

Seminar: Post-pandemic Populism

Instructor:

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Department: Nationalism Studies

Central European University

Winter semester: **Wednesdays 1.30-3.10 pm; start: January 10, 2024**

Course level: Ma, PhD

Credits (ECTS Credits): 4

Course e-learning site: Moodle for materials, reading and assignments

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Course Description

The rise of far-right populism has recently led to a surfeit of gloomy predictions in the public sphere. Far right or right-wing populist parties (hereafter RPPs) are winning elections across – and beyond – Europe and are leading in opinion polls in many countries. In this way, the political spectrum is drifting to the right, accompanied by significant *discursive shifts*. The agenda, arguments, slogans, rhetoric, and performances (meaning written, spoken, and visual texts on specific issues) propagated by RPPs are becoming more and more acceptable and being adopted by (predominantly conservative) mainstream parties. Such discursive shifts go hand in hand with processes of *normalisation*, *mainstreaming*, and *democratic backsliding*. Several preconditions are responsible for the success of these changes. These include among other things: crisis-ridden socioeconomic developments on both global and local levels; ethnonational (*völkisch*) and nativist ideologies and narratives propagated by RPPs; the strategic mediatisation of politics; and not least of all support for RPPs by conservative parties, who thereby hope to stave off their potential loss of power.

As a result, many politicians both on the EU and the national level as well as prominent individuals in public life are warning that Europe (and the world as a whole) is drifting towards increasing (ethno-) nationalism, illiberal democracy, and authoritarianism. These warnings are justified, for the developments in question entail, among other things, systematic infractions against, and violation of, human rights, international treaties, and the values and norms upheld by the European Union and/or United Nations. Lies, demagogic rabble-rousing, conspiracy narratives, insults, and defamations may engender outrage, yet they mostly entail no legal consequences and are usually forgotten within a matter of days, due to the current media logic. It seems as though the public has become accustomed to daily provocations and scandals. A process of *normalisation* has taken place – or, we could pose the question – has a “new normal” been launched/established/imagined/implemented?

This course attempts to understand (and explain) socio-political developments in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic – which obviously changed all our everyday lives. Many recent studies have illustrated the range of negative effects of the pandemic, especially on the health and well-being of children and adolescents. Other studies have traced the specificities of political communication in various countries (in Europe and beyond)

employed to achieve maximum compliance of citizens (in following the many measures suggested by experts).

Apart from the pandemic, we must also consider the many other global crises (polycrisis): climate crisis, refugee movements, wars in many parts of the world, energy crisis, cost-of-living crisis, and so forth. Uncertainty and anxiety, the loss of trust in the “elites (scientists, politicians, journalists, etc.) because of an unpredictable future have frequently led to dystopian imaginaries, susceptible for the instrumentalization of a *politics of fear* – which, as mentioned above, might lead to a rise of the RPPs.

We will therefore focus on these complex issues and questions by discussing important **readings in class** (circa 60-70 pages/week = 2-3 journal papers or chapters from books), about, amongst others, populism, identity politics, and migration- and asylum-regimes, always related to the pandemic. We will focus on theories, methodologies, research designs, and procedures of the respective analysis.

In each class, one (or two) participants will quickly summarize (in ca 20 minutes) the agreed readings and will also think of a few questions to launch the discussion. There will be discussion in groups and amongst the entire class.

Students will be asked to develop a **topic for a small research project**, which may be completed individually or in a group of no more than 3 individuals. Indeed, I suggest that all participants should write about the post-pandemic populist developments in their respective countries while analyzing speeches or media texts or social media or party programs or posters, or....In this way, we will be able to achieve a comparative study of the aftermath of the pandemic related to the populist far-right. Suggestions will be discussed and should be developed beyond these suggestions in the form of a *term paper proposal*. **These research projects will be reported in term papers of 2500-3000 words.**

Readings will be provided on Moodle.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- ✓ Have an overview of the most important concepts in recent research on the range of complex phenomena related to the pandemic, political communication, crisis communication, and to far-right populist agenda and parties.
- ✓ Critically discuss different approaches to normalization and mainstreaming, and focus on the analysis of discursive shifts.
- ✓ Distinguish between salient genres of text, image, and talk
- ✓ Conduct field-work for pilot studies on specific topics (interviews, ethnography, transcription, and so forth) or critically review the state of art on one of the many complex aspects of post-pandemic developmen

Course Requirements

Continuous participation/presentation	40%
Term paper proposal (deadline tbd)	10%
Final term paper (deadline: end of term)	50%

COURSE SCHEDULE (preliminary)

1/10	Organisation of Course, Discussion of Readings and Bibliography
1/19	Discussion of theoretical approaches to far-right populism
1/24	Discussion of Readings
1/31	Discussion of Readings
2/7	Discussion of Readings
2/14.	Presentation of Research Proposals
2/21.	Discussion of Readings
2/28	Discussion of Readings
3/6	Discussion of Readings
3/13	Discussion of Readings
3/20	Presentation of Research, General Discussion

Note: No class on 17 January! Make-up class on 19 January. Make-up classes will always take place whenever a regular class will not.

Core Readings will be provided, uploaded on the course website

Extensive Bibliography will be provided

Consultations outside of class will be available if deemed necessary

Term paper assessment criteria

Content (60%)	
-relevance of topic chosen	5%
-overview of the state of the art/research	20%
-original research design (research questions/aims, methods, data selection)	15%
-analysis/results/conclusions	20%
Text quality (30%)	
-structure	15%
-adequate style/readability/clarity	15%
Formal correctness (10%)	
-references	5%
-correct English	5%

Preparatory/Pre-course Readings

Wodak, R. (2021) *The Politics of Fear. The Shameless Normalization of Far-right Discourse*. London: Sage.

Wodak, R. (2021) Crisis Communication and crisis management during COVID-19 *Global Discourse*. 11/ 3: 329-353