote no on the referendum. Drawing upon the Laclauian discourse analysis, Nicholls considers how this signifier, communism, continues to resonate in political campaigns in Australia. He claims that the foundations for this continued resonance emerge in existing reactionary organizations such as the Australian League of Rights and goes on to outline how the League imagines the communist conspiracy and explains how this conspiracy remains embedded in political discourse today.

Valery Dzutsati and F. Michael Wuthrich set out to answer a question: how does a religious group's demographic status influence its members' attitudes toward economic and political liberalization? Using a contextual approach, Dzutsati and Wuthrich examine the attitudes of Azeri Muslims in two religiously restrictive but demographically different states: Azerbaijan (where Muslims are the majority) and Georgia (where Muslims are a minority). They suggest that attitudes toward liberalization are shaped by the strength of association with one's religious community and its relative position vis-à-vis the state and society. Demonstrating this dynamic, they show that in Azerbaijan, Muslims' religiosity is associated with greater support for political liberalization but lower support for economic liberalization. In Georgia by contrast, Muslims' religiosity reflects an opposition to political liberalization but support for economic liberalization. They thus conclude that "instead of theologies, the political and economic opportunity structures facing religious groups may play a critical role in determining their attitudes toward various forms of liberalization."

Yael Shmaryahu-Yeshurun and Daniel Monterescu look at the intersection between political settlement, religion, and economic gentrification in Israel, pointing to the rise of a new type of gentrifier, the "nationalist gentrifier," operating in Israel's mixed-cities. Shmaryahu-Yeshurun and Monterescu suggest that nationalist gentrifiers in the mixed city of Jaffa differ from their secular liberal gentrifier and religious settler counterparts in their perceptions and motivations. These differences can be seen in their strategic activation of a 'conqueror gentrifier,' 'colonizing gentrifier,' and 'competitor gentrifier' profile vis-à-vis different local communities. The authors claim that the 'sociologically hybrid configuration' of this gentrifying force is indicative of the privatization and commodification of space, as well as indicative of the trend toward nationalist radicalization in Jewish-Israeli society. They conclude by prompting scholars to think about the ethnonational and economic drivers of expansion projects in contested urban spaces.

Mark R. Thompson and Kevin N. M. Agojo challenge a prevailing view on "executive aggrandizement" and opposition to it through a case study of the Philippines under three presidents, all of whom were 'executive aggrandizers.' Executive aggrandizement in electoral, institutional, and civil societal arenas has been a major focus for scholars of democratic backsliding and some have suggested that the more democratic accountability remains despite illiberal stratagems, the stronger the pushback is likely to be. Thompson and Agojo show this to be not only inaccurate but the exact *inverse* of what happened in the Philippines where, despite election fraud, constitutional manipulation, and protest crackdowns, Presidents Marcos Sr. and Arroyo confronted stronger pushback than President Duterte, under whom opposition forces gained little traction despite elections remaining competitive, institutions remaining largely intact, and relatively little repression of peaceful protests occurring. In the author's words, "This suggests that opposition efficacy is more dependent on how effectively it can contest democratic legitimation claims used to disguise autocratization."

For resources on illiberal, populist, and authoritarian trends across the globe, consult our growing ***Resource Hub*** *aggregating hundreds of published academic articles on illiberalism and other topics relating to illiberal movements. From security and international affairs, to democratic backsliding and public policy, this center of longstanding and recently-published literature continues to document ongoing global trends of growing illiberal movements around the world.*

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