Search in this book

CHAPTER

Introduction: Illiberalism Studies as a Field 🔓

Marlene Laruelle

Abstract

This introductory chapter argues that the term *illiberal(ism)* provides a new frame for understanding societal change. In contrast to existing concepts, illiberalism recenters our focus on liberalism and can therefore fruitfully account for different dimensions usually not taken into account. This chapter first advances a definition of illiberalism—in contradistinction to other concepts such as populism, conservatism, and authoritarianism—before exploring five main contentions related to this definition. It then moves to a broader discussion on the entanglements between liberalism and illiberalism, looking at liberalism's own spaces of contention, its multiple scripts, its encapsulation of Western metamodernity, and how illiberalism contributes to the ongoing deconstruction of liberal hegemony. Finally, it delves into the "amplifying feedback loop" effect of illiberalism, which is both a by-product of the contradictions of liberalism and an amplification of liberalism's challenges.

Keywords: illiberalism, liberalism, neoliberalism, populism, conservatism, ideology

Subject: Comparative Politics, Political Theory, Political Institutions, Politics

Series: Oxford Handbooks

Collection: Oxford Handbooks Online

A brief search on Google Trends shows that the use of the term *illiberal(ism)* has been rising since it was popularized by Fareed Zakaria in his famous—and very normative--1997 article "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," with a visible surge since the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016 (Zakaria 1997). Since then, it has become widely used as a category of political struggle to denounce opponents, both domestically and internationally. The concept has also rapidly been integrated into scholarship, with the literature on Central and Eastern Europe—in particular on Hungary and Poland—leading the way.

Within a few years, new voices began to build out a more stable conceptual core for the term so as to avoid overlap, confusion, and vagueness. Yet the concept remains highly contested, as it exists in multiple semantic spaces, as well as in political and intellectual ecosystems already populated by many other

concepts. What does the term *illiberal(ism)* bring to the table that other concepts—such as populism, conservatism, and far right—do not already cover? What makes something illiberal but not non-, anti-, or post-liberal? And is the term, like *populism*, now used so widely that it is losing heuristic value?[1]

This volume argues that the term *illiberal(ism)* provides a new frame for understanding societal change. Specifically, in contrast to existing concepts, illiberalism recenters our focus on liberalism and can therefore fruitfully account for different dimensions usually not taken into account. In the study of illiberalism, liberalism itself—already a very elusive concept—is usually a blind spot: with its unquestioned hegemony, it is used as a yardstick (positively or negatively connoted) for almost everything. Liberalism's centrality is in itself problematic, and the fact that its opponents define themselves or are defined as *il*-liberal reinforces this normative aspect.

Even if a segment of the existing literature considers it impossible to dissociate the two words that make up the compound term "liberal democracy," there is conceptual value in teasing out the difference between them. Liberal democracy tends to be used as a shorthand for democracy, but it is a specific political system that features a plethora of countermajoritarian institutions and rights-defending mechanisms along with electoral majoritarianism/pluralism. What we can now observe is the "hollowing-out" perhaps not so much of democracy per se as of *liberal* democracy, accompanied by a deep crisis of legitimacy of the liberal governing class (Mair 2013).

Over the past decade, a growing strand of scholarship has explored so-called "democratic decay," "democratic erosion," and "autocratization" in different parts of the world. But what if, all along, the problem has been not democracy but liberalism? What if dissatisfied constituencies have in fact been seeking not less democracy but rather less liberalism? The term illiberalism allows us to explore these questions, providing a fertile new paradigm for discussing ongoing developments. While this paradigm may not answer every question we have about the societies under study, it does serve to highlight a number of processes and provide a coherent explanation for them.

In this introductory chapter, I first advance a definition of illiberalism—in contradistinction to other concepts such as populism, conservatism, and authoritarianism—before exploring five main contentions related to this definition: ethical self-positionality; the diversity of illiberalisms in space and time; the nature of illiberalism as an ideology; locating illiberalism in politics and/or society; and the existence of a leftist illiberalism. I then move to a broader discussion on the entanglements between liberalism and illiberalism, looking at liberalism's own spaces of contention, its multiple scripts, its encapsulation of Western metamodernity, and how illiberalism contributes to the ongoing deconstruction of liberal hegemony. Before concluding by presenting the logic of the *Handbook*'s contents, I delve into the "amplifying feedback loop" effect of illiberalism, which is both a by-product of the contradictions of liberalism and an amplification of liberalism's challenges.

For a Definition of Illiberalism

The semantic ambivalence of the term illiberalism is intrinsic. The prefix *ill-* is the assimilated form of the Latin prefix *in-* used for words beginning in *l* and therefore means simultaneously "not," "opposite of," and "without." It can also mean something that is bad or unsuitable (as in "ill-prepared"). Taken literally, therefore, illiberalism may mean "non-liberal," "a-liberal," and "not suited for liberalism"—core ambivalences that should provide the point of departure for any scholarly exploration of the term.[2]

To date, scholars have advanced several different definitions of illiberalism. Jasper Theodor Kauth and Desmond King propose dividing illiberalism into two conceptual categories: "disruptive illiberalism," made up of practices opposing procedural democratic norms, and "ideological illiberalism," based on a logic of

exclusion of some groups from the citizenry (Kauth and King 2020). While their approach helps distinguish authoritarian leaders who attack democratic norms from pockets of illiberalism within democratic regimes, it remains incomplete in many respects. First, it employs a restricted definition of liberalism, and second, it does not entirely solve the complex relationship between ideological components and political practices.

The *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, a collected volume of more than sixty essays, offers many definitions, with authors proposing different ones depending on their fields of research, but often mixing genres of what is illiberal, populist, conservative, and authoritarian. The main definition advanced by editors Andras Sajó, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes appears more precise: illiberalism is "a set of social, political, cultural, legal, and mental phenomena associated with the waning of individual liberty (personal freedom) as an everyday experience." For them, illiberalism is "not an ideology or regime type," meaning that it is "compatible with the political rituals of a competitive democracy" (Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes 2022). This definition has the advantage of including perspectives from the different levels at which illiberalism can be "located" while focusing on a key issue: "the waning of individual liberty."

So far, the best-articulated definition of illiberalism has been offered by Julian G. Waller in several of his articles as "a modern ideological or ideational family that perceives itself in opposition to and reaction against philosophical liberalism, with pronounced tendencies towards the distrust of checking or minoritarian political institutions formed by apolitical experts, and focused on promoting a variety of collective, hierarchical, majoritarian, national-level, and/or culturally integrative approaches to contemporary political society in a substantive manner" (Waller 2023).

Contributing to this collective knowledge production, I advance here a definition that seeks to balance the generic nature of the term, which enables it to cover a wide variety of cases, against the precision that makes it epistemologically relevant. The definition is based on six components:

1) Illiberalism is one manifestation of a broader backlash against those contemporary experiences in which liberalism is considered failed, inefficient, or excessive. This backlash need not necessarily be illiberal; it may equally be leftist, post-liberal, and so on. Illiberalism is therefore inherently situational toward liberalism, yet it is not its mere negation and has substantive content of its own.

2) Illiberalism is not external to liberalism but a by-product thereof. It rises in reaction to systemic, endogenous evolutions of liberalism (what the Italian scholar Giovanni Orsina describes as "the feeling of having lost control over its own existential environment" (Orsina 2023) and has an amplifying, "feedback loop" effect thereon.

3) Illiberalism and liberalism are deeply entangled. Illiberalism is often found in authoritarian or autocratizing regimes, but it can also exist within an electoral democratic or a liberal technocratic framework.

4) Illiberalism is a cluster of ideologies that articulate a rejection of some or all of the different scripts of liberalism. It blends diverse intellectual traditions and policy norms and practices that promote majoritarianism, sovereignism, and traditional hierarchies (social, sexual, gender, cultural) and recognize the right to particularism and some forms of exclusivity.

5) Illiberalism can be located at different levels. It may be found as an intellectual product (doctrine level), as a project for a country and/or the world (a political offering), as public policies (regime and institutional level), or as a grassroots culture (societal level, shaped by collective beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors).

6) Illiberalism has an open-ended trajectory: it may interact with liberalism in a dialectical way, subvert liberalism, win hegemonic status over liberalism, or dismantle liberal democratic institutions.

Equally, one can "exit" from illiberalism.

Based on this definition, I argue that opposition to liberalism is always contextual: it may target core principles of liberalism and the Enlightenment, or may instead challenge only some concrete manifestations of liberalism in politics and society. While it appears in multitudinous combinations—each one specific to a given national context and political culture and critiquing different levels and layers of the "scripts" of liberalism (see the following discussion)—it is fed by the two main blind spots of liberalism: the balance between individual and collective identity, and the lack of social justice. While it may be seen, for good reasons, as weakening the hegemony around liberal democratic values, it also has the effect of repoliticizing and re-ideologizing debates by advancing a mix of anti-pluralism, anti-minoritarianism, anti-egalitarianism, and authoritarian solutions. It moves the debates from technocratic politics to the field of morality and culture: it stresses the idea of a renaissance of collective identities and of grand narratives to avoid the fragmentation and atomization of societies. As Giuliano da Empoli clarified in his *Engineers of Chaos*, what matters for the political offer is not the exactness of the facts but the intensity of the grand narrative (Empoli 2019).

Illiberalism, thus defined, needs to be contrasted with competing notions. For instance, illiberalism shares with conservatism a respect for traditional hierarchies and is likewise rooted in a pessimistic ontology of mankind. However, conservatism, especially the Anglo-Saxon version thereof, has historically been economically (neo)liberal, has accepted many of the assumptions of political liberalism, and has worked well within the framework of postwar liberal democracies. By contrast, illiberalism displays (albeit not systematically) much more statist features in terms of economic policy and challenges either liberal democracies' liberal assumptions or their democratic functioning—or both.

Turning to populism, illiberalism shares its critique of the current liberal system. Similarly, it blends values usually seen as right-wing with a left-wing promotion of welfare state and social policies. But the two also diverge: whereas populism is more of a communication mechanism, a rhetorical tool by which to construct the opposition between "us" and "them," illiberalism is an ideological universe. Unlike populism, illiberalism is not necessarily anti-elitist, anti-intellectualist, or anti-institutionalist, nor does it require a charismatic leader. Illiberalism is, however, essentially opposed to technocracy; by contrast, even though populism and technocracy are generally understood as antithetical, they not only are compatible but may be mutually reinforcing, as the research on technopopulism has shown (Bickerton and Accetti 2021).

Finally, there is a potentially significant contradistinction between illiberalism and post-liberalism. Public intellectuals whose political project would fit a normative definition of illiberalism often present themselves as post-liberal. Whether that terminological blurriness is part of a strategy for concealing these actors' radical ideas or whether illiberalism and post-liberalism share enough to converge is a matter of debate. After all, both criticize liberalism—especially its excessive individualism—and seek to rehabilitate common goods and community belonging. However, I see two central differences between them. First, illiberalism considers liberalism to be mistaken in its fundamental principles, whereas post-liberalism recognizes liberalism's achievements (especially the idea of equal rights and respect for the human person) but asserts that it has exhausted its ability to deliver solutions and should be replaced by something else. What this solution might be remains an open question, but all self-proclaimed post-liberal figures refer to a stronger sense of community. Second, whereas illiberalism emphasizes traditional hierarchies and may converge with clearly anti-liberal references (from Catholic integralism to Christian Nationalism), post-liberalism offers a more open definition of communitarianism, including a more leftist, more inclusive interpretation of what a community is (Milbank and Pabst 2016).

Illiberalism as a Contested Concept

The main concepts of political philosophy—freedom, rights, democracy, liberalism, and so on—are always highly contested (Swanton 1985). There is no scholarly agreement on their meaning, much less a consensual interpretation thereof among societal actors. Regimes largely seen as authoritarian or dictatorial claim to be genuinely democratic; and in Western Europe and the United States, far-right political movements have captured the language of freedom and rights (McAdams and Piccolo 2024). Political actors of all boards tend to denounce their opponents as populist, illiberal, or even fascist in hopes that this rhetorical exclusion from the political community resonates with voters (Berman 2016).

There are dozens of examples of this linguistic fluidity. This should come as no surprise: language is situational by nature, making contestation the norm, not the exception. People fight for control of meaning, as we see in, for instance, the "culture wars" around what constitutes a "family." It is therefore entirely reasonable that new concepts such as illiberalism should likewise be contested, including in scholarship. Indeed, I see at least five areas of contention over the academic meaning of illiberalism: the issue of ethical self-positionality, that of diversity of illiberalisms (plural) in space and time, that of the "nature" of illiberalism as an ideology, that of locating illiberalism in politics and/or society, and that of the existence of a leftist illiberalism.

Contention 1: Self-Positionality and Ethics

One of the key issues with scholarship on illiberalism has been its lack of reflection on its own positionality and its context of enunciation. Contestation over the meaning of a term can emerge as the result of different elements. The first is the positionality of each speaker. Some scholars are fervent defenders of liberal democracy as it currently exists in many Western countries; some support liberalism as an ideal type but see discrepancies between the ideal and its realization; some lean toward a more conservative reading of society that sees liberalism as going too far in dismantling the social order; and some incline toward a more leftist positioning in which illiberalism is the hidden child of liberalism's failures. To this inherent plurality of perspectives should be added the rise of illiberal academia—that is, new academic (or para-academic) figures and institutions that have as their stated objective the undermining of existing institutions that they deem too liberal (Giudici 2021; Geva and Santos 2021; Pető 2021).[3]

Only rarely do scholars make explicit their own philosophical vision, and the majority of those in the Global North are biased heavily toward liberalism and progressivism, which are seen as the "default" model. Yet it is necessary to acknowledge that liberal democracy is only one normative choice and that some may prefer the alternatives. Moreover, the postcolonial literature demonstrates that there are multiple modernities and that—far from being limited to the criteria of a Western-born liberalism—a democratic system can have multiple roots (Eisenstadt 2002).

Without explicit enunciation of the context, it is challenging to capture the multiple semantic spaces used in scholarship and the positionality of each scholar as a citizen—and potentially an activist. A growing trend invites scholars to reflect on their social responsibility and how the knowledge they acquire benefits not just their peers and the student community but society more broadly (Massanari 2018). Any scholarship related to democracy and its challenges may have direct implications for how society frames debates and policy solutions. At the very least, scholars' contribution should be to make explicit the fact that liberal democracy is just one of the normative options and to be clear about which features they define as liberal.

A second key issue—related to the first—is how scholars choose to dialogue with their object of study. They have agency in dealing with semantic blurriness, but this has political implications. By using the adjectives "far right," "fascist," "illiberal," "post-liberal," or "conservative," scholars participate in building the

image of the movements they describe, either discrediting them by making them sound radical, violent, or fringe or embracing these movements' own branding as respectable political forces. Is it the duty of scholarship to denounce whitewashings of language and positioning? Alternatively, should scholars work from the point of view of the actors themselves, while recognizing the risk of euphemization?

Of course, navigating between an *etic* (given by external observers) and an *emic* (given by actors themselves) definition of an object is not a new issue; ethnology has been dealing with its origin and has made the discrepancy an object of reflection per se. The same seems to be needed here: scholarship should be explicit as to whether the term "illiberal" is attributed by the scholar or is claimed by actors themselves, so as to better circumscribe the semantic field and the boundaries of the study. This is all the more necessary given the permeability between emic and etic definitions; the Orbán regime, for instance, offers a fascinating case of borrowing from the academic language for political struggle by embracing the term "illiberal" (Buzogány and Varga 2018, 2023).

This debate relates directly to the issue of prescriptiveness in political philosophy. There is indeed inherent tension between capturing the fluidity and trying to categorize. Do we use a term (liberalism, illiberalism, etc.) to describe something in real-world contexts and categorize "who is who," or do we analyze the repertoires of use of the concept, taking the situationality of language as our point of departure? Should scholars look for a supposedly identifiable essence to concepts and then distribute normative labels of authenticity, deciding who merits the title of liberal, illiberal, or conservative and who is usurping it? This question is a major one. Many political figures whom scholars would label as illiberal or far-right present themselves instead as conservatives or old-fashioned liberals: think of the PiS in Poland, Vladimir Putin in Russia, or the government of Singapore. Here, too, scholars should make explicit their normative or descriptive positioning.

Contention 2: Illiberalism's Space and Time

A second contestation relates to the issue of accounting for space and time in defining the boundaries of illiberalism and its diversity. Is diversity an element that diminishes the relevance of the concept, making it too much of a catchall category, or something that should be integrated into our assumptions and help us think in a comparative framework?

Chronology Matters

When it comes to time, can we apply the term illiberal historically or should we concentrate only on contemporary phenomena? To keep the term heuristically relevant, I see illiberalism as a contemporary phenomenon with chronological boundaries, crystallizing moments or turning points, and multiple temporal trajectories depending on national contexts.

Fareed Zakaria locates the birth of illiberal democracies in the 1990s with the third wave of democratization (Latin America in the 1970s, Southeast Asia in the 1980s, Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s) and its limitations (Zakaria 1997). I prefer to identify other birth moments for illiberalism that are connected not to regime typologies but to ideological transformations. Globally, these transformations have been happening in a changing socioeconomic environment shaped by deindustrialization and the rise of the service economy, the increase in access to education, and occupational upgrading. This has effectively hollowed out old collective identities based on socioeconomic profile, opening up space for new collective identities to emerge and became salient sites of political contestation.

The first crystallizing moment can be found in the 1960s–1970s, as cultural progressivism gradually became dominant or at least a force of change in Western societies and conservative forces had to reorganize themselves to resist (Gifford and Williams 2012; Scanlon 2013). It was at this point that "culture wars"

began structuring the US domestic landscape before being exported abroad through the Evangelical movements in Latin America and Africa (Hunter 1992; Hartman 2019). They then became more massive and diversified, and reached Europe with the symbolic call to arms of Pope John Paul II for a new evangelization of Europe after the end of the Cold War (Formicola 2005; Schäfer 2008). This origin in the 1960s–1970s is important to emphasize if one wants to capture the dynamic of illiberalism and its competition with progressivism, which should be part of the equation: illiberalism did not arise in a vacuum.

The second birth moment came in the 1980s–1990s, as neoliberalism became the new economic norm— beginning with Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the United States before spreading across Europe and worldwide—and then generated a backlash, in particular after the 2007–2008 economic crisis. The peak of neoliberalism coincided with the fall of the socialist bloc and what Francis Fukuyama saw as the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992). This "end of history" is not so much about the triumph of the liberal-democratic model in the Cold War as it is about the rising trend of technocratic politics: it has deeply depoliticized and de-ideologized policy decisions by affirming that there were no longer choices to be made about development trajectories, but rather a single rational, data-driven, and expertise-based approach (Milne 2012).On this temporal reading, illiberalism is about half a century old. Yet—and this is a critical caveat—that does not mean it does not belong to a broader ideological family or universe with older roots.

One can identify two core genealogies that attach illiberalism to two major historical predecessors: first, the anti-Enlightenment forces that emerged in the late eighteenth century and throughout the long nineteenth century; and second, the interwar period. The term "illiberal" itself first seems to have been used by the British writer and philosopher John Ruskin in 1871 to criticize Victorian modernity of the late nineteenth century (Ruskin 1871). It was used by French political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon to describe Napoleon III, who combined popular legitimacy, populist claims, imperial nostalgia, conservative values, and sympathy for the aspirations of the working classes (Rosanvallon 2000). Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic likewise offer great historical parallels. It is therefore no coincidence that there exists a book by Konrad H. Jarausch analyzing "academic illiberalism" in imperial German universities (Jarausch 1982). Europe's interwar experience—when liberalism was challenged by illiberal forces, both conservative and fascist—is the most striking parallel with today's world and calls for deeper diachronic exploration.

Space Matters

The second issue is that of space. How can we—and indeed *should* we—compare what appears as a backlash against liberalism in very different political cultures across the globe? How can and should we reconcile the transformations happening in the Global North with those happening in the Global South (both notions being themselves contested)? Culture wars and neoliberalism do travel, but they are rooted in very diverse societies whose political culture, experiences of democracy construction, and value systems are quite different. What unites an otherwise very diverse Global South is, for instance, the experience of colonialism and postcolonialism, a prism that directly impacts actors' interpretation of what is or is not liberalism.

Mapping illiberalism spatially helps reveal how some of these core transformations impact different regions of the world and different social groups. For instance, a cluster of illiberalism has emerged in Central and Eastern Europe, with Russia, Hungary, and Poland as leading examples. The fact that this region has been a foremost laboratory for illiberal experiments can be explained by three central components. First, the regimes that existed in these countries prior to the communist period, either during imperial times (when the region's population existed under different combinations of Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman domination) or during their interwar independence (for those states that had one), were largely non-liberal. Second, communist regimes were both progressive on some aspects and conservative on others —for instance, prudish in terms of mores and sexuality, nationalist in many respects, and anti-Western by dint of being anticapitalist (Brainerd and Cutler 2005; Sauvé 2018). Third, the region experienced in the

1990s the most disruptive features of (neo)liberalism in a radical way at the end of the communist period (the destruction of the welfare state, the shrinking of the civil service, the rise of social inequality, a high level of corruption in the privatization of the economy, etc.) (Berman and Snegovaya 2019; Berezin 2019; Snegovaya 2020; Snegovaya 2021).

This is not to suggest that postcommunist societies were not thirsty for change—they most certainly were. But the scale of this attempted transition and its socioeconomic and cultural impacts were far greater than anticipated. The polysemantic dimensions of joining the "West" institutionally, politically, economically, strategically, and philosophically constituted a uncertain ideological pursuit subject to contestation, disappointment, and resentment. Some of these societies' aspirations were oriented toward an "old-fashioned" liberalism that would have been economically generous and protective, as well as only moderately socially progressive, rather than toward the "post-modern" liberalism that actually transpired, which was economically neoliberal and (seen as) excessively progressive in terms of morality. Another geographical cluster of illiberalism can be found in Latin America; this experience remains to be compared to that of Central and Eastern Europe.

(Plural) Illiberalisms in Context

As Edmund Fawcett explains in his chapter in this volume, one can identify at least three types of illiberalism in context: illiberalism as a *refusal* by countries that were never fully liberal and/or democratic (China, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkmenistan …), illiberalism as a *deflection* from a liberal-democratic path recently embarked down or returned to (Latin American and Central and Eastern European countries, Turkey, etc.), and illiberalism as *defection* from liberal or democratic norms in countries that have long been committed to both (in the United States and Western Europe).

One may question whether the first category of countries—those displaying a *refusal* of liberalism—should be excluded from the definition of illiberalism. After all, many ideological universes are not directly connected to liberalism and can be seen as non-liberal or anti-liberal: these include communism, fascism, Salafism and other versions of Islamism, as well as Asian religious philosophies inspired by Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and so on. In all these cases, the textual universe of reference does not share much with liberalism. Yet liberalism is rarely totally absent from them in one way or another. Communism competed with liberalism to implement the precepts of the Enlightenment understood differently; fascism cooperated well with some forms of economic liberalism (big corporations supported Hitler, while some Western liberal elites solidarized with Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, or Latin American military juntas); and Islamism, in its different versions, has developed in reaction to experience of colonial liberalism (Iran after the Shah, the Taliban against the pro-communist regime and then during NATO occupation, etc.).

The case of China illustrates well the debate. In her chapter in this volume, Eva Pils considers Xi Jinping's reign to be illiberal in the sense that it has reframed what good governance means and reduced the freedoms available to the public after the period of recognition of limited liberal legal principles that followed Mao's death in 1976. Associated with populist and anti-globalist discourses, it reveals a form of *droitisation* of state policies and language. In that sense, Xi's China is more illiberal than anti- or non-liberal. As this example shows, new research on the "peripheries" of illiberalism will enable us to confirm or contradict the hypothesis that illiberalism and non-liberalism do not overlap.

No matter how this specific debate on *refusal* is decided, *deflection* from a liberal-democratic path recently embarked down or returned and *defection* from liberal or democratic norms in countries that have long been committed to both remain the two main illiberal trajectories and the ones with major impact on the future of liberal democracies. In both cases, illiberalism must be understood as a form of post-liberalism: a country pushes back against liberalism *after having experienced it.* Yet these two categories, however important, are insufficient to capture the large spectrum of trajectories toward illiberalism.

Does illiberalism constitute a stage of evolution from a liberal democracy to an authoritarian regime? For instance, is an "illiberal democracy" necessarily a form of transitional stage toward an authoritarian regime when the illiberal leader is able to stay in power long enough to transform institutions (think Orbán in Hungary, Vučić in Serbia, Putin in Russia, to stick with Central and Eastern European examples)? A large part of the existing literature seems to imply that there is a continuum from illiberalism to authoritarianism, even if conceptually the relationship is more complex or contingent than it is linear.

Or is illiberalism part of the dialectical construction of a democracy, in which phases of illiberal experiments alternate with liberal moments, as the history of nineteenth-century Europe might suggest? A related question is that of post-illiberalism. How do societies and institutions "come back" from an illiberal moment (the United States after Trump, Brazil after Bolsonaro, Poland after PiS ...). What has been transformed by illiberal policies (political and judicial institutions, public opinion, media ecosystems, etc.) and what resisted? How have the public space and debates around polarizing cultural issues such as abortion, religion, immigration, and identity been transformed by the illiberal moment, even once the latter is over? Does "exiting" an illiberal moment mean "returning" to the previous liberalism, or instead entering a new stage in which the illiberal and the liberal have to coexist?

Contention 3: Illiberalism as an Ideology

A third dimension of contestation over the conceptualization of illiberalism relates to its nature as an ideology. Illiberalism is often decried as a conglomerate of contradictory arguments and policies that falls short of being a conventional ideology.

But the assumption that ideologies are internally coherent is partly illusory. First, highly coherent ideologies are a minority, and even those have inner divisions. Soviet Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, and Trotskyism, among others, all fought for the legacy of Marxism. Soviet ideology was itself a blending of Marxism-Leninism and National Bolshevism carried out under Stalin (Brandenberger 2002). Salafism faces major conflicts when it comes to interpretation, and Salafi movements may excommunicate each other. And while the Italian and Nazi variants of fascism are the most prominent types, less ideal-typical types proliferated in Spain, Portugal, Latin America, Romania, and so on. More importantly, the main ideologies that shape the Western world, such as liberalism and conservatism, are in fact meta-ideologies—that is, clusters of ideologies (racism, antiracism, patriarchy, feminism, antisemitism, nationalism, neoliberalism, environmentalism, etc.) arranged in varying ways depending on the national cultural context and the historical moment (van Dick 1998).

In scholarship and especially in policy-oriented literature, ideology tends to be projected onto "Others": totalitarian countries would have ideologies, but liberal democracies do not. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz observed, it is "one of the minor ironies of modern intellectual history that the term 'ideology' has itself become thoroughly ideologized" (Geertz 1964). Here I share Geertz's view that ideologies are symbolic systems that serve as a road map for a person in a complex social reality, resulting in creative adaptation by each of us. Even if ideologies function as "disguises for ulterior motives" (mostly at the elite level), they are always "maps of problematic social reality" that attempt to "render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them" (Geertz 1973). This means that every society shares some mainstream ideology; what differs is citizens' right to a plurality of ideologies and the degree of pressure exerted by dominant institutions, whether state or private, to enforce one ideology over others.

The most relevant works on the concept of ideology come not from political science but from semiotics, anthropology, and cultural studies—all of which insist on the meaning-making effect of ideology. Roland Barthes has described myths as a metalanguage used to make sense of the world, thereby helping to

naturalize particular worldviews and power relations (Barthes 1972). Michel Foucault insisted that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" and therefore contribute to normalizing and legitimizing power relations in both democratic and authoritarian contexts (Foucault 1972).

Given the contribution of semiotics to the research on ideology, I rely here on Teun van Dijk's definition of ideology around four criteria: (1) it has internal structure as forms of shared social cognition; (2) it controls socially shared attitudes on important social issues (e.g., immigration, abortion, the death penalty); (3) it has foundational texts such as manifestos; and (4) it is present in the everyday discourse, interaction, and practices of members of the ideological group and not only among politicians (van Dick, forthcoming). This definition combines ideology as a structure with some philosophical coherence, a global overview of the proper order of society, and a more political, goal-oriented implementation aspect.

Agreeing on a definition of ideology does not obviate another central piece of the debate, which relates to the categorization of ideologies—identifying and naming them—and their internal architecture. In this realm, the seminal reference is the work of Michael Freeden, who sees ideology as a process of de-contestation offering "temporary stabilities carved out of fundamental semantic instability in the social and political worlds" (Freeden 2013). One of the limitations of this hierarchy, as with the majority of conceptual works around ideology, is that it interprets the ideational realm mostly through traditional textual culture. However, "thick" ideologies, as defined by Freeden, are a product of classical modernity that belong to the past. The postmodern world, with its inherent ideological fluidity or liquidity—to borrow the terms crafted by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 2000)—may only produce "thin" ideologies or clusters of ideologies that blend varied doctrinal corpora in eclectic constellations.

How, then, do we articulate the microtargeting aspect of everyday politics and political offers, at least in the Global North, with a scholarly reading of ideology as coherent and all-encompassing? Should we look for ideology to be "located" in more heterogenous niches? In a fragmented world of competing and contrasting identities based on the idea that knowledge is inter-subjective and self-referential, the definition of "ideology" has been fundamentally transformed. Moreover, textual realities are disappearing, replaced by more visual and more sensory ones—another shift that remains largely understudied and will impact the way we define, name, and categorize ideologies.

The scholarship on illiberalism remains divided on its status as an ideology. Some, such as Andrea Pető, see it as a new assemblage of existing ideas (Pető 2022). Others, among them Anja Henning and Gregorio Bettiza, consider that the adjective "illiberal" brings more to the discussion than the noun "illiberalism": it allows us to capture manifestations of contestation of liberalism without asserting that these constitute a comprehensive ideological formation. Still others, like myself, see illiberalism as having enough identifiable features to qualify for the status of a (meta-)ideology or cluster of ideologies.

This "-ism" status is conferred in recognition of the current *thickening* of everything illiberal: intellectual production, policy actions, and transnational coordination between actors—with the rapid growth of an illiberal International made up of thinkers, political entrepreneurs, funders, grassroots activists, and associations who coordinate their actions and borrow language and tactics from each other. At the doctrinal level, one can observe the gradual structuring of corpora of texts or doctrines around the idea of a rebellious conservatism. While illiberalism shares with conservatism the defense of traditional family values and social order, it considers that conservatism's effort to ensure stability or immobility has failed, given the speed and force of changes, and therefore that only counterrevolutionary changes—that is, a more virulent and active reaction—can stop what proponents of illiberalism see as civilizational decline and moral nihilism.

The intellectual genealogy of illiberalism includes varying combinations—specific to each individual thinker—of classic national conservatism (Edmund Burke, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, or Leo Voegelin, as well as doctrines coming from political Catholicism) and revolutionary conservatism (Armin Mohler, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Julius Evola, and the whole New Right school, with thinkers such as Alain de Benoist; more radical frames sometimes come from White Christianism and Great Replacement theories and radical countercultures) (Varga and Buzogány 2022). Some illiberal doctrinal constructions may also recode leftist narratives with new meanings, using references to Antonio Gramsci or Noam Chomsky while maintaining a strong anticommunist legacy, revived under the motto of "cultural Marxism," to denounce all forms of progressivism as "wokeism" (Braune 2019; Busbridge, Moffitt, and Thorburn 2020).

Contention 4: Locating Illiberalism

The question of analyzing illiberalism as an ideology pushes us to explicate where we "locate" illiberalism: at the level of a regime, a government, some institutions, political forces, intellectual production, grassroots demands, individual mindsets? Depending on the social science that is activated, certain objects are central to the analysis and others obscured.

To this point, illiberalism has mostly been studied as an object of political science and political sociology. Scholarship has explored the illiberal political offering and its attraction to voters; illiberal governments and their policies; and illiberal regimes and their dismantling of liberal democratic institutions. Yet that represents only one lens of analysis of what can be defined as illiberal. New fields—such as communication, law and constitutionalism, and political philosophy—have expressed interest in the concept and offer their own interpretations. Many other disciplines could also make major contributions to such an exploration, including cultural anthropology on the grassroots aspects, as well as psychology and cognitive sciences. Popular cultural practices as a site for illiberal values production, for instance, remains a blank spot.

Locating illiberalism can also contribute to the discussion of the relationship between competing explanatory concepts. If political regimes and institutions are the core objects where illiberalism is located, then the articulation with democratic decay, authoritarianism, autocratization, and so on, seems the more relevant one. But if illiberalism is analyzed as a strategy by means of which political entrepreneurs can address popular grievances, then populism may be a more relevant "companion" for scholarly exploration. If illiberalism is framed as an intellectual product, then conservatism, "Dark Enlightenment," and "Dark modernity" may be the right partners to dialogue with. If illiberalism, as Jan Kubik frames it in his chapter, is a culture, a way of talking and thinking, an ethos, a sensibility, and an aesthetic, then cultural anthropology and psychology will supply the appropriate candidates for dialogue, such as the notion of *ressentiment*.

Contention 5: Tackling the Issue of an Illiberal Left

A final contested aspect of the definition of illiberalism I advance is the inclusion of some leftist movements in the illiberal realm. Point no. 4 in my initial definition of illiberalism, with its requirement of respect for traditional hierarchies in terms of gender, sexuality, and national identity, rules out the vast majority of leftist movements in the Global North, which are progressivist on these questions. Some leftist audiences in Europe are inclusive in terms of mores but more exclusionary in terms of national identity. In the Global South, meanwhile, the left is often more conservative in terms of mores.

However, if we were to exclude the rejection of sexual and gender progressivism from our definition of illiberalism, then several leftist movements would qualify as illiberal: they challenge economic and geopolitical liberalism; they favor majoritarianism and sovereignism, which are seen as the last bastion of equal expression by citizens in a world of technocratic supranational decisions; and, as noted above, some

of them (although not all) favor an assimilationist definition of the nation (every individual needs socialization in the nation to be part of it) as opposed to a multicultural neoliberal framework.

"The left" is itself obviously a very broad notion—and one that is situational in space and time. It has a complex, diverse relationship to liberalism. It shares some elements of political liberalism such as the expansion of individual rights, but comes into tension with it where liberalism contests democratic demands in favor of defending well-established power relations. It opposes the economic script of liberalism, especially its neoliberal version. It favors societal progressivism in many (but not all) contexts, and often (but not systematically) opposes liberal geopolitical institutions such as NATO.

One can schematically differentiate three categories of left-liberalism relationship. First, the revolutionary left opposes liberalism in a radical manner that can be defined as antiliberal—in the case of communist doctrines, for instance. Revolutionism accepts and even welcomes political violence, while rejecting political pluralism in the name of a bigger, progressive cause. Yet the revolutionary left is sharing many of liberalism's Enlightenment components, such as a belief in progress, rationality, and universalism.

Second, a social-democratic left has accommodated liberalism in a liberal democratic framework, while trying to tone down economic (neo)liberalism in favor of more redistributive policies and pushing for a more inclusive societal liberalism. That left has failed to transform liberalism in a decisive way and has gradually embraced a post-ideological technocratic language. Its failure has been seen as a major explanation for the rise of illiberal parties and grassroots demands, as well as for the far right's capture of more leftist socioeconomic claims (Snegovaya 2024).

Third, a "new left" has emerged that is shaped more by identity politics than by class struggle and denounces liberalism as unfaithful to its commitment to equality/equity. This "new left" can be read as representing the usual progressivist pressure on liberalism to improve itself. But it also fairly well accommodates neoliberal philosophical principles of full sovereignty of the individual and hides the persistent contention between social classes behind identity politics. In its more extreme versions, such as Critical Race Theory, the "new left" can be read as opposing liberalism in calling for (racial) collective identities to be held superior to individual rights and challenging the idea of free speech for all, as it wants to curtail—silence, or at least blame and shame—what it identifies as racist, misogynist, or transphobic speech (the "cancel culture" phenomenon) (Ng 2022; Norris 2023).

As we can see, depending on which leftist tradition one is looking at, one might have a different answer to the question of the (non-)existence of a leftist illiberalism.

The Liberalism/Illiberalism Entanglement

The core of the debate about conceptualizing illiberalism relates to its relationship to its liberal main Other (Börzel and Zürn 2020). As noted above, treating liberalism as the default normative reference represents a major bias in scholarship. To explore illiberalism, one therefore needs to at least minimally deconstruct liberalism as a meta-ideology and look at its multiple morphologies and at its own self-mythologization (Bell 2014). While part of the literature continues to present liberalism/illiberalism as a binary, the field increasingly addresses the relational, imbricated nature of the two terms (Morisset 2024).

Liberalism Is Plural: Spaces of Tension

Opposing liberalism, as a well-defined ideology, to an illiberalism that is empty of content, purely negationist, or widely incoherent is a bias prevalent in the current literature. Yet one can only agree with Georg Simmerl that liberalism should be understood less as a clear set of ideals than as a "strategic application of these ideals in public debate for competing ends" (Simmerl 2023). Though it may have had a precise original principle—defending individual rights in absolute monarchies—it has since become a blanket term.

I see at least three layers of tensions to be untangled here. The first one relates to liberalism as a political philosophy with its own inherent tensions, mostly around the balance between individualism and the common good, and between freedom and justice. Liberalism has been shaped by diverse ideational sources and does not have a single, linear intellectual tradition. Some liberal thinkers have distanced themselves from the original economic "laissez-faire" tradition in favor of a more social-democratic reading of liberalism; others have instead pushed the free-market logic and joined forces with those identified as conservatives to "undo the Demos," as Wendy Brown formulated it (Brown 2017). Depending on liberalism's philosophical schools, several thinkers can be enlisted or excluded from the liberal tradition (Freeden 1986; Nell 2009; Losurdo 2014; McManus 2021).

A second layer relates to the relationship between liberalism and democracy. Many ancient democracies—such as the Athenian one—were not liberal; they functioned without rule of law or human rights, being based instead on the principle of majoritarianism. Since then, the Roman distinction between the *populus* and the *plebeians*—that is, between the legitimate, constitutive people and the "dangerous," "uncontrolled" people—has shaped the Western vision of the people as both the core repository for political legitimation *and* a threat to social order (Moatti and Müller 2021). Liberalism emerged in the eighteenth century, centered on the value of individual autonomy. It has often seen the plebs and their democratic potential as a danger for the polity, considering rational moderation and capacity for consensus the purview of select privileged groups (Higley and Burton 2006; Kahan 2017). The blending of liberalism and democracy occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (an example being the French Third Republic) and was sacralized during the Cold War decades as the distinction between the "free world" and communism—what Chantal Mouffe has termed "a contingent historical articulation" (Mouffe 2018).

This idea that liberalism—especially in the form combining liberal constitutionalism and minority-protection mechanisms—tempers democratic populism and its potential to drift toward autocratic populism and majoritarianism continues to dominate a large segment of the literature, from Fareed Zakaria to Stephen Holmes, inspired by Jürgen Habermas's idea of a "rational consensus." But another scholarly tradition inspired by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe refutes the idea of democracy as consensus and compromise. Instead, they reframe it as a technique for managing the nonviolent expression of antagonisms. As Mouffe declared in her seminal *Democratic Paradox*: "Let's not forget that, while we tend today to take the link between liberalism and democracy for granted, their union, far from being a smooth process, was the result of bitter struggles" (Mouffe 2000). Liberalism gives rights, but democracy gives inclusivity. Their relationship is regularly renegotiated.

A third layer of tensions relates to the discrepancy between liberalism as a philosophical ideal type and "really existing liberalism,"—a notion proposed by Aurelien Mondon, to parallel that of "really existing socialism."(Mondon 2024) Historically, liberalism was liberal only for a small group of people; for the rest, it was associated, in different combinations, with patriarchy, colonization, slavery, racism, and eugenics (Joppke 2015). Defenders of liberalism argue that even if liberalism has been compromised by its history, it is still the only political system able to improve itself. Liberal systems gradually expanded rights from privileged white males to other social groups, people of color, and women (Mounk 2018a; Fukuyama 2022). From this perspective, liberalism is a permanent work in progress, continually extending rights to new

groups. It is also capable of self-criticism and apologies for its mistakes, as seen in the current debates over the colonial past and the level of societal acceptance of misogyny and male domination (Williams 2020).

Critics respond that it is time to unmask liberal pretentions: what defenders of liberalism see as self-improvement has been in fact the result of pressure coming from grassroots movements—mostly leftist ones—*against* liberalism (Losurdo 2014). If liberalism has become more democratic, redistributive, and fair, it is mainly because it has had to accommodate leftist demands. Critics add that while these struggles between liberalism and the left have shaped a large part of the liberal-democratic construction, there is a well-documented history of liberalism's permeability to reactionary movements. Historically, liberalism has been able to accommodate fascism, even sometimes supporting its political and economic projects. Nowadays, liberal-right governments in Europe form coalitions with the far right against the left, and the liberal mainstream reproduces discursive schemes inspired by the far right, especially on national identity/immigration issues (Mondon and Winter 2020; Ekström, Krzyżanowski, and Johnson 2023). Moreover, behind the veil of moralizing pretentions, today's liberalism offers a legal and political framework for reproducing socioeconomic and cultural injustice both in a domestic framework and on the international scene.

Liberalism is therefore a universe made up of contradictory intellectual genealogies and ambivalent historical realizations. Depending on what we identify as liberalism when we discuss illiberalism, the relationship between the two terms can move from dichotomy to blending.

Liberalism's Four Scripts

Once we move away from liberalism as an abstract political philosophy to "really existing liberalism," one can identify four scripts through which it is realized: political, cultural, economic, and geopolitical.

Political liberalism defends the right of the individual to be protected as much as possible from state interference—both their political right to the "consentment of the governed" and their legal rights to private property. This political liberalism is closely related to democracy but should not be conflated with it. Their merging happened in a specific historical context, namely the post–World War II Western world, when some countries gradually converged on the idea that genuine democracy requires not only a statistical majority of 50 percent plus one vote, as well as free and fair elections, but also checks and balances and limiting majoritarianism by guaranteeing the rights of minorities.

The second script is economic liberalism, which historically insisted on the sacredness of private property and the market economy. This script has now taken the form of neoliberalism—the key difference being that neoliberalism is highly constructive, implemented by states and supranational institutions to force liberalization, and therefore no longer reflects the original "laissez-faire" idea of the "minimal state" still promoted by libertarians. Economic liberalism advocates for privatization, deregulation, globalization, free trade, and austerity measures to reduce state intervention in the economy (Giroux 2004; Harvey 2007; Ayers and Saad-Filho 2015).

The third script is societal liberalism, which stresses the emancipatory power of individual rights. Its philosophical principle is that collective structures such as the family are in fact reproducing traditional power relations and should therefore be challenged (Kaestle 2016). Born originally from the first script (expanding individual rights as much as possible), the third script is now related not to securing political rights, but to securing identity rights (Fukuyama 2018). This identity politics extends from recognizing the diversity of ethnic identities (as with the proliferation of new racial categories in the United States for Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, as well as the fight for the recognition of biracial categories) to legalizing the right to different sexual orientations (through same-sex marriage) and gender fluidity (the right to change gender or to reject binary gender identification). While the legalization of homosexuality

seems to have been accepted in many countries that identify themselves as liberal democracies (even if there continue to be tensions around the issues of adoption and procreation), gender identification has become a new battleground for liberating the individual from collective identifications.

The fourth script, geopolitical liberalism, is composed of two interrelated components. The first is that, historically, liberalism (like capitalism) has been intrinsically linked to colonialism (Bell 2016). The huge postcolonial/decolonial literature considers that liberalism has essentially been written by Europeans; is intimately articulated with non-liberal practices of domination, exclusion, and deculturation; and has imposed an external blueprint that posits a universal political order (Bhambra 2007; Jefferess 2008). Historical colonialism has been pursued by more modern neocolonial/neo-imperial methods. The United States in particular has long exported liberalism under the label of democracy promotion, regime change, and organized military interventions, which have delivered catastrophic results and contributed to the "US-led world liberal order" becoming often associated with neo-imperialism (Downes 2021). Making development aid conditional on recognition of liberal values such as LGBTQ rights is another form of normative pressure. Seen from the Global South, this Western liberalism for export sounds very illiberal: as Samuel Huntington summarized it, "what is universalism to the West is imperialism to the rest" (Huntington 1997).

Second, the international world order is constructed to benefit the "political West"—that is, North America and (Western) Europe. Western countries and institutions are largely privileged in the current world order, especially given the disproportionality between demography (the "golden billion") and representation in international organizations. As stated by Tanja Börzel and Michael Zürn, "the projection of North American power after World War II would have been inconceivable without the attractiveness of the US social and political model as the most significant *mise-en-scène* of the liberal script" (Börzel and Zürn 2020). Since the end of the Cold War, this geopolitical liberalism has become embedded in liberal internationalism, which, as Andrej Krickovic and Richard Sakwa explain, "stresses the transformative role of liberalism and democracy in taming interstate competition. The expansion of the liberal community of states and their continued hegemony over world politics are considered necessary for the preservation of global peace and stability" (Ikenberry 2018; Krickovic and Sakwa 2022).

There are three major point of tension between these different scripts, each of which has been instrumentalized by illiberal movements.

The first is the relationship between political and societal liberalism. For those we might call "liberal progressivists," there is an intrinsic connection between the two: the fight to free the individual from societal pressures when it comes to defining their ethnic, sexual, and gender identity is perceived as the logical continuation of political freedom against absolutist and authoritarian state structures. In their effort to cater to new identities and freedoms, such actors may manifest an illiberal attitude toward the fact that there is significant societal contention—if not contestation—around these new rights. For all who fall outside the group of "liberal progressivists," meanwhile, cultural liberalism is not the obvious extension of political liberalism but something of a different nature: it is variously seen as having nothing to do with political freedoms and being an excessive individualism that negates ontological realities of human beings (the conservatives); as a product of Western cultures not exportable abroad (among some in the Global South); or as an obfuscation of the social-class issue that moves political liberalism away from addressing socioeconomic equalities in favor of a neoliberal reading of ultra-individualist identities (the social class-based left).

A second point of tension relates to the relationship between liberalism and neoliberalism, which has long been a blind spot in research on illiberalism. For neoliberals, human beings are *homo economicus*: their main identity is to be a consumer focused on economic prosperity. But neoliberalism is much more than an economic policy: it is a coherent and distinctive political philosophy undergirded by the normative principle

of personal ethical responsibility (Slobodian 2018; Whyte 2019). It frames a broader view of the social order in which individuals, and not society or institutions, are in charge of their own "pursuit of happiness." One can therefore read neoliberalism as the natural continuation of liberalism toward extreme individualism, or a divergence from it as it erases the collective belonging aspect, or even an opposing philosophy.

In the real world, neoliberalism has been presented by decision-making circles—and experienced by citizens—as the continuation of liberalism, especially in cases where social-democratic forces, expected to propose a more welfare-state-centric vision of the economy, have implemented neoliberal policies. In Central and Eastern Europe, many of the "liberals" of the 1990s became "illiberals" in the 2000s–2010s, and their fusionist positions—which, like those of American conservatives, combined economic liberalism and moral conservatism—paved the way for illiberal regimes (Bluhm and Varga 2020). Today, one notices a new articulation, that of economic libertarianism with paleoconservatism (Cooper 2021). Many illiberal leaders—such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Viktor Orbán, and Javier Milei—pursue neoliberal policies and advocate for pro-market policies domestically but anti-globalization and protectionism internationally, confirming that illiberalism does implement neoliberal policies (Benczes 2024).

Seen from the left, neoliberalism has endangered political liberalism and contributed to discrediting it. One strand of the literature explores, for instance, how neoliberalism has succeeded in commodifying identities, family ties, and human bodies. In this reading, feminist and LGBTQ movements are denounced as participating in this neoliberal marketization and the idea that inclusion in the citizenry happens through ultra-individualism and consumerism (Rottenberg 2014; Prügl 2015; Graff 2021). Another set of criticisms of neoliberalism has now arrived from the right: illiberal movements contend that globalized neoliberalism threatens the sense of community belonging. Such critics promote gender traditionalism as an answer to neoliberalism, linking socioeconomic issues and social issues. In Poland, for instance, illiberals present themselves as defenders both of the economically underprivileged *and* of families with multiple children to whom they offer some preferential welfare policies (Graff and Korolczuk 2022).

A third point of tension relates to geopolitical liberalism. Aligning liberalism, universalism, and Westernism as an obvious virtuous trinity is problematic, to say the least. If liberalism is tainted by its Western cultural origin, can it be reinvented and reappropriated by non-Western actors? Is there room for a non-Western-centric liberalism? Two paradoxes can be mentioned here. First, that illiberalism is rising in the non-Western world as a reaction against the Western-led world order *even as* the Global North is itself becoming more illiberal. Second, that while key Global South powers such as China, India, South Africa, and Brazil play a fundamental role in pushing for a more sustainable global order, they are also denounced by the West as too sympathetic to regimes seen as antithetical to liberalism, such as Putin's Russia. How do we disentangle the apparent contradiction that some illiberal regimes, which are anything but inclusive and democratic at home, are at the forefront of a movement to make the international system more inclusive and equitable? Are they integral to this movement despite themselves, or using it cynically for their own benefit?

Illiberalism as a Challenge to the Meta-Ideology of Western Modernity

In the scholarly literature, the contestation of liberalism by illiberal forces is often explained as a backlash against cultural progressivism and neoliberal reforms. While correct, this analysis tends to bypass interpreting liberalism in the much broader sense of Western modernity. Liberalism does rest more or less on its assimilation to a meta-ideology of Western modernity, which covers a vast array of concepts adapted from the Enlightenment: individualism, universalism, rationality, modernity, and progress (Wallerstein 1995). As Georg Simmerl states, liberalism is interpreted as "an encompassing language game that constitutes the discursive environment of modernity" (Simmerl 2023). By challenging liberalism, illiberalism thus contributes in its own way to the growing challenges faced by the dominance of Western modernity.

Universalism

Illiberal scripts challenge the idea of an abstract universalism that would allow for similar policies to be applicable all over the world, claiming instead the right to particularism. They call for a *contextualization of politics* against multilateral institutions and abstract "*droit-de-l'hommisme.*" Globalization, in the sense of growing interactions between products and human beings from across the planet, plays a major role here, as globalization and universalism tend to be equated to each other. One might, of course, read that particularism as a simple defensive strategy on the part of authoritarian regimes that seek to protect themselves from normative interference coming from the West, but this would be to ignore the rich intellectual history of tensions between universalism and particularism, as well as the revival of civilizational thought.

References to civilization*s* (plural) have indeed been growing in recent decades, positing, as Roger Brubaker explains, "a different kind of imagined community, located at a different level of cultural and political space, than national discourse" (Brubaker 2017). A growing body of theory rooted in social psychology and sociology treats civilizations as a discursive commonplace, a mental map of the world that allows for discussions about ontological security (Haynes 2019; Hale and Laruelle 2021). This civilizationism is widely displayed by countries such as Russia, China, Turkey, India, and Singapore, but also by Western liberal politicians, from Emmanuel Macron to Joseph Biden, and by the EU institutions, for which Western values and liberalism are a "civilization" per se. The growing use of civilizationist references to explain international tensions, with illiberals insisting on the right to particularism and liberals blending universalist references ("there are no civilizations") with the definition of liberalism as a civilization ("the liberal West as a civilization to defend"), demonstrates that universalism has become a contested notion. As Peter J. Katzenstein puts it, a civilizationist standpoint undercuts the "liberal presumption that universalistic secular liberal norms are inherently superior to all others" (Katzenstein 2010).

Rationality

The concept of rationality likewise appears contested. Rationality supposes that an individual can take decisions in accordance with reason and that there are objective truths that can be deduced from empirical evidence. It privileges scientific methods of knowledge acquisition at the expense of all other forms. Historically framed as a fight against obscurantism, rationality relies on an ambivalentphilosophical basis. Who decides what is rational or not? Are religious feelings to be banned because they are not rational to the nonbeliever? What about cultural differences that give rationality very different content depending on local context and how people navigate their environment? Is it irrational to be willing to die for one's country or for a cause?

A second issue with rationality relates to the way it has become a herald of (neo)liberal language. It is now associated with the reign of technocratic decisions and expertise and with politicians justifying their decisions not as an ideological choice but as rational and data-based. This has contributed in some segments of the society to rationality being delegitimized, on the grounds that it is a language representative of vested interest groups and not of the common good. The fact that science has been assimilated to technocratic expertise partly explains the rise of anti-science feelings and anti-intellectualism, which are opposed to an alleged popular "healthy common sense" or to individual freedoms. The coronavirus pandemic accelerated the spread of such interpretations (Butter and Knight 2023). Conspiracy theories are a paradoxical by-product of the contestation of rationality: they call for individuals to build their own expertise and be skeptical of any form of information, while simultaneously rejuvenating views of the world that see direct causality and interconnectedness everywhere and deny the possibility of coincidence, hazard, or parallels (Douglas et al. 2019).

Modernity/Modernities

Liberal claims are also closely articulated with the notions of modernity and modernization, with the West as its historical and cultural embodiment. "The West" is itself an extremely loaded term, referring not to a geographic or political location but to an epistemic position. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have explained, "Eurocentric thinking attributes to the 'West' an almost providential sense of historical destiny. Eurocentrism, like Renaissance perspectives in painting, envisions the world from a single privileged point" (Shohat and Stam 2014). Illiberalism, especially as displayed in the Global South, can thus be read through the prism of calling for non-Western or anti-Western alternative modernities. There has indeed been a growing convergence between postcolonial claims, traditionally present in the political culture of many countries of the Global South and conventionally associated with the left, and the use of a postcolonial nationalism by illiberal figures blending it with classic far-right references (Zhang 2023).

There is therefore deep contestation of the moral geography of liberalism and its overlap or not with "the West.". Seen from the Global South, the whole of Europe, including Eastern Europe and Russia, is part of the West demographically (populations on the decline), economically (relatively rich countries), and culturally (coming from the Greco-Roman and Christian cradle). Seen from Russia, meanwhile, the West is mostly a geopolitical reality embodied by NATO countries and the "political West," which defends liberal values. Seen from Budapest, the West is based in Brussels, while Central Europe is the real Europe. For some constituencies within Europe and the United States, meanwhile, liberalism is a decadent force that is destroying the real West. As Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon argue in their *Exit from Hegemony*, the "vision of a world in deep cultural crisis, with the fate of Western civilization supposedly in the balance," is precisely the ideological "glue that unites the transnational right" (Cooley and Nexon 2020).

As Matthijs Lok shows in his *Europe against Revolution* (Lok 2023), the competition between liberalism and conservatism has historically been a fight for Europe's identity; counter-revolutionary thought played a major role in framing the idea of Europe as a political and moral entity against the modernity of the republican nation-state. The fight continues today, with a reverse agenda in terms of values. The EU portrays Europe as purely liberal-democratic: it is progressivist in terms of mores, secular in relation to religion, and denationalized in its vision of national identities as outdated. Building on Ana Laura Stoler's notion of "colonial aphasia," used to describe the occultation of some periods of time, as well as the difficulty of generating concepts to capture colonialism and comprehending its enduring relevance (Stoler 2011), one could speak of the EU having "illiberal aphasia" in forgetting its deeply rooted illiberal traditions (Mazower 1998).

Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes have analyzed the illiberal backlash coming from Central and Eastern Europe as "the end of the imitation era" (Krastev and Holmes 2020) and the revenge of the periphery on the center. Liberal arguments were indeed received in the region through a postcolonial lens, seen as imposed from abroad in a way that fails to consider the symbolic and material aspects of underlying power hierarchies (Kováts 2023). Such a dynamic has implied that postcommunist societies are students of the historic West rather than cocreators of a new Europe. For both Central and Eastern European elites, this is unacceptable, as they consider themselves architects of the post–Cold War order and want to have their voices heard. Countries such as Russia, Poland, and Hungary have then articulated (the last two in a more legitimate way, as they are EU members) their vision of another Europe: one that is proud of its conservative values, cherishes its Christian identity, and does not consider the nation an obsolete concept of reference. It is precisely because the end of communism was framed as the arrival of "Western" norms and blended the different scripts of liberalism that there has been a backlash against liberal democracy. As Jan Sowa eloquently puts it, postcommunist countries have had to deal with a model "based on the belief that the reproduction of Western ideological and economic standards will help bring us closer to modernity in the form in which it is imagined in the post-communist consciousness of the elites" (Sowa 2012).

The current illiberal backlash stemming from the region should therefore be read as a pursuit effectively aimed at reclaiming agency and subjectivity in a postcolonial or decolonial tone that has resonance in the Global South. While this backlash is massive, it is not present throughout the entire region; one can also (at least currently) identify societies such as Ukraine that are formulating their agency and subjectivity through and in the name of the Western liberal project.

The same contradiction can be found in US political culture. Liberal constituencies tend to see themselves as the "norm," while considering conservative or illiberal constituencies to be nonrepresentative of what should be American political identity (and vice versa, obviously). Historically, however, the United States has had both prominent populist movements and a deeply rooted far-right tradition, which should be considered legitimate parts of the country's political culture (Dueck 2019; Engstrom and Huckfeldt 2020). During the Cold War decades, the United States experienced McCarthyism domestically; supported far-right regimes across the globe, especially in Latin America; and recruited former Nazis to lead the fight against communism (Anievas and Saull 2020)—a whole page of history that does not align with today's hagiographic vision of the United States as herald of liberalism. Accordingly, the fact that US foreign policy always emphasizes liberal progressivist values has been widely interpreted in the Global South as hypocritical given the contestation of liberal progressivism within American society itself—a reality exposed during Donald Trump's presidency (Hart 2020; Geary 2023).

Progress

The notion of progress is another theme inspired by the Enlightenment and embraced by liberalism that is currently being questioned. As liberalism presents itself as *the* philosophy of progress, it struggles to deal with the pessimism of the large part of (at least) Western constituencies who are skeptical about the promise of the future.

In Western societies, surveys confirm a strong feeling of decline, be it moral, demographic, or economic. A 2022 Pew study found that the majority of adults in many Western countries, among them the United States, Australia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Belgium, believe that future generations will be financially worse off than their parents, a figure that rises to a striking three-quarters in Japan, France, Canada, and Italy (Clancy, Gray, and Vu 2022). In Europe globally, Eurobarometer polls show that more than two-thirds of European Union citizens fear that current demographic trends "put the EU's long-term economic prosperity and competitiveness at risk" (Eurobarometer 2023). In the United States, there are potent feelings of overall decline too: between two-thirds and three-quarters of Americans believe that by 2050 the country's economy will be weaker, its politics will be more divisive, and wealth and income inequality will be worse. Moreover, a majority believe that decline *is already happening* and that life was better fifty years ago than it is today (Daniller 2023).

Liberalism has so far failed to explain why economic progress—understood as economic growth—aggravates socioeconomic inequalities rather than remedying them. As Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* shows, the liberal idea that economic growth alone can produce equality is no longer operational (Piketty 2014). Many of the factors that produce greater inequality increased as liberalism became an unchallenged ideology during its neoliberal and "end of history" phase, binding unchecked liberalism and rising inequality together as an associative pair. This dynamic is visible in the fact that, according to the *World Inequality Report 2022*, inequality is now at levels not seen since around 1910 (Chancel et al. 2023).

Liberalism has also failed to foster a solid public debate about what technological progress means for societal well-being. AI and automation are expected to transform the job market, requiring massive retraining programs for those who lose their jobs in order to avoid a second failed deindustrialization, while

data capitalism has produced data breaches with important implications for privacy protection (First 2018; Zuboff 2019; Sætra 2019).

Even more importantly, liberalism has thus far failed to address environmental challenges—and especially climate change. Liberal governments continue to promote economic policies that, even when they try to respect international legislation on reducing environmental footprints (rooted in neoliberal capitalism's "greenwashing" efforts), reflect a belief in growth in a world that is finite. How can liberalism dissociate itself from a "progress" that destroys the livability of the planet? How can a new definition of what is progressive be invented? In theory, liberalism as a philosophy has the ability to integrate nature into its expansion of rights: animals and nature could be granted rights, as could the future generations with whom we have the duty to share the planet. Baby steps in this direction have already been taken by, among others, New Zealand, Ecuador, and India, which have (with mixed results) granted human rights to rivers and mountains (Tanasescu 2017).

This critique is not, of course, to suggest that illiberal forces offer solutions on the environmental front—they do not. Indeed, it could be argued that the presence in power of illiberal forces often correlates with less awareness, or even distrust, of the science around climate change than exists in liberal constituencies or governments. But they have been able to capture the global feeling of decline or deadlock of the current system to advance global contestation of the notion of progress, especially technological,—and therefore of liberalism.

Is Liberalism Turning Illiberal or Authoritarian?

Another face of the liberalism/illiberalism entanglement to be explored more in depth by the literature is the growth of illiberal and/or authoritarian tendencies in liberal democracies, including among those who identify as liberals. Scholarship on illiberalism tends to almost automatically associate illiberal worldviews with authoritarian practices of power and—except in some more leftist academic traditions—has a blind spot when it comes to the relationship between liberalism and authoritarianism. Here, one can disentangle two central articulations. The first—the relationship between liberalism and authoritarianism—has at least four layers:

a) Authoritarian regimes may be economically liberal—think Augusto Pinochet's Chile and the experience of Latin America as a whole during the Cold War.

b) Some forms of political liberalism may be imposed in nondemocratic settings, and the idea that technological and bureaucratic rationality can function effectively even if divorced from the rest of liberal modernity has contributed to blurring the lines (Esmark 2020). Here, one might highlight the case of Singapore, which is probably the only country to be treated as a case study of liberalism by some authors and of illiberalism by others. In Singapore, aspects associated with liberalism—such as meritocracy and technocratic elitism—coexist with more authoritarian features and an illiberal philosophical grounding (the regime's strong civilizationism and "Asian values" narrative, for instance, challenge Western universalism) (Wee 2001; Tan 2012; Rodan, Clammer, and Huat 2019; Chang 2021; Cheang and Choy 2021).

c) There has emerged an undemocratic liberalism in which citizens' rights are respected but their political choices are rarely implemented. The EU construction—and especially the powers given to the EU Commission, an unelected technocratic body—has been interpreted by some scholars as a nondemocratic imposition of liberalism. Yascha Mounk and Cas Mudde, for instance, see illiberal democracy and undemocratic liberalism as mirror dynamics (Mounk 2018b; Mudde 2021), while Sheri Berman reminds us that, historically, "liberalism unchecked by democracy can easily deteriorate into elitist oligarchy" (Berman 2017).

d) As liberal democracies struggle to impose austerity measures and face grassroots demand for more direct forms of democracy, one can observe growing use of authoritarian methods within the liberal framework: governments bypass national parliaments, reinforce executive power, misuse law-enforcement agencies, and so on. For instance, the French government's use of police brutality against some social protests, such as the Yellow Vests movement and environmental protests, can be analyzed as an authoritarian move in the name of defending technocratic liberalism (Trouillard 2022).

The second articulation relates to the rise of pockets of illiberal public policy within liberal democracies themselves—what Didier Bigo and Anastassia Tsoukala have called "illiberal practices of liberal regimes" (Bigo and Tsoukala 2008). There are at least five such pockets:

a) The "war on terror" narrative and its replication in different Western countries have allowed for extensive infringements of citizens' privacy, as well as the use of torture and the externalization of it in foreign countries in the name of the nation's security (Bigo and Tsoukala 2008; Bogain 2017). The multiplication of "states of emergency," however genuine they may be, has accelerated this infringement on individual freedoms, as seen in the debate over lockdowns and mandatory vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic (Galea 2023).

b) European anti-migrant legislation and practices, such as detention camps and refusal to aid struggling boats in the Mediterranean, have put states at odds with their own human-rights declarations (Triadafilopoulos 2011; Galston 2018; Kauth and King 2020). The same can be seen in the United States, where it has become logistically impossible even for Democratic governments to secure the border with Mexico and manage the flow of migrants in a way respectful of human dignity and liberal principles.

c) There is a growing trend of infringing on the freedoms of speech and thought. While these freedoms have never been as sacrosanct in European liberalism as they have been in the US context, where they are protected by the First Amendment, recent years have witnessed the rapid expansion of anti-hate-speech laws and anti-protest practices in the name of protecting minority groups and upholding such liberal values as multiculturalism and inclusiveness. In desperate attempts to curtail the rise of antisemitism linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict in fall 2023, France and Germany for instance tried to impose a blanket ban on pro-Palestinian protests; Austria and the UK banned some pro-Palestinian slogans (Brady et al. 2023); and some German states went so far as to make the recognition of Israel a precondition for naturalizing as a German citizen (Axelrod 2023). Ireland drafted a new law on hate speech that would make it an offense to deny or trivialize gender identity and disability, an approach that even many defenders of minority rights consider too radical (Askew 2023).

New legislative discussions in Europe around topics such as depriving foreigners of their work permits or stripping dual citizens of their second citizenship in the event that they are found to have engaged not only in terrorism but also in anything identified as "Islamic radicalization" confirm a hardening of what it means to be a citizen of a liberal democracy. While liberalism extends rights to a core group, it may equally seek to deny those rights to a minority deemed dangerous. Such policies are of course popular among far-right leaders and their constituencies in Europe, but even those who present themselves as liberals tend toward a similar set of decisions, as seen in the 2024 law on immigration passed by the French government (albeit subsequently largely dismissed by the Constitutional Court), which connects social rights to citizenship and makes it harder for the children of immigrants to obtain French citizenship (Burdeau 2023). This is not to suggest that a discussion on the boundaries of the citizenry is not worth having, but it seems that a more restrictive definition of the polity is under construction in Europe with popular backing, confirming once again that democracy and liberal values are sometimes contradictory.

d) New technologies have endangered political rights and have not to date been put under democratic supervision. Silicon Valley giants have created what Shoshanna Zuboff has called "surveillance capitalism," an economic system centered around the commodification of personal data with the core purpose of profit-making (Zuboff 2019). The interests of state institutions such as law-enforcement agencies to develop a vast suite of surveillance IT (street cameras, AI facial recognition, etc.) challenge liberal claims of the right to individual privacy in the name of collective security (Bennett and Livingston 2018; Foroohar 2021).

e) As mentioned previously, in foreign policy, US interventionism to support pro-democratic regime change, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, has not only failed in practice (Schramm 2022) but has also created mental schemes in which liberal democracy is seen as something imposed from abroad by force.

As these examples demonstrate, the distinction between liberalism, illiberalism, and authoritarianism is far from clearly delineated—and indeed, both theoretical and policy overlaps have been multiplying. This can be explained not only by the cynical electoral strategies of liberal figures who play on their citizens' fears but also by the genuine difficulty of balancing between public policies that guarantee individual rights (in particular of noncitizens) and those that meet collective needs for security or identity-based belonging.

Illiberalism's "Amplifying Feedback Loop" Effect

Linked to these evolutions is another subfield of research around illiberalism, which has focused on identifying the causes and consequences of its rise. Here, the literature overlaps with that which exists around other concepts, including populism, democracy decay/erosion, and autocratization. Yet the subfield of illiberalism introduces new elements to the discussion and highlights different components of the debate. Because it focuses on liberalism per se, it allows us to better dissociate what is systemic from what is anecdotal.

Illiberal forces contribute to what we can call an amplifying feedback loop: they initially grow as an answer to the internal challenges of liberal systems, but they then trigger processes that accelerate these challenges and intensify the move away from liberal values. This framework illuminates that illiberal forces are both resulting from problems faced by "really existing liberalism" *and* actively weakening liberalism. As this process unfolds, it responds to—and causes—several structural, endogenous transformations, listed here in no particular order of priority or causality.

Individual Full Sovereignty and Post-Truth

The first is post-modernity broadly speaking—even if this concept is itself contested—in the sense of a world much more fluid or liquid than previously, both in terms of horizontal moves (products, people, and ideas travel faster), vertical moves (people may challenge their place in the society more than before, even if this is less true in some countries of the Global South and there are growing traps of multidimensional poverty in the Global North), and virtual moves (people may have some idea of what is happening far away from them, thanks to the Internet).

This postmodernity pretends to offer full subjectivity and sovereignty to the individual (Bialasiewicz and Eckes 2021). From that perspective, individuals' "illiberal" and "progressive" views are two ideological sides of the same coin of full sovereignty. If an individual can decide to be of a gender that does not correspond to their biological sex, then an individual also has the sovereignty to refuse to believe in vaccination, lockdown, or scientific evidence of any kind, as well as to state that the 2020 US elections were stolen—because the full subjectivity of the individual is upgraded to the main and only yardstick for

determining what makes sense and is legitimate. There should, however, be noted a contradiction between this claim of an individual's full sovereignty and the reality of their socioeconomic situation, which usually dramatically constrains individual options.

This postmodernity has been accelerated by the hectic evolutions of technology and the media ecosystem, which have created an environment that invites citizens to request immediacy, whereas liberal democratic mechanisms—which must achieve consensus and balance—are by definition slow. Hyperconnectivity circumvents institutional intermediaries and makes them irrelevant as it dismantles hierarchies of knowledge and trust (Brubaker 2022). Social media have created a wide market of individual opinions all presented as equal, accelerating distrust in formal institutions, including science, and creating a context of "post-truth" (which sometimes manifests as conspiracy theories). Media ecosystems globally, and Big Tech algorithms in particular, have thus become key constitutive actors of the weakening of liberal democracy: they accentuate polarization and division, contribute to the gamification of the public space and the structuring of a false public-opinion space, and thereby bear direct responsibility for deconstructing the civic consensus and common good on which a polity is based (Lehr 2019; Davies 2021). Reforming algorithmic governance, especially with the arrival of AI, will become a critical component for liberal democracy's survival.

Socioeconomic Changes

A second systemic transformation relates to well-studied socioeconomic changes. Since the 1980s, neoliberal economic measures have decoupled economic growth from the well-being of the middle classes, contributing to the material and symbolic pauperization of large constituencies (Piketty 2014). This has been accentuated by globalization processes, which have caused blue-collar regions and groups, as well as parts of the lower-middle and middle classes, to become "forgotten" in the political offers. They are sandwiched between the most fragile groups (refugees, minorities, etc.), which receive state support, on the one hand, and cosmopolitan elites, on the other hand—in a context where developing countries with cheaper labor compete with domestic industry.

The deep evolutions of the labor market—deindustrialization, the growing quest for competitiveness, and the partial disappearance of trade unionism—have weakened traditional social ties and left little room to reinvent cultural togetherness in the workplace. As Steven Livingston proposes, positivist approaches to investigating the embrace of extremist ideas by a cognitive-science approach should be replaced or at least complemented by the study of the nature of beliefs as a human response to precarity, especially during social and economic disruption (Livingston 2023).

Ungovernmentability and the Paralysis of Representative Democracy

A third transformation revolves around democratic institutions' decay. The framework of representative democracy seems to have exhausted part of its appeal: citizens feel distant from decision-making centers and unable to influence policy decisions. As a result of technocratic de-ideologization, the feeling of the "ungovernmentability" of democracy has increased. Moreover, the ability of politics and policies to change people's ordinary lives has declined over the years: a large part of our everyday reality is now shaped by the private sector, which is not under democratic control. Sheldon S. Wolin has spoken about a "inverted totalitarianism," in which economic rather than political power is dangerously dominant (Wolin 2016).

Representative democracy is also struggling to renew itself: in the majority of Western democracies, MPs and their equivalents come from the upper echelons of society, often from families that already enjoy substantial social capital, if not financial capital, while the lower middle classes—especially blue-collar workers—are almost totally absent from the political sphere. The meritocratic promotion up the social

ladder that was possible in the first three decades following World War II seems to be paralyzed. Experiencing meaningful political rights is mostly a social-class-based reality that European and US democracies will have to rethink (Landemore 2020). This reality, combined with the lack of political alternatives and the feeling that social democracy has accommodated neoliberalism rather than challenging it, has created political apathy and high levels of abstention during elections, especially among youth (Belchior and Teixeira 2023).

In the Global South, frustration with democracy has led to calls for what Marco Garrido calls "disciplining democracy" (Garrido 2021). In those countries that have faced regular political and economic crises, such as in Latin America and South and Southeast Asia, citizens have been advocating for circumscribing the scope of democracy in hopes of making it more efficient. Support for this approach can also be seen in Europe, where a strong leader able to bypass representative institutions is seen by a growing number of citizens as the way to deal with democratic inefficiency. Surveying eighteen consolidated democracies between 1981 and 2018, Alexander Wuttke, Konstantin Gavras, and Harald Schoen show that some European polities—including Italy, Slovakia, and Spain—now display greater support for strong leaders who do not have to bother with parliament than they did a decade ago. In other contexts—like Norway and Sweden—one observes "U-shaped" support for strong leaders, with the youngest and oldest cohorts of voters supporting more authoritarian forms of government, while the middle generations, who came of age in the "long" 1960s, are less inclined to do so (Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020).[4] Some studies have explored the causal mechanisms that drive publics to desire stronger leaders, finding that material conditions such as growing inequality lead to "anomie," the feeling that society is breaking down, which pushes citizens to desire a stronger leader who could restore order, even if that means undermining democracy (Sprong et al. 2019).

Culturalization of Citizenship

A fourth transformation relates to the culturalization of citizenship. This term was coined by Jan Willem Duyvendak, Peter Geschiere, and Evelien Tonkens, who define it as "a process in which what it is to be a citizen is less defined in terms of civic, political, or social rights, and more in terms of adherence to norms, values, and cultural practices" (Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016). And indeed, calls to determine who belongs to the polity on the basis of mores and values have reshaped the European political landscape these last two decades, contributing to a rising welfare chauvinism (Careja and Harris 2022). Yet support for populist politicians cannot be explained simply by the widespread "cultural backlash" argument advanced by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, who posit the existence of a generational value gap between more conservative older generations and more liberal younger ones. Indeed, while looking at the grassroots level is key, Armin Schäfer demonstrates that the generational argument does not hold (Schäfer 2022). Younger generations are often more liberal but less democratic than older ones—yet another sign that the two notions of liberalism and democracy need to be decoupled.

The notion of culturalization of citizenship meshes with the idea that expanding individual rights into the sphere of sexuality and gender is the continuation of political rights: "sexual citizenship"—that is, rights linked to sexuality, gender, and the body—has become a central battleground for today's polities. Yet the notion of culture wars, a heavily loaded binary, should be questioned by scholars rather than taken for granted (Kováts 2023), and the various recent forms of conservative resistance should not be conflated (Edenborg 2023; Payne and Tornhill 2023).

At the level of culture wars' political entrepreneurship, one can indeed find two core groups of progressivists and conservatives. The former call for a more inclusive society in terms of gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and migrants' integration. They also offer a global, critical re-evaluation of Europe's colonial past and of neocolonial symbolic hierarchies. Some continue to value pluralism and civility, while others consider polarization a necessary by-product of the change required to produce a more just world. The

conservatives, by contrast, call for societal changes to be slowed down or reversed to secure a White, Christian identity—or at least a secularized, culturally Christian version thereof. They support traditional hierarchies and gender roles, advocate heterosexual marriage and families as the model, and posit the existence of a core ethnic nation into which migrants can assimilate but which they cannot challenge. In Western Europe, illiberal figures have adapted to public opinion and become more progressive in their views of sexuality, with homonationalism and/or femonationalism (Sifaki, Quinan, and Lončarević 2022) as a way to exclude the Islamic "Other." In any case, a significant proportion of citizens position themselves somewhere between these two culture-wars camps, making the picture more shades of gray than black and white.

The Handbook

The present Oxford Handbook picks up where the Routledge Handbook left off, building on the previous collective discussion to continue testing the concept of illiberal(ism). Contributors do not necessarily share the same exact definition of illiberalism or even its existence as an -ism. Yet they all attempt to "isolate" the term from broader and competing notions in order to avoid a conceptual overlap that would impede efforts to debate the heuristic value of the concept. They also test the concept in the context of their own discipline or field, discussing its potential and its limitations, as well as its interpretations depending on diverse epistemological traditions.

Sections One and Two explore the conceptual space of illiberalism. The first section addresses the relationship between illiberalism and its obvious "companions" (populism, conservatism, and authoritarianism), traces its ideological genealogy, and discusses where to locate it: in the political, intellectual, or cultural realm? The second takes a deeper dive into the entanglement between liberalism and illiberalism, deconstructing this established dichotomy by bringing in critical voices to define "really existing liberalism" and its ideological and policy affinities with illiberalism.

Sections Three and Four focus on the two classic articulations of illiberalism: with identity issues (its intersectionality with religion, beliefs, gender, race, and memory, and how these may coalesce in grand narratives such as the Great Replacement) and with socioeconomic issues (how neoliberal globalization has contributed to a backlash, with perspectives from different angles and countries, both from the Global North and the Global South).

Sections Five and Six approach illiberalism from the standpoint of regimes, national context, and the international scene. They emphasize the importance of looking at context-specific evolutions—with case studies from Central Europe, the BRICS, Turkey, China, India, and Russia—as well as the role of illiberal regimes in challenging the so-called liberal world order in the name of multipolarity.

Sections Seven and Eight investigate two new research directions. Section Seven explores illiberalism as a grassroots culture, a lived experience for a multitude of actors, from illiberal civil society to illiberal think tanks and media. This investigation serves to move away from the conventional top-down approach and embrace a more bottom-up perspective. Section Eight looks at illiberalism as a political philosophy, with a focus on specific intellectual projects' self-presentation—as illiberal, postliberal, or national-conservative—and their myriad architects. The section pays particular attention to some of the leading countries in the illiberal intellectual tradition, namely the United States, the UK, France, Poland, and Russia.

References

Anievas, Alexander, and Richard Saull. 2020. "Reassessing the Cold War and the Far-Right: Fascist Legacies and the Making of the Liberal International Order after 1945." *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3: 370–395.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Askew, Joshua. 2023. "New Hate Speech Laws Kick Up a Storm in Ireland." *Euronews*, May 3.
https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/03/new-hate-speech-laws-kick-up-a-storm-in-ireland.

Axelrod, Toby. 2023. "A German State Mandates the Recognition of Israel in Citizenship Application." *Times of Israel*, December 7.
https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-german-state-mandates-the-recognition-of-israel-in-citizenship-application.

Ayers, Alison J., and Alfredo Saad-Filho. 2015. "Democracy against Neoliberalism: Paradoxes, Limitations, Transcendence." *Critical Sociology* 41, nos. 4-5. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513507789.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. Boulder, CO: Paladin.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Belchior, Ana Maria da Conceição, and Conceição Pequito Teixeira. 2023. "Breaking with Mainstream Politics While Engaging with Polarized: Determinants of Young Europeans' Support for Democracy." *Journal of Youth Studies* (March 16): 1–20.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Bell, Duncan. 2014. "What Is Liberalism?" *Political Theory* 42, no. 6 (December): 682–715.
WorldCat

Bell, Duncan. 2016. *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Benczes, István, ed. 2024. *Economic Policies of Populist Leaders: A Central and Eastern European Perspective*. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Bennett, W. Lance, and Steven Livingston. 2018. "The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions." *European Journal of Communication* 33, no. 2: 122–139.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Berezin. Mabel. 2019. *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times: Culture, Security and Populism in the New Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Berman, Sheri. 2016. "Populism Is Not Fascism: But It Could Be a Harbinger." *Foreign Affairs* 95 no. 6 (November/December): 39–44.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Berman, Sheri. 2017. "The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3, 29–38.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Berman, Sheri, and Maria Snegovaya. 2019. "Populism and the Decline of Social Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3: 5–19.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2007. *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Bialasiewicz, Luiza, and Christina Eckes. 2021. "'Individual Sovereignty' in Pandemic Times—A Contradiction in Terms?" *Political Geography* 85, no. 3 (March): 1–3.
WorldCat

Bickerton, Christopher J., and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti. 2021. *Technopopulism: The New Logic of Democratic Politics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Bigo, Didier, and Anastassia Tsoukala. 2008. *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11*. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Bluhm, Katharina, and Mihai Varga. 2020. "Conservative Developmental Statism in East Central Europe and Russia." *New Political Economy* 25, no. 4: 642–659.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Bogain, Ariane. 2017. "Security in the Name of Human Rights: The Discursive Legitimation Strategies of the War on Terror in France." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 3: 476–500.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Börzel, Tanja A., and Michael Zürn. 2020. "Contestations of the Liberal Script: A Research Program." SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 1 (January). https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/publications/workingpaper-series/Working-Paper-No-1-2020/index.html.

Brady, Kate, et al. 2023. "European Bans on Pro-Palestinian Protests Prompt Claims of Bias." *Washington Post*, October 27. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/26/palestine-protest-ban-france-germany.

Brainerd, Elizabeth, and David M. Cutler. 2005. "Autopsy on an Empire: Understanding Mortality in Russia and the Former Soviet Union." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 1: 107–130.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Brandenberger, David. 2002. *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Braune, Joan. 2019. "Who's Afraid of the Frankfurt School? 'Cultural Marxism' as an Antisemitic Conspiracy Theory." *Journal of Social Justice* 9: 1–25.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Brown, Wendy. 2017. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Brubaker, Rogers. 2017. "Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8: 1196–1226.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Brubaker, Rogers. 2022. *Hyperconnectivity and Its Discontents.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Burdeau, Cain. 2023. "In Europe, Stance on Migrants Toughens as France Passes Immigration Law, EU Announces Deal." Courthouse News Service, December 20. https://www.courthousenews.com/in-europe-stance-on-migrants-toughens-as-france-passes-immigration-law-eu-announces-deal.

Busbridge, Rachel, Benjamin Moffitt, and Joshua Thorburn. 2020. "Cultural Marxism: Far-Right Conspiracy Theory in Australia's Culture Wars." *Social Identities* 26, no. 6: 722–738.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Butter, Michael, and Peter Knight, eds. 2023. *Covid Conspiracy Theories in Global Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Buzogány, Aron, and Mihai Varga. 2018. "The Ideational Foundations of the Illiberal Backlash in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary." *Review of International Political Economy* 25, no. 6: 811–828.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Buzogány, Aron, and Mihai Varga. 2023. "Illiberal Thought Collectives and Policy Networks in Hungary and Poland." *European Politics and Society* 24, no. 1: 40–58.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Careja, Romana, and Eloisa Harris. 2022. "Thirty Years of Welfare Chauvinism Research: Findings and Challenges." *Journal of European Social Policy* 32, no. 2: 212–224.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Chancel, Lucas, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman. 2023. "Full Report: World Inequality Report 2022." *World Inequality Report 2022*, March 13. https://wir2022.wid.world.

Chang, Wen-Chen. 2021. "Asian Values, Confucianism, and Illiberal Constitutions." In *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, ed. András Sajó, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes, 82–93. New York: Routledge.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Cheang, Bryan, and Donovan Choy. 2021. *Liberalism Unveiled: Forging a New Third Way in Singapore*. Singapore: World Scientific.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Clancy, Laura, Roseline Gray, and Bao Vu. 2022. "Large Shares in Many Countries Are Pessimistic about the Next Generation's Financial Future." Pew Research Center, August 11. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/08/11/large-shares-in-many-countries-are-pessimistic-about-the-next-generations-financial-future/#:~:text=At%20least%20three%2Dquarters%20of,the%20Netherlands%20and%20South%20Korea.

WorldCat

Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel Nexon. 2020. *Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Cooper, Melinda. 2021. "The Alt-Right: Neoliberalism, Libertarianism and the Fascist Temptation." *Theory, Culture and Society* 38, no. 6: 29–50.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Daniller, Andrew. 2023. "Americans Take a Dim View of the Nation's Future, Look More Positively at the Past." Pew Research Center, April 24. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/24/americans-take-a-dim-view-of-the-nations-future-look-more-positively-at-the-past.

WorldCat

Davies, William. 2021. "Anti-Equivalence: Pragmatics of Post-Liberal Dispute." *European Journal of Social Theory* 24, no. 1 (February): 44–64.

WorldCat

Douglas, Karen M., et al. 2019. "Understanding Conspiracy Theories." *Political Psychology* 40, no. S1 (February): 3–35.

WorldCat

Downes, Alexander B. 2021. *Catastrophic Success: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Goes Wrong*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Dueck, Colin. 2019. *Age of Iron: On Conservative Nationalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, Peter Geschiere, and Evelien Tonkens. 2016. *The Culturalization of Citizenship: Belonging and Polarization in a Globalizing World*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Edenborg, Emil. 2023. "'Traditional Values' and the Narrative of Gay Rights as Modernity: Sexual Politics beyond Polarization." *Sexualities* 26, nos. 1–2: 37–53.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., ed. 2002. *Multiple Modernities*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Ekström, Hugo, Michał Krzyżanowski, and David Johnson. 2023. "Saying 'Criminality,' Meaning 'Immigration'? Proxy Discourses and Public Implicatures in the Normalisation of the Politics of Exclusion." *Critical Discourse Studies*.

Empoli, Giuliano da. 2019. *Les ingénieurs du chaos*. Paris: Gallimard.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Engstrom, Erik J., and Robert Huckfeldt. 2020. *Race, Class, and Social Welfare*: *American Populism since the New Deal*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Esmark, Anders. 2020. "*The Technocratic Regime: Technocracy, Bureaucracy and Democracy.*" In *The New Technocracy*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Eurobarometer. 2023. "Eurobarometer Poll: Demographic Change in Europe." October. https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3112.

WorldCat

First, Daniel. 2018. "Will Big Data Algorithms Dismantle the Foundations of Liberalism?" *AI & Society* 33: 545–556. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-017-0733-4.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Formicola, Jo Renee. 2005. "The Political Legacy of Pope John Paul II." *Journal of Church and State* 47, no. 2: 235–242.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Foroohar, Rana. 2021. *Don't Be Evil: The Case against Big Tech*. London: Penguin.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Harper & Row.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Freeden, Michael. 1986. *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914–1939*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Freeden, Michael. 2013. "The Morphological Analysis of Ideology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears, 115–137. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199585977.013.0034.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Fukuyama, Francis. 2018. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Fukuyama, Francis. 2022. *Liberalism and Its Discontents*. London: Profile Books.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Galea, Sandro. 2023. *Within Reason: A Liberal Public Health for an Illiberal Time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Galston, William A. 2018. "The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2: 5–19.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Garrido, Marco. 2021. "Democracy as Disorder: Institutionalized Sources of Democratic Ambivalence among the Upper and Middle Class in Manila." *Social Forces* 99, no. 3 (March): 1036–1059.

WorldCat

Geary, Daniel. 2023. "It Can't Happen Here: Trump Viewed from the Margins." In *The Radical Right*: *Politics of Hate on the Margins of Global Capital*, ed. Fabio Luis Barbosa dos Santos, Cecilia Lero, and Tamás Gerőcs, 200–214. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.

Geertz, Clifford. 1964. "Ideology as a Cultural System." In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter, 47–76. New York: Free Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Geva, Dorit, and Felipe G. Santos. 2021. "Europe's Far-Right Educational Projects and Their Vision for the International Order." *International Affairs* 97, no. 5: 1395–1414.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Gifford, Laura Jane, and Daniel K. Williams. 2012. *The Right Side of the Sixties*: *Reexamining Conservatism's Decade of Transformation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Giroux, Henry A. 2004. *Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*. London: Routledge.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Giudici, Anja. 2021. "Seeds of Authoritarian Opposition: Far-Right Education Politics in Post-War Europe." *European Educational Research Journal* 20, no. 2: 121–142.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Google Trends, https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=illiberal,illiberalism&hl=en. Accessed December 29, 2023.

WorldCat

Graff, Agnieszka. 2021. "Blaming Feminists Is Not Understanding History: A Critical Rejoinder to Ghodsee's Take on Feminism, Neoliberalism and Nationalism in Eastern Europe." In *Gender and Power in Eastern Europe: Changing Concepts of Femininity and Masculinity in Power Relations*, ed. Katharina Bluhm, Gertrud Pickhan, Justyna Stypińska, and Agnieszka Wierzcholska. New York: Springer.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Graff, Agnieszka, and Elżbieta Korolczuk. 2022. *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*. London: Routledge, 2022.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Hale, Henry E., and Marlene Laruelle. 2021. "A New Wave of Research on Civilizational Politics." *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 4: 597–608.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Hart, Gillian. 2020. "Why Did It Take So Long? Trump-Bannonism in a Global Conjunctural Frame." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 102, no. 3: 239–266.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Hartman, Andrew. 2019. *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Harvey, David. 2007. "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1: 22–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271620629678.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Haynes, Jeffrey. 2019. "From Huntington to Trump: Twenty-Five Years of the 'Clash of Civilizations.'" *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 1: 11–23.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Higley, John, and Michael Burton. 2006. *Elite Foundations of Liberal Democracy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Hunter, James Davison. 1992. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America*. New York: Basic Books.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Huntington, Samuel. 1997. "The West and the Rest." *Prospect*, February 20. https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/essays/55236/the-west-and-the-rest.

Ikenberry, G. John. 2018. "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January): 7–23.

WorldCat

Jarausch, Konrad H. 1982. *Students, Society and Politics in Imperial Germany*: *The Rise of Academic Illiberalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jefferess, David. 2008. *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation, and Transformation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Joppke, Christian. 2015. "Liberalism and Racism: An 'Elective Affinity'?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 8: 1298–1304.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Kaestle, Christine Elizabeth. 2016. "Feminist Perspectives Advance Four Challenges to Transform Family Studies." *Sex Roles* 75, nos. 1–2 (July): 71–77.

WorldCat

Kahan, Alan S. 2017. *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville*. New York: Routledge.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Katzenstein, Peter J., ed. 2010. *Civilizations in World Politics*: *Plural and Pluralist Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Kauth, Jasper Theodor, and Desmond King. 2020. "Illiberalism." *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 61, no. 3: 365–405.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Kováts, Eszter, ed. 2023. *Culture Wars in Europe*. Washington, DC: Illiberalism Studies Program, Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University. https://www.illiberalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Culture-Wars-in-Europe-Eszter-Kovats-ed.pdf.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Krastev, Ivan, and Stephen Holmes. 2020. *The Light That Failed*: *Why the West Is Losing the Fight for Democracy*. New York: Pegasus Books.

Krickovic, Andrej, and Richard Sakwa. 2022. "War in Ukraine: The Clash of Norms and Ontologies." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2: 89–109.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Landemore, Hélène. 2020. *Open Democracy*: *Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lehr, Peter. 2019. "*Undemocratic Means: The Rise of the Surveillance State: A Critical Assessment.*" In *Counter-Terrorism Technologies*: *A Critical Assessment*, 169–179. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Livingston, Steven. 2023. "The Nature of Beliefs: An Exploration of Cognitive Science and Sociological Approaches to the Crisis of Democracy." SCRIPTS Working Paper 31. https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/publications/working-paper-series/Working-Paper-31-2023/index.html.

Lok, Matthijs. 2023. *Europe against Revolution: Conservatism, Enlightenment, and the Making of the Past*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Losurdo, Domenico. 2014. *Liberalism: A Counter-History*. London: Verso.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Mair, Peter. 2013. *Ruling the Void*: *The Hollowing-Out of Western Democracy*. London: Verso.

Massanari, Adrienne L. 2018. "Rethinking Research Ethics, Power, and the Risk of Visibility in the Era of the 'Alt-Right' Gaze." *Social Media + Society* 4, 2: 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118768302.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Mazower, Mark. 1998. *Dark Continent*: *Europe's Twentieth Century*. London: Penguin.

McAdams, A. James, and Samuel Piccolo, eds. 2024. *Far-Right Newspeak and the Future of Liberal Democracy*. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

McManus, Matthew, ed. 2021. *Liberalism and Socialism: Mortal Enemies or Embittered Kin?* Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79537-5.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Milbank, John, and Adrian Pabst. 2016. *The Politics of Virtue*: *Post-Liberalism and the Human Future*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Milne, Seamus. 2012. *The Revenge of History: The Battle for the 21st Century*. London: Verso.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Moatti, Claudia, and Christel Müller. 2021. "The People in Ancient Times and the Rise of 'Popularism,'" in *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, ed. András Sajó, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes. New York: Routledge, 203–216.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Mondon, Aurelien. 2024. "'There is no present or future, only the past, happening over and over again, now': Illiberalism, really existing liberalism and the bulwark fantasy." *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 4, no. 1.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Mondon, Aurelien, and Aaron Winter. 2020. *Reactionary Democracy*: *How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream*. London: Verso.

Morisset, Raphael. 2024. "The Paradoxical Sources of Illiberalism: A Synoptic Approach to the Genealogies of Illiberalism." *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 4, no.2
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Mouffe, Chantal. 2000. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Mouffe, Chantal. 2018. *For a Left Populism*. London: Verso.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Mounk, Yascha. 2018a. "The Undemocratic Dilemma." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2: 98–112.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Mounk, Yascha. 2018b. *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Mudde, Cas. 2021. "Populism in Europe: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism (The *Government and Opposition*/Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019)." *Government and Opposition* 56, no. 4: 577–597.
https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.15.

Nell, Edward J. 2009. *Free Market Conservatism: A Critique of Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Ng, Eve. 2022. *Cancel Culture: A Critical Analysis*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Norris, Pippa. 2023. "Cancel Culture: Myth or Reality?" *Political Studies* 71, no. 1: 145–174.
https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217211037023.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Orsina, Giovanni. 2023. "Politique, technocratie et mondialisation á l'épreuve des guerres culturelles." In *Fractures de la guerre étendue: De l'Ukraine au métavers*, ed. Gilles Gressani and Mathéo Malik. Paris: Gallimard.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Payne, Jenny, and Tornhill, Sofie. 2023. "The enemy's enemy: feminism at the crossroads of neoliberal co-optation and anti-gender conservatism." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 28, no 1: 62–82.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Pető, Andrea. 2021. "Current Comment: The Illiberal Academic Authority. An Oxymoron?" *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 44, no. 4: 461–469.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Pető, Andrea. 2022. "Andrea Pető on Gender and Illiberalism." *Agora* (blog), March 14. https://www.illiberalism.org/andrea-peto-on-gender-and-illiberalism.

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Prügl, Elisabeth. 2015. "Neoliberalising Feminism." *New Political Economy* 20, no. 4: 614–631.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Rodan, Garry, John R. Clammer, and Chua Beng Huat. 2019. "Review of 'On Liberalism Disavowed: Communitarianism and State Capitalism in Singapore' by Chua Beng Huat." *Sojourn*: *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 34, no. 1 (March): 185–206.
WorldCat

Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2000. *La démocratie inachevée*. Paris: Gallimard.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Rottenberg, Catherine. 2014. "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism." *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3: 418–437.
https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.857361.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Ruskin, John. 1871. *Fors Clavigera*: *Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Britain*, vol. I.

Sætra, Henrik Skaug. 2019. "Freedom under the Gaze of Big Brother: Preparing the Grounds for a Liberal Defence of Privacy in the Era of Big Data." *Technology in Society* 58: 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2019.101160.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Sajó, András, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes, eds. 2022. *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Sauvé, Guillaume. 2018. "The Apogee of Soviet Political Romanticism: Projects for Moral Renewal in Early Perestroika (1985–1989)." *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 9: 1407–1432.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Scanlon, Sandra. 2013. *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Schäfer, Armin. 2022. "Cultural Backlash? How (Not) to Explain the Rise of Authoritarian Populism." *British Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 4: 1977–1993.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Schäfer, Bernd. 2008. "The Catholic Church and the Cold War's End in Europe: Vatican Ostpolitik and Pope John Paul II, 1985–1989." In *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal*, ed. Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, 64–77. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Schramm, Madison V. 2022. "Review of 'Catastrophic Success: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Goes Wrong. By Alexander B. Downes.'" *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 4: 1507–1509.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. 2014. *Unthinking Eurocentrism*: *Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge.

Sifaki, Angeliki, C. L. Quinan, and Katarina Lončarević, eds. 2022. *Homonationalism, Femonationalism and Ablenationalism Critical Pedagogies Contextualised*. London: Routledge.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Simmerl, Georg. 2023. "Liberalism and Critique: Why It Is Unviable to Analytically Position a Liberal Script in Opposition to Its Contestations." SCRIPTS Working Paper 24. https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/publications/working-paper-series/Working-Paper-24-2023/index.html.

Slobodian, Quinn. 2018. *Globalists*: *The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Snegovaya, Maria. 2020. "Different Strokes for Different Folks: Who Votes for Technocratic Parties?" *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 4: 556–567.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Snegovaya, Maria. 2021. "How Ex-Communist Left Parties Reformed and Lost." *West European Politics* 45, no. 4: 716–743.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Snegovaya, Maria. *When Left Moves Right: The Decline of the Left and the Rise of the Populist Right in Postcommunist Europe*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2024.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Sowa, Jan. 2012. "An Unexpected Twist of Ideology: Neoliberalism and the Collapse of the Soviet Bloc." *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 5: 153–180.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Sprong, Stefanie, et al. 2019. "'Our Country Needs a Strong Leader Right Now': Economic Inequality Enhances the Wish for a Strong Leader." *Psychological Science* 30, no. 11: 1625–1637. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619875472.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2011. "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France." *Public Culture* 23, no. 1: 121–156.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Swanton, Christine. 1985. "On the 'Essential Contestedness' of Political Concepts." *Ethics* 95, no. 4: 811–827.
https://doi.org/10.1086/292685.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Tan, Kenneth Paul. 2012. "The Ideology of Pragmatism: Neo-Liberal Globalisation and Political Authoritarianism in Singapore." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 42, no. 1: 67–92.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Tanasescu, Mihnea. 2017. "When a River Is a Person: From Ecuador to New Zealand, Nature Gets Its Day in Court." *The Conversation*, June 19. https://theconversation.com/when-a-river-is-a-person-from-ecuador-to-new-zealand-nature-gets-its-day-in-court-79278.

Triadafilopoulos, Triadafilos. 2011. "Illiberal Means to Liberal Ends? Understanding Recent Immigrant Integration Policies in Europe." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 6: 861–880.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

Trouillard, Pauline. 2022. "Repressing the Protests through Law, Police and Discourse: The Example of the Yellow Vests' Movement in France." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 3: 506–520.
Google Scholar   WorldCat

van Dick, Teun A. 1998. *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: Sage.
Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Varga, Mihai, and Aron Buzogány. 2022. "The Two Faces of the 'Global Right': Revolutionary Conservatives and National-Conservatives." *Critical Sociology* 48, no. 6 (September): 1089–1107.
WorldCat

Waller, Julian G. 2021. "Harnessing Illiberalism's Analytical Leverage." *The Loop* (ECPR), August 27.
https://theloop.ecpr.eu/harnessing-illiberalisms-analytical-leverage.

Waller, J. G. 2023. "Distinctions With a Difference: Illiberalism and Authoritarianism in Scholarly Study." *Political Studies Review*

0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299231159253.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1995. *After Liberalism*. New York: New Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Wee, C. J. W.-L. 2001. "Mediating 'Progress': The National Narrative of Economic Development and Liberalism in Singapore."
Communal/Plural 9, no. 2: 223–242.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Whyte, Jessica. 2019. *The Morals of the Market: Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism*. London: Verso.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Williams, David. 2020. *Progress, Pluralism, and Politics: Liberalism and Colonialism, Past and Present*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's
University Press.

Google Scholar   Google Preview   WorldCat   COPAC

Wolin, Sheldon S. 2016. *Politics and Vision*: *Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton
University Press.

Wuttke, Alexander, Konstantin Gavras, and Harald Schoen. 2020. "Have Europeans Grown Tired of Democracy? New Evidence
from Eighteen Consolidated Democracies, 1981–2018." *British Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1: 416–428.
https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123420000149.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November-December 1997): 22–43.

Google Scholar   WorldCat

Zhang, Chenchen. 2023. "Postcolonial Nationalism and the Global Right." *Geoforum* 144, no. 1 (August).
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103824.

WorldCat

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*: *The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London:
Profile Books.

Notes

1   A special thanks to the many friends and colleagues who read the previous versions of this paper: Julian A. Waller, Gulnaz
Sibgatullina, John Chrobak, Aaron Irion, and Joseph Cerrone.

2   Of course, not all scholarship on illiberalism need necessarily define the concept. Instead, authors may choose to confine
themselves to studying semantic use of the term, exploring the repertoires employed by different actors.

3   This is less new in the United States—Liberty University, one of the bastions of the Christian Right, opened in 1971—but is
now multiplying, especially in Central Europe.

4   I am grateful to Aaron Irion for bringing this article to my attention.