

The Evolution of Post-Democracy

CALL FOR PAPERS

University of Coimbra, 20-21 October 2022

According to Colin Crouch's influential essay on post-democracy (Crouch 2004), formal democratic institutions are still existing but have lost democratic substance. His post-democracy thesis holds that severe socio-economic cum political transformations have undermined the structural conditions of democratic will-formation, legitimization, and policy-making. Democratic regimes seem to be stuck in a transitional phase: they ceased to be democratic, but have not yet transformed into a novel regime type. In a similar vein, other authors have applied Gramsci's concept of "interregnum" to our current predicament. However, by adhering to this diagnosis, the post-democracy discourse has so far overlooked alternative forms and practices of politics and law-making that are evolving in the ongoing socio-political evolution. Hence, more than 20 years after Colin Crouch, Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin introduced the term post-democracy, we should ask which novel tendencies and alternative models of policy-making and legitimizing politics have already developed or are in the process of emerging. This is all the more necessary given that in the context of the Covid-pandemic, the rise of populism and populist regimes, and the wake of ongoing economic and ecological crises, the practical and theoretical search for alternatives to democracy and novel forms of governing is intensifying. Against this background, the workshop seeks to explore different facets of the evolution of post-democracy along the following lines:

The evolution of criticisms of democracy

There is a long history of criticisms of democracy since Plato. Has the discourse on the limits and problems of democracy changed in recent years? Have new criticisms of democracy emerged that challenge the normative justification of democratic regimes in a more fundamental way? How do they affect political and legal norms, institutions, discourses, and actors?

The evolution of alternative models of politics and policy-making

We can observe pleas for more non-democratic (e.g., expertocratic, experimental, authoritarian, epistemic, algorithmic) forms of government, not only with a view to the pandemic and climate change. How are they justified? Which models of post-democratic government and new institutions do theorists, experts, bureaucrats, and politicians (explicitly or implicitly) propose? Moreover, is there an empirical process of evolutionary development of undemocratic forms of policy-making in the context of post-democratic regimes? Which patterns of institutional and practical change towards novel types of policy-making and policy-legitimizing beyond the conventional democratic ones can we observe?

The evolution of basic constitutional norms beyond conventional democracy

Has the profound transformation of liberal democratic regimes over the last decade led to new constitutional patterns for political life in post-democratic times? What does post-democratic constitutionalism empirically and normatively entail? Are there

countertendencies, i.e., are constitutions bulwarks against evolutionary change, or do they adapt to changing political circumstances?

The evolution of political culture

Current debates on the effects of a digitalized public sphere and a seemingly ever more aggressive polarization pose the question of how democratic “civic culture” may evolve into a novel post-democratic political culture. More specifically, what does the evolution of new forms of political discourse (indicated by new concepts and phenomena such as cancel culture, gaslighting, virtue signaling, no-platforming, or silencing) mean? Do they indicate a shift towards a new political culture? If so, with which concepts can we grasp this novel political culture? Against this backdrop, what is the future of core political ideas which have shaped democratic polities and their legal framework in the past? More specifically, how does the post-democratic transformation of political culture affect core tenets of liberalism, socialism, and republicanism, such as solidarity, tolerance, public interest, deliberation, common good, rule of law, and human rights?

The evolution of democracy towards democratic experimentalism

If democratic regimes are not doomed to fail, but prove to be resilient and adaptive, what evolutionary democratic innovations might foster this further adaptation? How could changes within the conventional structures be carried out through deliberate political action and by policies of democratic experimentalism? What roles might the state, elites, parties, and the rule of law play in such an adaptive and experimental evolution of democratic societies?

Abstracts of 300 words (max.) should be submitted by **July 31th 2022** to Ana Margarida Gaudêncio (anagaude@fd.uc.pt) and Veith Selk (selk@pg.tu-darmstadt.de). Participation decisions will be made by mid-August. The working language is English. Selected papers will be invited for publication.

We intend to hold the workshop as a full “in-person” event. Depending on the situation, we may switch to a hybrid or online-only format. The registration fee (roundtable materials and coffee breaks) is 30€ (for professionals) and 20€ (for students, including PhD candidates). Further details on registration, payment as well as other workshop activities soon to follow.

The workshop is jointly organized by Ana Margarida Gaudêncio (UCILeR, Instituto Jurídico da Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de Coimbra—University of Coimbra Institute for Legal Research, Portugal), Luís Meneses do Vale (UCILeR, Instituto Jurídico da Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de Coimbra—University of Coimbra Institute for Legal Research, Portugal), and Veith Selk (Institut für Politikwissenschaft der Technischen Universität Darmstadt—Institute of Political Science, Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany).