



Institutskolloquium

IfP

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Institutskolloquium / DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

# Democratic self-defense in times of autocratization

Wednesday, 10 December 2025 · 16:00 c.t.

Room 124, Institut für Politikwissenschaft

Or join online via Zoom: 930 8975 0663 (Meeting ID), 142311 (Passcode)

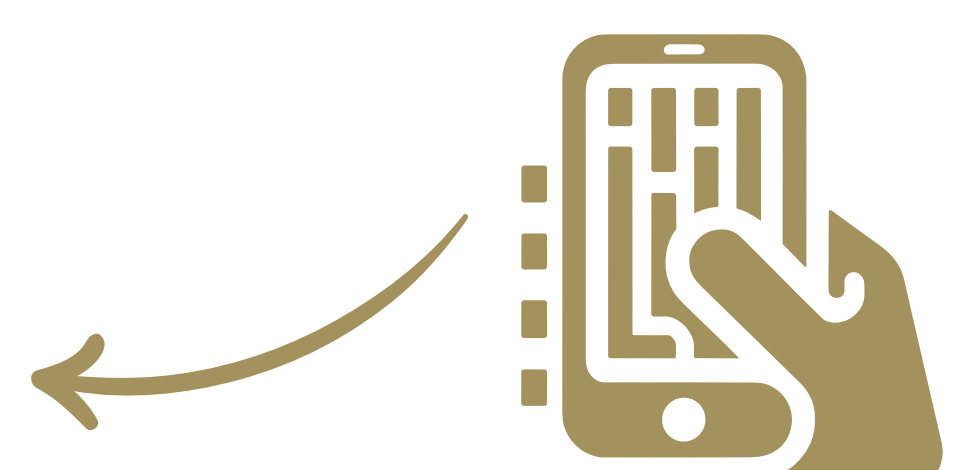


Currently, we are witnessing a “wave” of autocratizations across the globe. The number of countries that experience a loss of their democratic quality is increasing. In this context, the talk addresses the question what liberal democracies can do to defend themselves. How can they stem their weight against autocratization processes? An intuitive answer can be found in the works on “militant democracies”. The basic idea is that democracies can and should rely on legal means to save democracy against its enemies. The instruments range from measures against the abuse of parliamentary institutions, the protection of the independence of the judiciary to even more controversial instruments like banning of political parties and the curtailment of political rights – under certain circumstances. Being initially developed by German émigré scholar Karl Loewenstein in the 1930s, the talk asks what lessons can be drawn from these classic writings. How – and to what extent – can these ideas be translated to today’s challenges?

**Johannes Gerschewski** is a research fellow at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. Key topics of his work revolve around stability, legitimacy, and crisis of political regimes. In particular, he focuses on justifications of (un-)democratic power structures and asks why some people are attracted by authoritarian values. He works on questions of liberal and illiberal political thought, nostalgia, democratic backsliding, and what democracies could and should do to defend themselves against autocratizations. His work appeared in outlets like the American Political Science Review, Perspectives on Politics, and Comparative Political Studies. His monograph *The Two Logics of Autocratic Rule* was published in 2023 with Cambridge University Press. In 2024, he was a Thomas Mann Fellow at the Thomas Mann House in Los Angeles.

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For more information