

Call for Papers

Populism and Nativism as Legitimation Narratives of Illiberal Politics

ECPR General Conference in Hamburg, 22.-25. August 2018
Panel endorsed by the Section “The illiberal turn in the post-communist region”

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Please submit your paper abstract (no more than **500 words**) plus 3-8 keywords to Bartek Pytlas (bartek.pytlas@gsi.lmu.de) by **1. February 2018**. Please include in your proposal your E-Mail address as registered in your MyECPR account.

In recent decades, nativist and populist politics shifted from the margins to the mainstream of the political process within contemporary European democracies. While the growing resonance of these claims is not limited to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), it is in this region that the consequences of this phenomenon for party competition, public debates and the democratic rule of law as such have become most palpable. Across the region, old and new political actors alike use populist and nativist rhetoric to establish an illiberal counter-narrative to the underlying values and institutional framework of democracy. Where these parties moved from mainstream to power, populism and nativism are being used to legitimize policies widely criticized for their deteriorating consequences on constitutional checks and balances and the rule of law through a paradoxical political invocation of “true” or “better democracy”. What more, these narratives have been deployed as discursive tools to justify the de-legitimization of political and societal actors, as well as institutions opposing the illiberal turn.

Extant research has put increased attention on the impact of populism and nativism on liberal democracy. Yet, there is still need to systematically explore how exactly political entrepreneurs use these narratives in the political process to establish and most especially uphold mainstream legitimacy of illiberal democratic politics and policies. Observing how political actors both in opposition and in power use populist and nativist discourses to legitimize the illiberal transformation of the normative and institutional frameworks of democracy carries increased relevance beyond CEE cases.

This Panel, therefore, aims to explore patterns and mechanisms of populist and nativist legitimation strategies behind illiberal politics in a comparative perspective. Which strategies do political challengers use to legitimize their illiberal “ideology of democracy” within mainstream party competition? How do populist and nativist actors in power justify and “cement” their illiberal rule? What effect do these narratives have at the individual level with regard to trust in democracy and its institutions, diffuse and specific support for the political system, as well as liberal pluralist values? What are the reactions of parties and other actors that oppose illiberal politics and how can we explain the success or failure of their discursive counteraction strategies?

To answer these and further interrelated questions, the Panel brings together conceptually funded contributions that explore the relationship between populism, nativism and legitimation of illiberal politics. The Panel equally welcomes Papers employing qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods approaches. Contributions can perform a cross-sectional, cross-temporal or cross-process comparison of Central and Eastern European cases, as well as contrast developments in CEE with cases from other regions. Conceptual papers and single case studies are welcome so long as they highlight their wider comparative contribution to the topic.