

# Call for Papers

for a *Special Issue* in the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* on

## **Confronting Challenges to Democracy: Civic Resistance and Institutional Resilience**

Guest Editors: *Marco Bitschnau* and *Sebastian Koos*

Liberal democracies are under evermore pressure these days. What they face across the globe is a multi-faceted threat to their institutional integrity, democratic values, and civic life. Populists and authoritarians on both the left and right attack the *status quo*, creating a climate of polarization and social discontent. Prominent examples can be found in the cases of Hungary, where the governing FIDESZ party has increasingly moved toward autocratization and state capture; France, where all kinds of populist forces have thrived in recent years; and the United States, where white supremacists are still making the headlines in a deeply divided society. Yet, these are just parts of a broader trend that has been subject to a comprehensive body of research (e.g., Berman 2021; Bieber 2018; Cole & Schofer 2017; Muis & Immerzeel 2017; Norris & Inglehart 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018).

What remains underexplored, however, are the strategies—beyond going to the polling booth—that societies have devised to meet this challenge: After all, neither established parties nor civil society actors are helpless in the face of this darkening of the democratic horizon, but may counteract it through a wide variety of measures. In some countries, such as Poland, Israel, or Hungary, mass protests have shaken up political certainties and created veritable pressure from the streets. In others, such as Germany or Greece, there have been discussions about banning parties regarded as extremist—discussions that are controversial, for they raise the question of the conditions under which the choice of the electorate must be limited to protect its liberal foundation. And finally, there is a range of civic initiatives and projects that engage in educational efforts, raise awareness, build networks, and thus move between these poles (popular pressure from below and institutional pressure from above).

These strategies, the tactics associated with them, discourses surrounding them, and actors driving them forward are at the core of the articles to be brought together in this special issue. Concretely, we seek to initiate a dialogue between different strands of literature on: (1) potentials and limitations of civic resistance and democratic resilience (e.g., Burnell & Calvert 1999; Merkel & Lührmann 2021; Volacu & Aligica 2023; Weyland 2024 ); (2) street protests, civil society action, and similar bottom-up interventions (e.g., Bertuzzi et al. 2022; Blackington 2024; Bolleyer 2021; Gerö et al. 2023; Sato & Arce 2022); (3) party bans, lawsuits, and similar top-down interventions (e.g., Bernatskyi 2024; Bourne & Casal Bértoa 2017; de Leeuw & Bourne 2020). Combining theoretical and empirical scholarship along these lines will allow for a better understanding of how societies around the world confront challenges to democracy—and what can be learnt from their examples.

We encourage the submission of (comparative) empirical analyses, case studies, and substantive theoretical contributions. Possible topics include (but are not limited to) the following:

- What countermeasures exist against challenges to democracy? How do they differ between countries and under what conditions do they succeed?
- Under which conditions are actors mobilized to defend democracy? To what extent is this shaped by the broader political context? What role do parties and civil society play?
- What are the promises and risks of acts of resistance? Is there a threat of backlash and how is it dealt with?
- Which tactics are deployed to follow which strategies? What rationales are they based on and what (internal or external) discourses accompany them?
- What specific goals are being pursued? Are there concrete policy demands or rather efforts to gain symbolic hegemony?
- What are possible long-term consequences—for those who challenge democracy, for those who oppose this challenge, and for society at large.

The selection of contributions for this special issue follows a two-step process: We first ask authors to submit an extended abstract (500 words) and a short biographical note (author name, affiliation, position) until **October 15, 2024** to [confrontingchallenges@gmail.com](mailto:confrontingchallenges@gmail.com). The abstract should give a clear and concise overview of the proposed article (question(s), theory, method, and results), and

how it relates to the overarching theme of the special issue. After an internal pre-selection (until end of October), we invite authors to submit a full article (by **late January 2025**), which will then go through the journal's peer review process.

The special issue is planned to be completed by **early 2026**, but individual articles can be published *online first* in advance. In case of questions, feel free to reach out to the guest editors directly:

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