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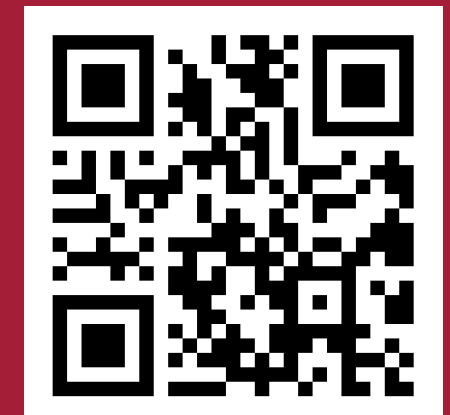
# Nationalism, the politics of memory and democratic backsliding

Wednesday, 24 June 2026 · 16:00 c.t.

Room 124, Institut für Politikwissenschaft

Or join online via Zoom: [zoom.us/j/93089750663](https://zoom.us/j/93089750663)

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Democratic backsliding results from the actions of illiberal, yet democratically elected governments. This points to a puzzle: How do illiberals generate electoral support, even as they undermine democratic institutions? Recent conceptual contributions separate illiberalism's anti-individualistic, anti-pluralist core from a set of complementary ideologies that flesh out this core in different ways. These complementary ideologies range from religious conservatism to nationalism or socialism. They can help make illiberalism palatable to voters. However, empirical studies have only focused on selected appeals (in particular nationalism) and/or selected cases. This presentation presents early results from a research project that aims to contribute a more comprehensive empirical understanding of why and how illiberals persuade voters. The first part maps "varieties of illiberalism" among European parties and electorates, assessing whether these varieties yield different electoral pay-offs in post-fascist and post-communist societies, due to their different authoritarian histories and politics of memory. Second, we explore how ordinary citizens normalise or stigmatise varieties of illiberalism in light of their society's memory culture through a series of focus groups conducted in Poland, East and West Germany. Exploring the links between an illiberal core and a variety of complementary ideologies in European parties' platforms and voters' minds, we hope to clarify what makes illiberal ideas persuasive, and, by implication, how to compete against them.

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Foto: Ines Janas



For more information

