

Far-Right Populism and Democratic Equality

Panel Organizers: Michele Giavazzi (LMU Munich), Daniel Sharp (LMU Munich/University of Vienna), and Katharina Sodoma (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg),

Format: Semi-Open

Far-right populism is the primary threat to the contemporary democratic order. Yet, far-right populist parties often purport to be, in some sense, democratic. Indeed, they often claim to be *more* democratic than their liberal-democratic competitors. Accordingly, understanding and demystifying the relationship between populist conceptions of democratic values and a proper account of these values is of crucial importance. Existing debates about populist conceptions of democracy emphasize that populists have a wayward conception of democratic self-rule based on a restrictive ethno-nationalist and 'Volksich' notion of popular sovereignty (Corduwener 2014; Müller 2017; Schmidtke 2023). However, comparatively little work has been done exploring how to conceive of the relationship between populism and the other prime democratic value, the value of social or political equality. Yet, crucially, far-right populists sometimes seem to appeal to quasi-egalitarian ideas and demands (Mansbridge and Macedo 2019). Thus, there is a tension between the populist's conception of equality, on the one hand, and the proper understanding of this democratic ideal, on the other. The panel seeks to explore the relationship between democratic equality and far-right populism.

We intend the panel to explore two clusters of questions.

First, what is the relationship between populist conceptions of equality and how democratic equality is appropriately conceived? We are here interested in the way that certain perversions of the ideal of democratic equality may help explain the allure of populism and on how these misunderstandings bear on broader debates in democratic theory. One hypothesis is that far-right populists systemically misunderstand the scope of who is entitled to equality by affirming an exclusive conception of the demos and a hierarchical vision of the moral status of non-nationals. A second hypothesis is that populists embrace a conception of political equality unmoored from the demands of accountability, on which citizens' political judgments are treated as authoritative irrespective of their epistemic merits. Here, we are interested in papers that explore, in dialogue with empirical research, how populists conceive of equality and the wider implications of these issues for debates in political theory.

Second, we are interested in how far-right populism poses a threat to democratic equality, properly conceived. Standard discussions of backsliding emphasize the deleterious impact of far-right populism on *liberal* institutions, such as the rule of law and human rights protections. Yet, there has been comparatively little discussion of the way that far-right populism threatens valuable forms of equality more generally. Here, we are specifically, but not only, interested in the relationship between far-right populism and relational or social egalitarian ideals.

Papers

Daniel Sharp & Katharina Sodoma: Democratic Equality and Populist Conceptions of Democracy

Michele Giavazzi: Populist Egalitarianism & Epistemic Unaccountability

We hope to recruit an additional three papers through an open call.

Organizer Bios:

Michele Giavazzi is a Research Fellow at the Chair in Philosophy & Political Theory at LMU Munich. He specializes in political and social philosophy. His research focuses on democratic theory and political epistemology, with a particular focus on epistemic challenges to democratic legitimacy, the ethics of voting, and the responsibilities of democratic citizens. His work has been published in venues such as *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, and *Episteme*. He is currently working on a book manuscript on democratic citizenship and epistemic competence.

Daniel Sharp is a postdoctoral fellow at the Chair for Philosophy and Political Theory at LMU Munich. In 2026, he will begin a position as Tenure-Track Professor of Applied Ethics at the University of Vienna. His research focuses on questions about equality, democracy, migration and citizenship. His work has appeared in journals such as *Ethics*, *Political Communication*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy*, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, and *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*. He is a Co-PI on the VW-Stiftung project *DEPOLARIZE: DEveloping POLARIZaTion Interventions based on Empathy*.

Katharina Anna Sodoma is a postdoctoral fellow at the Chair for Theoretical Philosophy at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. Her research focuses on topics at the intersection of ethics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and political philosophy, with a specific focus on democratic theory. Her work has appeared in *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming), *Erkenntnis*, *Political Communication*, *Philosophical Explorations*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, and *Social Philosophy Today*. She is a research collaborator on the VW-Stiftung project *DEPOLARIZE: DEveloping POLARIZaTion Interventions based on Empathy*.