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

illiberalism Studies Program

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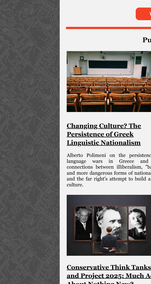
Event Recordings

Ideology and Meaning-Making Under the Putin Regime

Marlene Laruelle launched her new book, a critical genealogy of ideology in Russia today, at the Elliott School on May 6.

Watch it here

What's Mainstream? Talking "With" and "About" the Far Right



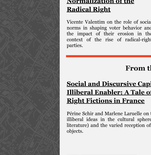
Dr. Katy Brown discussed her work on the political mainstream, its character, and its role in mainstreaming the far right electorally and ideologically on April 28th. The full recording is now available!

Watch it here

Publications

Old Project, New Vehicles: Conservative Civics and Leadership Institutes in Historical Context

Lauren Lassalle Shepherd discusses the upsurge in new civics and leadership institutes, and how they fit into older right-wing projects concerning education and American society.



Changing Culture? The Persistence of Greek Linguistic Nationalism

Alberto Polimeni on the persistence of language wars in Greece and the connections between illiberalism, "banal" and more dangerous forms of nationalism, and the far right's attempt to build a new culture.

The Conservative Revolution Redux: American Politics and German Philosophy

Matthew McManus on how German conservative revolutionary philosophers are inspiring the new American right, and the necessity of offering a defense of the Enlightenment project.

Conservative Think Tanks and Project 2025: Much Ado About Nothing New?

Jason Stahl on the conventionality of Project 2025, the role of think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, and the dearth of genuinely new and radical thinking.

Illiberalism in its Epoch: Modern Illiberalism as a Consequence of the Global War on Terror

Sam Hamad on the relationship between the Global War on Terror and the transnational illiberalism of today.

Lost on the Wrong Side of History: The Case of Candace Owens

Martin D. Brown on the right-wing influencer Candace Owens, her frames into "hidden" histories, and the roots of the right's attack on epistemology.

Are Chinese Schmittians Leading the Leaders?

Alison Pang on the supposed influence that Chinese scholars of Carl Schmitt wield in Beijing and over China's geopolitical outlook.

Agora

Vicente Valentim on the Normalization of the Radical Right

Vicente Valentim on the role of social norms in shaping voter behavior and the spread of their erosion in the context of the rise of radical-right parties.

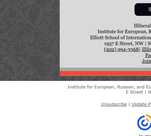
From the ILLSP Team

Social and Discursive Capital as Illiberal Enabler: A Tale of Two Far-Right Fictions in France

Pétrine Schir and Marlene Laruelle on the circulation of illiberal ideas in the cultural sphere (specifically in literature) and the varied reception of illiberal cultural objects.

Connective Action and the Rise of the Far-Right

Steven Livingston and Michael Miller (eds.) present integrated perspectives on traditional institutional forces at work in democracies and internet strategies with a central focus on technology as a defining force in the 21st century.



On the Papacy

Julian Waller on the peculiar, unusually effective, governance model of the Papacy.

Resource Hub

Martin Sekerák [notes](#) that "national conservatism" has become a buzzword recently but has not gained sufficient academic attention. To fill this gap, Sekerák sketches the most typical features of the phenomenon, such as its defense of national identity and sovereignty, its emphasis on traditional conservative values, its skepticism of liberal democracy, and sheds light on its evolution as a coherent political ideology. Sekerák emphasizes national conservatism's anti-liberal ethos and claims it represents one of the best recent examples of the so-called conservative backlash.

Against Convenience in Academia: A Public Choice Analysis approaches the phenomenon of academic conformity through the lens of public choice theory, which applies economics to administrative and political processes. Academic conformity is the end up allowing their leaders to construct an authoritarian market economy and an illiberal democratic order.

The Extreme Centre and the Anti-Establishment Populists: The Struggle for the Soul of Europe studies the intellectual "phantom war" in the EU between pro- and anti-establishment forces. The author argues that the rise of populism in the EU is not a result of public policy choices in Europe at the supranational level and its member states, affecting European integration, the values, practices, and policies of democracy, and the fate of the EU as a political project. Populist forces affect the public perception of the EU and its institutions in fundamental ways, by policies on refugees and other migrants, the role of nationality in public decision-making, the relationship between and defense of checks and balances, only to mention a few examples.

Sophia Besch and Tara Varma [argue](#) that Donald Trump's return to the American presidency, combined with the rise of right-wing parties in Europe, may usher in what is a new era of revisionist transatlantics. According to the authors, revisionists on both sides of the Atlantic share a desire to "reshape the transatlantic order in line with their domestic affairs and multilateral institutions like the European Union." In policy terms, revisionist transatlantics could be characterized by skepticism of NATO and amenability to Russian interests. Besch and Varma [argue](#) that the rise of revisionist transatlantics in the U.S. and European sides of the alliance, and that both sides stand to benefit from cooperation and that they could work to renegotiate the values and interests that unify them, and, in the process, consolidate the transatlantic project.

Tim Haughton et al. [argue](#) Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico's return to power. They argue that Fico's success is a result of his ability to capitalize on the failures of the left party and pulling elements of a successful centre-left party. But Fico defied those calls, and the authors show that this was accomplished through the combination of exogenous shocks (like the pandemic and the war in Ukraine) and internal strategic decisions by Fico and his party, such as campaign messaging around strong and effective leadership, policy shifts, and coalition-building strategies. The authors conclude that Fico's success may form a coalition government with Fico. This outcome also contributes to an understanding of how divisive politicians can return to power and how this contributes to democratic erosion.

Simon Bradford and Fia Cullen [suggest](#) that the long-standing politicization of migration in Hungary has been driven by a "unique combination of historical, political, economic and complications in Hungary's growth model." The authors compiled 60,000 refugees to arrive in the country, and labor shortages led to its foreign direct investment-based growth model to become strained. The authors argue that the Orbán regime has used legislation granting "blood-country guardianship" mechanisms. By analyzing political speeches, social media postings, and visual images, the authors conclude that the government has constructed a narrative that "frames Hungarian sovereignty, economic imperatives on one hand and domestic political and public demands for the preservation of national identity on the other."

Working from the observation that illiberal parties have been normalized in recent decades, Frantiska Wagner et al. [ask](#) how their parliamentary and governmental participation influences their core discourse and that of mainstream parties. The authors leverage a novel liberal–illiberal scale based on word embeddings and dictionaries and apply it to speeches delivered in the European Parliament. The authors conclude that the immigration discourse and that of mainstream parties, using evidence documenting the interaction between 87 parties in eight European countries over the last 15 years. They argue that illiberal parties have a "normalizing effect" on the EP, and that "the immigration discourse of far-right parties and that far-right parties normalize moderate their anti-immigration discourse when entering governmental but then radicalize again when they leave government." The authors conclude that "the mainstream right has the net effect of pulling the country's party system to the right on immigration."

As insiders who opposed the 2020 attempt to ban gender studies in Romania, Oana Băluță and Ionela Băluță [examine](#) the contours of this effort and the resistance to it. From this position, they ask how researchers' positionality can be conceptualized when they are "simultaneously the object of the attack and the subject of resistance." The authors turn into the production of knowledge. To answer these questions, they introduce a novel epistemological and ethical framework that integrates reflection on researchers' positionality and emotions. They conduct autoethnography and "ponder the tensions between political and academic contexts and epistemic agents at the intersection of research and activism." The authors conclude that "gender studies are central to anti-gender campaigns and far-right mobilization and contributes to research on de-democratization, epistemic injustice, and the normalization of violence."

Noting that electorally viable party systems are associated with the constant emergence of new parties, Tomáš Cirhan and Mattia Collini [explore](#) the strategies of four parties in the Czech Republic and Italy that have emerged since 2010: ANO, Pirates, Lega, and Forza. They analyze the statutes and organizational documents of these parties in addition to the decision-making capacities of party leaders, their interventions in the autonomy of territorial party units, and the role of party members. The authors [argue](#) that they conclude that organizational survival and the role of party leaders often precede the parliamentary survival of these parties.

While democratic backsliding in illiberal regimes is well studied, Péter Radó and Bálint Mikola [investigate](#) what policies enable illiberal actors to reproduce their narratives, ideological frameworks, and political power. The authors focus on education as a key ideological vehicles. Focusing on post-2010 Hungary and the years 2015-2023 in Poland, the authors analyze legislative changes, party programs, and party discourse, pairing this with semi-structured expert interviews. They find that these countries' illiberal ruling parties considerably differ in the extent to which they transformed educational and curricular governance, and that this is a result of the historical divide that has been amplified to these parties by their respective legislative majorities.

Building on the literature of authoritarian neoliberals in emerging democracies, Spencer and Kirby Goidel [probe](#) how the combination of nostalgia and authoritarianism influenced public attitudes within the United States, an established democracy without an authoritarian past. Using data from the 2020 American National Election Studies and between nostalgia and four measures of authoritarianism attitudes. The article finds that nostalgic Americans are more likely to support political strongmen, violations of rules, and censorship, and that they are less likely to support democratic norms. Overall, the findings establish a link between nostalgia and authoritarianism in an established democracy without a recent authoritarian past.

Acknowledging that evidence has been mixed when it comes to the question of how age is associated with attitudes towards liberal democracy and support for far-right parties, Mattias Wahman et al. [ask](#) how this relationship looks in Sweden. Using data from the Swedish Election Studies and [find](#) that younger people are not only less supportive of democracy. They find that young people are not only less supportive of liberal democracy but also more likely to vote for far-right parties at the most recent European elections. Crucially, they observe a correlation in each age group between lack of support for democracy and support for far-right parties. The authors [argue](#) that the far-right is in governance, but that it is also challenging this suggest that the younger generation may not be a bulwark against democratic backsliding.

Authoritarian Consolidation in Times of Crisis: Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro brings a comparative perspective to contemporary Venezuela, and asks how authoritarians can consolidate power in times of crisis. The author argues that Maduro's administration has approval ratings, and international pariah status, and a dwindling economy, offering a systematic examination of the mechanisms by which regime change was fostered under the Maduro regime. The author argues that Maduro's regime has fostered "unprecedented and dynamic collapse; democratic breakdown and the consolidation of authoritarian rule; and comparative institutional work on Venezuelan politics. It addressed themes such as authoritarian consolidation, backsliding, emigration, and party politics.

With the post-truth anti-feminist political moment as background, Sofa Chasoweris [applies](#) how far-right populists have benefited from the fear global shift in young men's voting habits. In particular, Chasoweris analyzes posts from the South Korean online community DCinside, and argues that anti-feminist discourse has been central to the diffusion of liberal norms as a result of cultural friction. In the case of these posts from Solo Pann, feminism is translated from its liberal meaning to entail female supremacy, misandry, and gender hierarchy, contributing to the political divide that has been capitalized on by populist politicians in South Korea.

For resources on illiberal, populist, and authoritarian trends across the globe, consult our growing Resource Hub containing hundreds of published academic articles on illiberalism and other topics relating to illiberal movements. From a security and international politics, 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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