

# CfP | movements 10(1) | The Border-Authoritarianism Nexus

Redaktion movements

## **The border-authoritarian nexus: Anti-migration policies and the transformation of liberal societies**

The political debate is increasingly polarized. From the European Parliament elections in spring 2024 to Trump's victory in the United States in fall 2024 and the recent political elections in Germany, we are witnessing an acceleration of the authoritarian transformation of liberal societies. Right-wing populist movements have entered parliaments and governments across Europe and America. This process is eroding the social fabric of society, undermining democracy and framing diversity and the pursuit (and maintenance) of equal rights as a threat to popular conceptions of nationhood. Liberal parties are openly adopting the rhetoric and policies of right-wing populists, highlighting the collapse of the so-called 'political center', which was once portrayed as a bulwark against all forms of extremism. Now, however, it seems to only oppose demands for social equality and justice, feminism, environmentalism and even basic human rights.

A common feature of current authoritarian, illiberal or right-wing ideological productions and governments are escalating attacks on post-migrant society, against immigration movements and policies of equality and the rights of migrants and refugees, as well as against achieved gender rights, democracy projects and civic education measures. The rhetorical staging of migration as a threat to national security has come to dominate debates, for example when people talk about the instrumentalization of migration or migration as a "hybrid weapon". The association of migration with terrorism has also experienced a renewed boost in recent months, which can build on established

Islamophobic discourse patterns. This is symbolized by gender-specific and racialized image regimes of the “European woman in need of protection” and migrant “toxic masculinity” as well as the now almost consensual labeling of refugee migration as “illegal migration”.

These rhetorical escalations have tangible consequences: they legitimize the withdrawal from human rights conventions and international law; they undermine asylum and mobility rights; they weaken fundamental rights such as the right to due process, freedom of the press and equality before the law; they lead to a policy of constant tightening and arming of migration control policies, glorify deportations and normalize racist and sexist violence at external and internal borders.

The result is an emerging interdependence between intensifying migration and border regimes and the transformation of liberal-democratic social orders into authoritarian states. Uncertainties about how to adequately deal with post-migrant realities, centrist attempts to present “solutions” for “migration”, which is increasingly framed as a problem, and right-wing populist narratives of threatened “identities” are mutually reinforcing - even without explicit cross-party cooperation. The decades-long portrayal of migration as a problem and threat to social cohesion - instead of addressing this as a consequence of the fundamental racist structure of nation states - now seems to be combined with right-wing populist promises of solutions to such an extent that migration has become a cipher and primer for nationalist, reactionary and anti-liberal political and social ideas.

With this issue of *movements*, we want to address this nexus, which we summarize as the “border-authoritarianism nexus”. We invite contributions that approach this nexus theoretically, conceptually and/or methodologically with a view to different (world) regions and subject areas, saturated with empirical evidence.

We want to deepen our understanding of local processes, practices and strategies of linkage and authoritarian transformation as well as broaden our view of the global entanglements of authoritarian projects and migration and border policies. We also invite proposals for contributions that address and shed light on the transitions and intersections of illiberal, authoritarian governance and democratic modes of governance in the field of migration and border politics. We explicitly invite researchers and activists active in anti-fascist and pro-migrant movements or border activism to examine the relationship between authoritarianism and repressive border formations. We particularly invite contributions on the following questions:

## **Authoritarian Transformations - Bound Societies**

- How can the relationship between authoritarian social change and anti-migrant and anti-gender narratives, ideologies and/or policies be conceptualized, theorized and empirically understood?
- How does authoritarian change shape societies and how does it redefine the concept and practice of democracy - how can these transformations be observed, described and interpreted?
- How do these changes alter, undermine or eliminate the legal and human rights framework?
- How can the reorientation of EU migration policy and the relationship between the EU and member states be classified and interpreted; what transformations can be observed here in the mode of Europeanization?

## **Border thinking, border policies and border activism**

- How can “border” be conceptualized in connection with authoritarian transformations? What kind of border thinking or border spectacle is mobilized to present migration as a “problem” that needs a quick and urgent “solution”? Which actors (and explicit or implicit alliances) are involved?
- To what extent do authoritarian transformations inspire and ‘require’ a reconceptualization of the border - how is thinking about borders changing in public discourse and what new analytical approaches are being developed for this transformation?
- How do authoritarian transformations affect body politics and body rights? How are affects mobilized and what are the effects on migration and gender?
- How are strategies of migration and in the field of activism changing?

## **Intellectual precursors and reservoirs**

- Which intellectual precursors and reservoirs (in literature, philosophy, the natural sciences - e.g. race theories or eugenics) are mobilized in the connection between border and authority?

- How do current authoritarian narratives and policies differ from long-standing paradigms of migration defense?
- In what ways are these predecessors being reworked, and why are they so popular today?

## Conceptual framework

- What conceptualizations and terminologies are appropriate to analytically label the phenomena we observe, what is the scope of such concepts as fascism, right-wing populism, authoritarianism, right-wing extremism, necropolitics?
- How should we understand the concept of transformation? Is there a break or continuity with earlier times, especially with (neo)liberal democracies?

## Disciplinary reflection on migration and border studies

- How can and should critical migration and border studies and activism respond to and position themselves in relation to these transformations?

We look forward to receiving abstracts of up to 500 words by **April 15, 2025**.

Texts will generally be published in the journal in three different formats. We welcome abstracts for each of the following formats:

1. **academic articles** (max. 50,000 characters, including spaces)
2. **research reports**, artistic and political **interventions** in narrative and non-narrative form, including essays, videos, maps, etc. (max. 30,000 characters, including spaces)
3. **interviews and book reviews** (max. 20,000 characters, including spaces)

When submitting an abstract, please indicate the format in which you would like your contribution to appear. All contributions will be reviewed by the editorial team. The **deadline for submission of full papers** (articles, interventions or reviews) is **September 1, 2025**. Academic articles will be peer-reviewed by at least two anonymous experts. The editorial team will maintain an open dialog with the authors and discuss feedback and suggestions in a transparent process. The final decision on the acceptance of contributions will be made by the *movements* editorial board. The issue will be published in winter 2025/26.

For abstract submissions and further questions, please contact Frank Wolff  
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More information about the journal and the review process: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/01.grenzregime/01.editorial/~en.html>.

Stylesheet and notes on text forms: <http://movements-journal.org/redaktion/stylessheet/~en.html>.