

Call for Conference Papers

Grassroots Unrest in Europe and the Erosion of Liberal Democracy

European democracies have had a turbulent past few years contending with illiberal turns in governance (as exemplified in the cases of Poland and Hungary), debates over European identity and its global role (the migration crisis or Brexit), and security threats (as exemplified by Russia's invasion of Ukraine). The Covid pandemic and more recent rises in [food and energy](#) costs have put pressure on citizens and, coupled with the aforementioned crises, have contributed to a growing sense of broader dissatisfaction with incumbent governments and their capacity to lead. Indeed, there is a growing dissatisfaction with the liberal democratic model itself. Multiple surveys have found that the frequency of mass protests have steadily grew over the past two decades. From 2009-2019, for instance, mass protests globally have [increased](#) by an annual average of 11.5%. The substance of these protests has also been particularly salient as, by some indications, over 54% of mass protests between 2006 and 2020 have related to "a failure of political representation and of political systems" ([Ortiz et al. 2021](#)). Grassroots politics and citizen protest mobilization is a vibrant component of democracy and is often [hailed](#) as critical to the good health of a democratic society, yet there is a creeping [feeling](#) that dissatisfaction with liberal democracy and growing autocratic sympathies may be capitalized upon and contribute to further democratic erosion.

To address these issues, the Illiberalism Studies Program will host a conference at the George Washington University on **November 3, 2023**. We invite scholars to submit research and works in progress which will discuss the role of grassroots mobilization in the European context and its impact on democracy.

Suggested topics

- ❖ The (un)expected consequences of the Covid pandemic (e.g. changes in voter turnout, voter behavior, discourse on values, civil society organization)
- ❖ The role of democracies, and democracy itself, in the changing international order
- ❖ Transnational cooperation within local pushes for autocratic leadership
- ❖ Cultural attitudes as a driver of challenges to liberal democracy
- ❖ Demand-side drive for illiberal leadership
- ❖ The role of new technology in organization and mass mobilization
- ❖ The role of emotion and resentment, fear, and frustration as drivers of illiberalism
- ❖ Discourses of exclusion and narrative-construction practices

Please submit a title and a 250-word abstract to illibstudies@gwu.edu by June 15, 2023. Successful candidates will be notified by June 30, 2023. Travel to Washington DC and accommodation will be covered.

Select papers will be invited to submit to the [Journal of Illiberalism Studies](#).

