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Publications

Postliberalism and the 2024 Election

Julian G. Waller on the postliberal ecosystem, its features, and its influence today and in years to come.

Trump, Harvard, and the Future of Higher Education in Politically Divided America

Geoffrey Kabaservice on the problems in higher education today, universities' relationship to the public, and reciprocity and civic responsibility.

Atreju: The Italian Far Right's Yearly Celebration

Alberto Polimeni on the characteristics, purposes served, and paradoxes of Atreju, the Italian far-right's annual gathering.

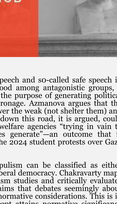
Alt Higher Ed and the American Right

Charles U. Zog on the right wing's alternative higher education programs, their historical antecedents, and their function today.

From the ILLSP Team

Why Illiberalism Explains Changes in Today's Social Order

Marlene Laruelle on illiberalism, its utility as an analytical category, and how it helps us understand our world today.



Political Analogies and Wartime Russia

Julian G. Waller on the uses and misuses of interwar analogies and how they can help us understand (or not) wartime Russia.

The 'Dark Enlightenment' as a Bridge Between the US and Russia

Marlene Laruelle on the Dark Enlightenment, related historical movements in Russia, and the ideological bridges being built between the U.S. and Russia.

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Albena Azmanova writes that the war between free speech and so-called safe speech in universities has produced a competition for victimhood among antagonistic groups, a battle that only empowers administrators and serves the purpose of generating political control for those who can channel demands into patronage. Azmanova argues that the original purpose of free speech struggles was to empower the weak (not shelter them) and that freedom versus safety is a false dilemma. Going down this road, it is argued, could lead universities to become unfit-for-purpose social welfare agencies "trying in vain to counter the ubiquitous insecurity neoliberal policies generate"—an outcome that is rejected. Azmanova concludes by underscoring how the 2024 student protests over Gaza indicate a way out of the false dilemma.

Udeepta Chakravarty argues that all theories of populism can be classified as either articulating a threat to, a critique of, or a remedy for liberal democracy. Chakravarty maps out the normative disputes within the field of populism studies and critically evaluates each position. Through this analysis, Chakravarty claims that debates seemingly about theory and definitions are not devoid of political and normative considerations. This is in no small part because "Populism as a political concept attains normative significance within a liberal democratic discourse," and therefore theorists of populism with differing commitments to and analysis of liberal democracy will "furnish different accounts of the reality populism produces—generating a contested horizon of expectations."

Jacob Williams questions whether it is analytically useful to compare contemporary postliberalism to fascism. Williams outlines the core characteristics of postliberalism today and the four components of a "fascist minimum." He demonstrates how postliberal movements differ from fascism on each of these four elements and thereby concludes that "Postliberalism does not fit easily into this framework." While postliberalism can be seen engaging in a similar movement vis-à-vis liberalism that fascism engaged in vis-à-vis bourgeois modernity (taking it over for their own purposes), this movement is directed not toward fascist national rejuvenation, but toward "the trans-national imposition of a religious order that would override national concerns." Williams thus concludes that deploying the concepts of the 20th century to understand postliberalism "will obscure its true character."

Recognizing that the weaponization of cultural policy is one of the crucial yet underexplored strategies of illiberal political actors, Kristina Cufar and Hana Hawlina investigate the multifaceted nature of measures that are employed to polarize society, influence the interpretation of history, consolidate so-called traditional values and ethnonationalism, and normalize political corruption and increasingly authoritarian political practices. Via an analysis of the frequent political interventions into the artistic and cultural sphere that occurred in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022, during a period of illiberalization, the authors propose a typology of illiberal cultural policy measures. The article considers illiberal cultural policy a pivotal strategy for the indelible transformation of political ideology and practice, one that reveals an important dimension of democratic backsliding and the success of illiberal politics in Europe and beyond.

Martijn Mos and Lucrecia Rubio Grundell uncover how the mostly progressive European Parliament (EP) is more hospitable to anti-gender organizations than the extant scholarship recognizes. Drawing on the concept of political opportunity structures, the article presents three types of opportunities that the EP offers anti-gender organizations: policy influence, mobilization, and organizational legitimation. While anti-gender organizations have seen limited success in policy influence (certain victories notwithstanding), the authors demonstrate that they have used the EP to mobilize institutional and non-institutional allies, consolidate their transnational networks and discredit their adversaries, and boost their authority by presenting themselves as experts and the legitimate representatives of social interests. It is in this sense, the authors write, that the EP assists the advocacy of the anti-gender movement.

Annastiina Kallius considers the relationship between law, memory, and propaganda through an examination of Viktor Orbán's illiberal regime in Hungary. At base, she finds that Orbán's governments have manipulated coexisting memory traditions to bolster domestic propaganda and challenge the values of the European Union. She argues that recent legislative achievements in Hungary "should be understood as memory laws which draw on a re-emerging European intellectual tradition which questions enlightenment universalism." The mechanism by which these accomplishments of the Orbán government are tied to the rejection of European values lies in the fact that the European Union considers itself a vehicle for a supranational and universalist memory tradition that excludes others. Thus, "by reversing the EU's mnemonic exclusion and by promoting a reductionist reading of the Counter-Enlightenment, illiberal memory politics places these coexisting traditions of memory into a zero-sum competition."

Ákos Huszár analyzes how social class is associated with party preferences in today's Hungary. Contra traditional patterns of class voting, the article finds that left-wing parties no appeal more to middle-class voters than workers. The right-wing parties comprising the Viktor Orbán-led government, on the other hand, are found to have appeal amongst both the lower classes and the upper classes. Huszár concludes that "this constellation has emerged because the governing parties have been successful in masking class inequalities and uniting the nation through the broad notion of 'middle class', denying the antagonism between capital and labour, promising social mobility and promoting a nationalist ideology."

Daniel Schulte puts forward the following question: *When* do right-wing governments in backsliding hybrid regimes adopt and implement restrictive morality policies such as abortion limits? To answer, Schulte interrogates divergent abortion policy outcomes in Poland, Russia, and Turkey. He finds that "In backsliding hybrid regimes, the strength of the anti-abortion social movement is a background condition influencing the relative level of restriction, and the chief executive's decision is central for the choice to ban at all or even more." This decision-making process is informed by the fact that, in hybrid regimes, incumbents still must win elections and therefore "some executives are more strategic than others in weighing potential political consequences of bans."

Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga ask whether it is possible to talk about a right flank of a Russian regime that is often characterized as fascist, or at a minimum as capable of eliminating dissent. They argue that ideological and political differences can still be discerned in Russia and that "distinguishing between the regime and currents to its right allows understanding the ideologization of the Putin regime as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between the regime and factions acting simultaneously as loyalists and critics." Thus, the Russian right is an autonomous actor that has simultaneously influenced the Putin regime's recently aggressive international posture and been the country's most important source of pro-war regime criticism. The authors discuss how the Russian right was able to achieve its strength by subordinating ethnonationalist notions to "geopolitical" positions and by joining forces with the Christian right.

Focusing on the far-right turn in Latin America, the contributors to *Ultra and Extreme Right-Wing in Latin America* analyze the radicalization of political discourse on the continent. By combining sociological, political, historical, and discourse analysis practices, this text uncovers how historical grievances and media ecosystems shape social imaginaries and political practices in four South American countries. The volume features analyses of Argentina's libertarian populism and anti-statist narratives, Peru's far-right manipulation of historical memory and religious rhetoric, Chile's nationalist resurgence and institutional conservatism, and Brazil's election denialism and media spectacle during the Bolsonaro era. Dissecting the linguistic mechanisms behind these phenomena, its interdisciplinary approach will appeal to experts in sociology, political science, and discourse studies.

By examining democratic backsliding in India through the lens of political culture, Meirav Mishali-Ram offers a framework for understanding democratic decline in the country by analyzing the interplay between the ruling elite and society. The findings suggest that the decline is both animated by the populist leadership of Narendra Modi and the ruling BJP, but is also facilitated by entrenched sociocultural dynamics that permit the leadership to leverage cultural symbols, historical narratives, and communal ideologies to consolidate power and undermine democratic principles. This novel framework offers a broader framework for understanding how sociopolitical patterns in other contexts may similarly enable democratic backsliding.

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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