

## 2022 Austrian Studies Conference

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## Far-Right Politics in Austria, Europe, and the United States: Recent Trends and Transatlantic Connections

Organized by the UC Berkeley Austrian Studies Program in cooperation with the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies and the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation. Co-sponsored by the UC Berkeley Department of German, the UC Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies, the UC Berkeley Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, the Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation, and the Department of Political Science, University of Vienna.

University of California, Berkeley

April 20, 2022, 10am-4pm PT

Zoom

[Register Here](#) <sup>Ⓞ</sup>

## Description

Against the background of the recent rise of far-right ideology, authoritarian political thinking and corresponding politics across Europe and the United States the conference sheds light on both country case studies and transnational exchange and collaboration between relevant groups and political actors.

The contributions focus on relevant developments in Austria and other European countries. Special attention is given to parallels and differences between national political contexts and trends, on the one hand, and transnational/transatlantic influences, connections and co-operations, but also differences, on the other.

Pertinent topics to be discussed comprise the rejection of pluralistic political concepts, the role of antisemitism, racism and xenophobia, hostility towards ethnic and social minorities, appeals to stereotypes and scapegoating, the striking success of conspiracy theories which have been fueled by the Covid-19 pandemic, and last but not least the significant transnational dissemination of far-right political discourse and imagery via diverse social media. The Botstiber Lecture by Karin Liebhart explores the example of Austria and discusses why the country is an interesting case for the study of far-right movements and party politics.

## Program

**10:00-10:15 AM:** Welcome by the conference organizers Jeroen Dewulf (UC Berkeley) and Karin Liebhart (University of Vienna) as well as Kevin McNamara and Michael Burri in representation of the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies.

**10:15-11:00 AM:** Keynote Lecture by Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch (Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation): "A Watershed Moment for Europe's Democracy - The twin-challenges of authoritarian populism and the return of weaponized power politics"

**11:00 AM-12:00 PM:** Session 1: Moderated by Jeroen Dewulf (UC Berkeley)

-11:00-11:15 AM: David Large (San Francisco Fromm Institute): "Return of the Repressed: The Post-World War II Origins of Far-Right Politics in Europe"

-11:15-11:30 AM: Péter Krekó (Eötvös Loránd University of Science): "COVID-Skepticism, Pseudoscience and the Populist Radical Right: A Complicated Relationship"

-11:30-11:45 AM: Laura Jákli (Harvard Society of Fellows): "The European Far Right's Campaign Strategies in Online Political Ads"

-11:45 AM-12:00 PM: Discussion

**12:00 PM-1:00 PM:** Session 2: Moderated by David Large (San Francisco Fromm Institute)

-12:00-12:15 PM: Michal Krzyzanowski (Uppsala University): "The New Normal' and the Recontextualisation of Crisis: Discursive Shifts in European (Right-Wing) Populist Imagination during/after the COVID-19 Pandemic"

-12:15-12:30 PM: Mitchell Orenstein (University of Pennsylvania)/Maria Snegovaya (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University): "Conservative National Populists in Eastern Europe: Is There an Economic Dimension to Their Support?"

-12:30-12:45 PM: Andreas Onnerfors (European Academy of Sciences and Arts): "The Great Replacement': A Transatlantic Frame of Radicalized Violence"

-12:45-1:00 PM: Discussion

**1:00-2:00 PM:** Lunch break

**2:00 PM-3:00 PM:** Session 3: Moderated by Karin Liebhart (University of Vienna)

-2:00-2:15PM: Matthew Stenberg (UC Berkeley): "When do Cities Discriminate? LGBTQ+ Discrimination in Poland"

-2:15-2:30 PM: Hannes Richter (Embassy of Austria in the United States and University of New Orleans): "The Far Right and Support for Liberal Democracy in the United States: Beyond the Generation Gap"

-2:30-2:45 PM: Johanna Schuster-Craig (Michigan State University): "Anti-Genderism and Trans\*humiliation in Far-Right European Politics"

-2:45-3:00 PM: Johannes von Moltke (University of Michigan): "Media Cultures of the New Right"

-3:00-3:15 PM: Discussion

**3:15-4 PM:** Botstiber Lecture by Karin Liebhart (University of Vienna; 2022 Botstiber Visiting Professor, UC Berkeley): "QAnon's Rise in Austria"

## Abstracts

- **Laura Jákli:** "The European Far Right's Campaign Strategies in Online Political Ads"

The far right is the fastest growing party family in Europe. Although party messaging is important to understanding their increased electoral support, current data are not ideal for investigating how parties prioritize and frame issues in practice. In this presentation, I argue that the far right's targeted online ad messages provide the most candid account available of what the party communicates to potential voters when ad content is neither publicly visible nor regulated. Using computational methods, I evaluate the content of more than 68,000 political campaign ads across 11 European countries and 79 political parties, fielded on Facebook in the two months leading up to 2019-2020 elections. Using this comparative campaign ads dataset, I examine three prominent theories on the rise of Europe's far right. I find that only the far right campaigns heavily on immigration issues, and that the center-right has not 'outbid' the far right on immigration in almost any country. I also find empirical support for the theory that the far right employs uniquely grievance-based mobilization strategies. I conclude with some implications for far right mobilization in the era of digital politics.

- **Péter Krekó:** "COVID-Skepticism, Pseudoscience and the Populist Radical Right: A Complicated Relationship"

The paper will examine the relationship of populist right-wing parties and voters towards the issue of COVID, lockdown regulations, and vaccines. Most research confirms that populist radical right-wing parties – and their voters – typically take COVID-skeptical positions, and they are less trustful of vaccines (see for example Italy, Brazil, US), and more critical of lockdowns. Some populist radical right-wing parties on government (e.g., in Poland and Hungary) take more nuanced positions on the issue, combining (silent) COVID-skepticism with an authoritarian push on the vaccines (and sometimes on lockdowns) and the over politicization of the vaccine issue that deepens existing divisions. The reasons for this non-heterogeneous and dynamic relationship between right-wing populism, COVID-skepticism, and pseudoscientific views are discussed in light of the literature on „populist establishments“: populist right-wing political players on government.

- **Michal Krzyzanowski:** "The New Normal' and the Recontextualisation of Crisis: Discursive Shifts in European (Right-Wing) Populist Imagination during/after the COVID-19 Pandemic"

This presentation connects the recently prevalent discourse of 'the new normal' – initiated and widely used in Europe and elsewhere in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – with long term and pre-existent national and transnational imaginaries and discursive dynamics of European (right-wing) populist – or far right – political actors. On the one hand, the interest here is in deconstructing the seemingly novel logic of the 'new normal' narrative by showing that, as such, it is largely based on well-established tendencies of production of a new 'normality' and the wider normalisation of exclusion in/via mediated and political discourse. As the paper shows, the often-ambivalent imaginary of 'crisis' – deployed in relation to such recent European and global events/processes as, inter alia, the 'Refugee Crisis' or 'Brexit' – has remained central as well as being further recontextualised in the public argumentation of European right-wing populist actors. On the other hand, however, the paper emphasises a vital, parallel 'discursive shift' in the conceptualisation of 'crisis' by the European far right during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper argues, namely, that the very acute and real as well as tangible character of the Coronavirus has forced the populist political actors to abandon their usual strategies of 'imagining', 'mis/constructing' or even 'performing' (Moffitt 2016) crisis and instead saw them turning towards descriptions of the COVID-19 crisis in terms of various types of 'facts'. However, those quasi-factual descriptions of crisis, have, at the same time, been very skillfully re/ packaged and 'used' as well as 'operationalised' as tools that helped the far right 'pre-legitimise' its political strategies and policies. These, as the paper shows, have allowed the far-right political actors – and especially the European right-wing populists currently in power – to solidify the hegemonic position of their ideologically-driven discourse by not only symbolically but also formally gaining control over competing voices in the public spheres including, very notably, those of the media that used to be critical of far-right politics and actions.

- **David Large:** "Return of the Repressed: The Post-World War II Origins of Far-Right Politics in Europe"

The far-right parties that in recent years have achieved considerable influence across Europe, including traditional Center-Right parties to shift rightwards and in some cases participating in coalition governments or even taking control of governance themselves, are not some sudden flash in the pan. Along with echoes from a more distant past, these parties have organizational and ideological roots in the first decades after World War II. Using France, Germany and Austria as national case studies, this talk will trace the "radicalized conservatism" in evidence today to a postwar landscape of repressed yet virulent hard-right activism.

- **Karin Liebhart:** "QAnon's Rise in Austria"

QAnon, one of the most bizarre conspiracy theories of modern times, followed by millions of social media users in the United States, has significantly gained ground also in Austria and a couple of other European countries since it first emerged in Europe in 2017. QAnon symbols and references to alleged conspiracies are particularly visible at so-called "Corona rallies". The paper discusses why Austria is an interesting case in this regard. It focuses on underlying anti-pluralistic, anti-liberal, and anti-Semitic patterns that mold the political culture of Austria to explain why centuries old conspiracy theories that have returned from the United States to Europe in new garments currently achieve such striking success. The results highlight the adaptation of QAnon's US based narratives into EU-centered – or even local – narratives. They also shed light on QAnon's capacity to give a home to diverse and even contradictory narratives, and its function as a conspiracy theory sponge, which makes it particularly attractive also for European far right politicians and activists.

- **Andreas Onnerfors:** "The Great Replacement' - A Transatlantic Frame of Radicalized Violence"

In 2019 and 2020, two terrorist attacks were carried out in Germany echoing well with the idea of the 'Great Replacement', developed by French Neo-conservative thinker Camus. The Great Replacement conspiracy alleges that 'globalist' elites are engaged in a coordinated plot to eradicate the white race and national states from the face of the earth through multiculturalism, gender ideology and cultural indifference. Both terrorists in Germany developed their worldview in manifestos which were posted online before the attack. In this talk Andreas Onnerfors will explain how the Great Replacement conspiracy theory has turned into a transatlantic frame of radicalized violence uniting European and American extremists alike.

- **Mitchell Orenstein/ Maria Snegovaya:** "Conservative national populists in Eastern Europe: Is there an economic dimension to their support?"

While European populist parties have a reputation as exclusionary right-wingers, in recent years scholars have begun to ask whether their economic policies have become more inclusive of weaker social and economic groups, even minorities and immigrants. This paper uses quantitative analysis to show that European populists, particularly in Eastern Europe, have been far more successful than other parties at creating jobs. In contrast to their anti-gender rhetoric, they have created jobs for women as well as men, and, at least in some cases, minorities and immigrants as well. This forces us to rethink the sources of support for these parties and the difference between their exclusionary rhetoric and inclusive economic policies.

- **Wolfgang Petritsch:** „A Watershed Moment for Europe's Democracy: The twin-challenges of authoritarian populism and the return of weaponized power politics"

- **Hannes Richter:** „The Far Right and Support for Liberal Democracy in the United States: Beyond the Generation Gap"

The significant link between age and support for liberal democracy has been well established in recent political science research, both in the United States, as well as in Europe. A generational effect is evident; younger generations exhibit lower levels of support for liberal democracy than their older peers. With this finding in mind, I will focus on additional demographic and political covariates that have shown a significant effect in multivariate models predicting support for liberal democracy in the United States. As some of these results might seem counter-intuitive, a discussion is needed to place them into context in order to gain a better understanding of what predicts authoritarian tendencies beyond the age gap in the United States today.

- **Johanna Schuster-Craig:** „Anti-Genderism and Trans\*humiliation in Far-Right European Politics"

Gender politics are one of the core thematic concerns of right-wing ideologies. I argue that within a broader strategy of anti-genderist politics, right-wing extremists and right-wing politicians make use of a tactic that I call trans\*humiliation, which I define as the public humiliation of transpeople as a scapegoat for the perceived absurdity of left-wing feminist politics and a queered gender spectrum. In this presentation, I will look at discussions in the Austrian media about the 1995 case of Hans Hermann Groer. I want to expand on my previous work about gender and trans\*humiliation in German far-right politics by female politicians by looking specifically at the interplay between rhetoric about the abuse of children and the way the far-right attempts to limit the agency of gender expressive children.

- **Matthew Stenberg:** "When do Cities Discriminate? LGBTQ+ discrimination in Poland"

Although on average we have seen increases in legal protections for minority rights in recent decades, this is by no means universal. Many governments maintain long-standing policies that discriminate against underprivileged and minority groups, and societal institutions writ large have long privileged in-groups at the expense of others. However, some governments are going even further: implementing new, actively discriminatory policies against minority groups that violate principles of the rule of law. In Europe, many such policies – pursued at both the national and subnational levels – are quite open with their discriminatory intent in spite of EU protections for minority rights. Indeed, many politicians actively draw attention to these policies in their campaigning and interviews as they seek to gain political support of majority-group constituents.

- **Johannes von Moltke:** „Media Cultures of the New Right"

Though often rabidly nationalistic when it acts locally, the new right thinks globally and it is networked transnationally. That network is sustained by a far-reaching media infrastructure that warrants attention in its own right. For it has become increasingly evident that the New Right must be distinguished from earlier right-wing radicalisms by the fact that it is media made. The internet and social media, in particular, have been not just a crucial accelerant for the rise of the alt-right, but the very soil in which it could take root. At the same time, the new right has turned to other, no less global media forms: from interconnected think tanks with a circulating stable of speakers to the lively transnational publishing industry that provisions the network of right-wing ideas with print. Rooted in book publishing but active on social media, outfits like Arkots in Sweden, Countercurrents in the U.S., or Antaios in Schnellroda, Germany provide platforms for right-wing intellectual history and self-styled, present-day New Right intellectuals. Closer investigation allows us to situate this bookish culture as part of a transnational media infrastructure that facilitates the free flow of texts and translations. This presentation zooms in on the "Schnellroda Complex" as a node from which to unravel and map the media strategies and interconnections that constitute the "metapolitical" network of the New Right.

## List of Participants

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