

Call for Papers

“The Authoritarian Threat to Europe’s Liberal Democracies”

EUROLAB Authors’ Conference, 21-22 November 2019, Cologne/Germany

In recent years, European liberal democracies have increasingly come under strain. The rise of anti-establishment and sometimes openly anti-democratic politicians and parties (Pappas, 2016) and other trends have sparked concerns about the progress of societies: An increasing polarization and radicalization of publics and political discourse (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018), the advent of alternative, hyperpartisan media hosting disinformation campaigns, fostering antagonism, and propagating authoritarian ideas (Arif, Stewart, & Starbird, 2018; Sanovich, 2018) as well as an apparent shift towards authoritarian values among citizens (Foa & Mounk, 2016, 2017) have left observers and publics across Europe alike worrying about how Europe’s liberal democracies can cope with the threat these developments may pose to liberal democracy.

From a normative point of view, the electoral success of (right-wing) populist parties critical of liberal democracy, the political and social division of publics as well as their radicalization, the spread of untrustworthy and misleading content online, and the turning away from core democratic values are clearly undesirable and alarming. However, while lively academic discussions as well as public debates have revolved around the causes of these phenomena, little research has been conducted regarding their consequences. Do they actually pose a serious threat to democracy? Do authoritarian challenges endanger the stability and functioning of European democracies?

To answer these questions, we invite papers addressing one or more of the following themes:

- the consequences of populism for, e.g., democratic policies, political discourse, or citizens’ attitudes,
- the extent of democratic regressions across Europe and their relationship to anti-establishment and right-wing parties and politicians taking power;
- the effects of (increasing) polarization on societal conflicts and political participation,
- the functioning of social media as echo chambers, their instrumentalization by radical actors and their contribution to fostering a climate of hatred and polarization,
- the consequences of populism and polarization for political trust and support for democracy,
- the dissemination of autocratic views and authoritarian values through digital media,
- the effect of disinformation campaigns on citizens’ perceptions of democratic institutions
- changes in citizens attitudes, e.g. their political value orientations or notions of what democracy is and what it ought to be

We want to further an interdisciplinary exchange on these complex themes and invite papers from all social-science disciplines. We are open to all methodological approaches but particularly welcome comparative cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that help understand how authoritarian trends affect European liberal democracies both on the system and the citizen level.

Editors

Jonas Linde (University of Bergen)

Marlene Mauk (GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences)

Heidi Schulze (GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences)

Instructions for Authors

Please submit an **extended abstract of about 600 words** and a summary of no more than 150 words to eurolab@gesis.org until **April 28, 2019**. Your abstract should include information about the theoretical framework, data, methods, and expected results. Prospective contributors will be contacted in May 2019 with more detailed information. A first draft of the full manuscript will be due in October 2019 and will be presented and discussed at the two-day authors' conference in Cologne on November 21 and 22, 2019. Selected papers will be published in either a special issue or an edited volume. The organizers are in the process of acquiring funds for covering travelling and accommodation costs.

References

- Arif, A., Stewart, L. G., & Starbird, K. (2018). Acting the Part: Examining Information Operations Within #BlackLivesMatter Discourse. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 2(CSCW), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3274289>
- Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network propaganda: Manipulation, disinformation, and radicalization in American politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2016). The Democratic Disconnect. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(3), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0049>
- Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2017). The Signs of Deconsolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 28(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0000>
- Pappas, T. S. (2016). Distinguishing Liberal Democracy's Challengers. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(4), 22–36. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0059>
- Sanovich, S. (2018). Russia. The origins of digital misinformation. In S. C. Woolley & P. N. Howard (Eds.), *Oxford studies in digital politics. Computational propaganda: Political parties, politicians, and political manipulation on social media* (pp. 21–40). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.