Shifting Constellations: Germany and Global (Dis)Order

Call for Papers: Project Workshop 1 – “Germany and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy”
25–26 June 2019, University of Birmingham

IGS Birmingham’s two-year research project – Shifting Constellations: Germany and Global (Dis)Order (January 2019–December 2020) – explores Germany’s roles and responses during a period of rapidly shifting constellations in global politics. The current world order is undergoing a process of disruption and redefinition, and crucial to our project is an investigation of how Germany is responding (and perceived to be responding) to these disruptions.

The first project workshop, to be held at the University of Birmingham on 25–26 June 2019 (dates tbc), will address the theme of Germany and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy.

We invite abstracts of 20-minute papers, in German or English, that address questions linked to this topic, in any of the four core research strands of the project described below. All papers at the workshop will be delivered as plenary papers in order to promote and maximise exchanges of ideas between the project strands.

Please send your abstract (max. 300 words) to Dr Nicholas Martin – n.c.martin@bham.ac.uk – by Friday 7th December 2018.

Strand 1: Institutions (Lead: Julian Pänke)
The Institutions strand of the first IGS project workshop explores German responses to shifting constellations in the institutional set-up of global and European politics. On a global level, traditional rule-providers of a political (United Nations) and economic (WTO, G7) order are losing their appeal and legitimacy. A new type of national leader (Trump, Putin, Duterte, Bolsonaro) prefers to think in zero-sum calculations, and the belief of these new leaders in great power politics appears to supersede the rules-based and values-based multilateral order of the post-Cold War period. On a European level, the Brexit process, the rise of Eurosceptic parties, and the erosion of European law and solidarity is undermining the very idea of European integration. Driven by mounting tensions between tribalism and globalism, this new global and European disorder indicates a crisis of liberal democracy. Germany in particular has benefited from a rules-based liberal order. Berlin’s political influence and economic prosperity depends on the existence of reliable, credible institutions. Thus, if we are witnessing an undermining of liberal democracy, how do these institutional disruptions affect Germany, its self-image, and its power? Are these disruptions only negative, or are opportunities appearing in these times of institutional change? How are different German domestic actors responding to these challenges –government, political parties, the media, business, and the public? What expectations do global and European agents have of German actors?
Strand 2: People and Migration (Co-leads Charlotte Galpin and Tara Windsor)

This workshop strand interrogates the relationship between the movement of people to and from Germany and various ‘crises’ in liberal democracy, at global, regional, national and local levels. In particular, it will explore tensions between Germany’s (perceived) role as a guardian of the liberal order and a guarantor of democratic freedom to people fleeing conflict and oppression, on the one hand, and the challenges that migration (apparently) poses to an open, pluralist society and the legitimacy of its democratic structures, on the other. To what extent has migration been the response to and/or trigger of political crisis? What forms have these crises taken, and by whom have they been managed? How are notions of ‘democracy’ understood and deployed by those who welcome migration to Germany and by those who resent or reject it? In what ways have responses to migration been seen to strengthen or undermine democratic processes? How is (German) democracy viewed by migrants themselves? The strand is particularly interested in understanding grassroots and civil societal discussions and initiatives in response to different types of migration, for example, the response of Willkommenskultur to refugee arrivals alongside increased support for far-right movements. We are also very keen to set these issues in a broader historical perspective.

Strand 3: Media (Lead: Charlotte Galpin)

This strand explores linkages between a crisis of liberal democracy and the media. Firstly, it will explore the ways in which the so-called crisis of liberal democracy are communicated in Germany through the media and how this serves to (re)construct notions of German and European identity. Internationally, news media are also a key vehicle for reproducing and transforming images of Germany and for constructing its role in defending the liberal democratic order. Secondly, the rise of social media seems to lie at the centre of current challenges to liberal democracy. Brexit, the 2016 US presidential election and, most recently, the presidential election in Brazil were profoundly shaped by the social media landscapes of Facebook and Twitter, raising questions about “fake news”, “bots”, and ways in which “big data” has been weaponised by campaigns. In Germany specifically, the far-right Alternative für Deutschland uses social media as its primary campaign tool. Social media is also a vehicle through which counter-movements (such as anti-racism groups) mobilise, organise events and challenge narratives. This strand will therefore explore the role of old and new media in Germany at a time of crisis for liberal democracy.

Strand 4: Ideas and Identities (Co-leads: Nicholas Martin and Maren Rohe)

This strand of the first IGS project workshop seeks to explore the extent to which, and how, the contemporary cultural landscape in Germany is being shaped by rapidly shifting developments in global politics. It will focus on aspects of these developments that are significant for contemporary German culture, ideas, identity, memory, and language. The strand also examines cultural responses in other countries to Germany’s shifting position and identity. It seeks to address questions related to ideas and identities, including but not limited to: how is Germany’s role in the ‘crisis of liberal democracy’ culturally constructed inside and outside the country?; is Germany seen by artists and intellectuals as a haven of liberal values or as a hegemon suppressing legitimate, democratic demands in other countries?; how and by whom are such images of Germany constructed and contested?; how is cultural production dealing with Germany’s newly assumed – or ascribed – political roles and identities?; how are new cultural products and projections of Germany received in other countries?; to what extent are shifting cultural and intellectual representations of Germany, inside and outside the country, helping to enact or contest imagined communities of the German nation?; how are global political crises reflected, or resisted, in German art, literature and film?; how has resurgent nationalism represented by, for example, PEGIDA and/or the AfD influenced the work of artists in Germany and abroad, especially the younger generation of artists?; what part does the German cultural and intellectual scene – including cultural mediators such as the DAAD and the Goethe-Institut – play in projecting Germany’s (new) identities domestically and abroad?