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UNIVERSITÉ PARIS 1 PANTHÉON SORBONNE

CESSP CENTRE EUROPÉEN DE SOCIOLOGIE ET DE SCIENCE POLITIQUE

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## *Conservative Mobilizations: Labeling, Contextualizing, Investigating*

**Early Career Researchers' Study Day**
**May 16, 2025**
**Centre Sorbonne, Salle de la Fresque D-306**
**17, rue de la Sorbonne, 75005 PARIS**

**Organizers:** Alihan MESTCI (EHESS, CESSP), Natasza QUELVENNEC (EHESS, CESSP) and Antonio SAUANDAJ (Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, CESSP)

The recent electoral victory of Donald Trump in the United States and the rise of political figures such as Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey and Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel highlight the scale and effectiveness of mobilizations recently brought together under the label of the "illiberal turn" (Laruelle, 2022). These movements, driven by actors with diverse social and political characteristics, have challenged liberal values globally over the past decades, targeting principles such as the rule of law, abortion rights, migration policies, same-sex marriage, and the market economy. This phenomenon has been framed as a "cultural backlash" (Inglehart & Norris, 2016), a "democratic backlash" (Bermeo, 2016), "conservative revolutions" (Zalewski, 2016), "culture wars" (Hunter, 1991; Barša, Hesová & Slačálek, 2022), or a "populist moment" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Despite their differences, these mobilizations share a common opposition to contemporary transformations of the social and symbolic orders. Within institutional settings, they frequently coincide with a transition toward authoritarian governance that, while maintaining the outward appearance of democracy, undermines key counterbalances such as a free press and independent judiciary (Dieckhoff, Jaffrelot & Massicard, 2019; Sadurski, 2019).

The sociology of "conservative mobilizations" provides a framework for analyzing the key issues, actors, strategies, and dissemination channels within these movements (Agrikoliansky & Collovald, 2014). Whether they involve political parties, grassroot activism (associations, religious organizations) or conservative ideological production and expertise, these mobilizations rely on a variety of strategies and are sometimes situated at the intersection of several social fields. The transnational nature of these mobilizations has diversified the arenas where ideas and actors circulate (Ayoub & Stoeckl, 2024).

The protean nature of this phenomenon, less studied than its "progressive" counterpart, has attracted growing scholarly interest in recent years. However, most researchers focus on the analysis of electoral phenomena and political parties (Dahani *et al.*, 2023; Rouban, 2024), leaving other forms of

engagement under-investigated. Notably, despite the literature's undeniable interest in the role of intellectuals in the production and dissemination of conservative ideas (Behr, 2021; Cowan, 2018; Uzlaner & Stoeckl, 2020), many grey areas still surround interstitial spaces - more or less formalized - of articulation of conservative knowledge and repertoires of action (*think tanks*, clubs, transnational advocacy networks, etc.) or the ideological reconversions of left-wing intellectuals (Durand & Sindaco, 2015). Similarly, a metapolitical strategy designed to prepare the ground for electoral victories (Greskovits, 2017; Ślarzyński, 2018) or youth activism (Marylou & Massol, 2024) merit further investigation.

These gaps, along with the methodological challenges of studying conservative fields, form the basis for this study day dedicated to early career researchers (doctoral students, recent PhDs, and post-docs). Funded by the LabEX TEPSIS and sponsored by the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS), the Sorbonne Doctoral School of Political Science and the European Center for Sociology and Political Science (CESSP), it aims to provide a forum for scientific exchange on these topics. Participants are invited to critically examine the relevance of the term "conservative mobilizations" and its implications. The discussions will explore the sociogenesis, evolution, and strategies of these movements, as well as the dissemination of their ideas. The event will also address the investigative and reflexive challenges inherent in studying conservative mobilizations. Contributions will be attended around three thematic axes: 1/ to deepen theoretical reflection on the various labels attributed to them and the ways in which they appropriate or distance themselves from them; 2/ to contextualize them, considering the trajectories of ideas and actors in time and space; 3/ to analyze the methodological and reflexive issues involved in the study of conservative movements.

**Axis 1 - Labeling: Delimiting, Legitimizing, Stigmatizing**

The literature cited above reveals great heterogeneity in the categories mobilized to analyze dynamics that differ but share significant similarities. These categories are the result of a labeling process involving both the actors in conservative mobilizations and the researchers who explore them. For instance, while actors sometimes opt for the label "conservative" for legitimization purposes, specialists may prefer the term "ultra-right" rather than "far right" to avoid stigmatizing their object of study (Gaxie, 2006). In this context, we aim to analyze the distinctions and overlaps among the labels assigned to the actors involved in these mobilizations, as well as the ways in which these actors adopt such labels to define themselves. Thus, this axis invites deepen reflection on the labeling of conservative mobilizations by examining how it influences perceptions, legitimizes and stigmatizes certain groups and political ideas. What characteristics distinguish between a *populist*, a *conservative*, a *reactionary*, a *neo-conservative* or an *illiberal*? Why are some of these labels claimed or, on the contrary, rejected by the players in these mobilizations? Do they apprehend them differently depending on whether they are in the public or private sphere? Do they prefer to call themselves *patriots* or *nationalists* to build a collective identity? What labels (*traditionalist*, *fundamentalist*, etc.) should be adopted to describe players who politicize religion? How do they identify themselves? The aim is not to establish a normative typology, but to reflect collectively on how these different categories facilitate (or complicate) the approach, historicization and sociological investigation of conservative mobilizations.

**Axis 2 - Contextualizing: Going Beyond the Present, the National and Institutional Politics**

In the context of the growing prominence of far-right actors, the question of the "rightward shift" and/or "radicalization toward the far right" of political fields has become increasingly central to contemporary analyses. The vertigo of "unexpected" electoral victories can be explained by the emergence, or even superposition, of "drifts", "turning points" and "crises". However, works favoring

relational approaches (Boltanski, 1973; Sapiro, 2015; 2022; Erdinç & Gourisse, 2022; Bourdieu, 2023), comparative approaches (Bozarslan, 2021) or proposing a putting the "event" into perspective (Bensa & Fassin, 2002; Matonti, 2021) suggest broadening the temporal and/or spatial scope of these analyses. This axis encourages a decentering of analyses from from the present moment, the national space or the political field (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002; Sapiro & Fondu, 2023) to grasp the relational architecture and contemporary protest dynamics. To achieve one or more of these decentralizations, various approaches - relational, socio-historical and/or transnational - may be considered to study the circulation of ideas, references and agents. Contributions may also adopt a processual perspective to examine the sociogenesis, mutation and turning into public policy of worldviews that call for a reversal of existing power relations. How do "controversies", "events" and "crises" participate in the mobilization of agents of ideological, cultural and political conquest? To what extent do protest dynamics constituted in different spaces and times "provide a strange sense of familiarity" (Matonti, 2021, p. 131) here and now? How do actors mobilize transnational resources and multi-positionalities in different social sectors to legitimate and promote conservative ideas and consolidate their positions?

**3 - Investigating: Objectifying, Distancing, and Protecting Yourself in Fieldwork**

Investigations of conservative mobilizations are marked by tensions that might potentially complicate empirical work. While some researchers advocate the need for an emic approach, highlighting the heterogeneity and proper agenda of conservative actors (Avanza, 2018), others warn against a "movement-centric bias" (McAdam and Boudet, 2012) and stress the need to study them in relation to their opponents (Fillieule and Broqua, 2020). Confronted with these "unsympathetic" movements, some studies highlight the challenges of distancing (Nikolsky, 2011) and caution against their exoticization and methodological exceptionalism (Dezé, 2016). Additionally, the field is often difficult to access and lacks transparency. This scarcity of data compels researchers to rely on sources created for legitimization purposes (Collovald, 1988) or those that present polemical (media) or antagonistic (activists from opposing sides) viewpoints. Ultimately, when dealing with "dominant" mobilizations, researchers face risks that may lead to self-censorship and jeopardize the integrity of their investigations (Laurens & Neyrat, 2010; Aldrin *et al.*, 2022). This axis invites early career researchers to reflect on the constraints of the empiric work and the stratagems they adopt to circumvent them. How do they negotiate access to the field? What are the stakes involved in certain strategies (elliptical and partial presentation of the research object, "undercover" investigation, etc.)? What advantages and disadvantages result from their socio-demographic characteristics (gender, class, race, age, nationality...), their scientific affiliations (local *vs.* foreign, sociologist *vs.* political scientist...), or even their physical appearance (signs of religious affiliation, gendered self-presentation...)? What relationships of domination are at play between interviewers and respondents? How can we protect ourselves from the risks of investigating the dominant actors? How can we choose relevant sources and overcome the lack of transparency that characterizes conservative mobilizations? How can we avoid the media and partisan bias of secondary sources?

**Languages**: French, English.

**Calendar**

Proposals should be sent to Alihan MESTCI (alihan.mestci@ehess.fr), Natasza QUELVENNEC (natasza.quelvennec@cnrs.fr), Antonio SAUANDAJ (sauandajantonio@gmail.com) by **January 31, 2025**. Paper proposals, in French or English, should include the full name, status, institution and e-mail address of the communicant(s). They should include a title and an abstract (approx. 500 words,

excluding bibliography). A written version of the papers should be sent to the organizers by **Avril 27, 2025**. Funds are available to cover travel and accommodation costs: participants are invited to inform the organizers if they need them.

**Scientific Committee**

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