

Call for Papers

Who rules over migrants? Autocratic elements in migration policies

University of Leiden, The Netherlands

14-15 November 2024

We are pleased to invite paper proposals for the 1.5-day interdisciplinary workshop: “Who rules over migrants? Autocratic elements in migration policies”, that will take place at the University of Leiden on 14 and 15 November 2024.

Across the world, governments and political leaders – both democratic and autocratic –, are becoming more and more creative in mobilizing policy tools that circumvent judicial or democratic scrutiny in order to enact migration policies in line with their economic, geopolitical or ideological goals. In this context, we have noted the use of what we call *autocratic policy tools* – a tendency towards a concentration of the power to make laws and rules in one hand, the hand that also executes the law. This is exemplified by straightforward ‘rule by decree’ situations, but also by very broad delegations of lawmaking power to the executive, without any meaningful constraints, or by executive policies that entirely lack a legal basis or judicial oversight.

Examples of such autocratic policy tools that avoid legal safeguards and/or parliamentary law-making can be found across the world: For instance, in the United States, executive action has been a tool for Presidents to enact both liberalizing and restrictive migration reforms; Obama’s decision to grant temporary stay and work rights to certain undocumented immigrant children through the 2012 DACA Act or Trump’s 2017 travel ban for people from seven majority-Muslim countries are two prime examples. In Morocco, a 2013 royal decree by King Mohamed VI launched the country’s first-ever regularization of irregular migrants despite lacking legal grounds for such a procedure. In the Netherlands, the government introduced a 6-months waiting period for family members who were entitled to family reunification with recognized refugees in 2022, without any legal basis. And in 2023, the leaders of the military junta in Niger issued a decree that decriminalized irregular migration and retracted the controversial 2015 anti-smuggling law, a move that was welcomed by local civil society actors but criticized by European governments.

This workshop aims to bridge insights from Law and Political Science to explore the variegated uses and the scope of such autocratic policy tools in migration policy across the Global North and South, as well as how these uses relate to political regime contexts (democracy/autocracy) and to policy outcomes (restrictive/liberal).

In particular, we invite abstracts that make an original empirical and/or theoretical contribution to one or more of the following questions:

- How can we conceptualize autocratic policy tools in migration policymaking? What are the main defining features and effects of autocratic policy tools?
- Can we identify a tendency towards an increasing use of autocratic policy tools on migration? Is that a worldwide trend?
- Are autocratic policy tools a prerogative of governments classified as autocratic or autocratizing; or do democracies also mobilize autocratic policy tools? If so, do democratic governments use autocratic policy tools for different aims than autocratic governments?
- How is the use of autocratic policy tools related to the substantive outcomes of policy reforms? In other words: Are autocratic policy tools mainly used to enact restrictive policy changes; or can they also be a vehicle for liberal reform?
- What kind of formal, procedural or institutional constraints are necessary to prevent or reduce autocratic elements in migration policymaking? Does migration policy suffer from exceptionalism in this regard? In other words: do regular constraints not apply in the context of migration policies?

We welcome researchers at all career stages - from doctoral researchers to senior academics – to examine these questions with us and advance our understanding of autocratic elements in migration policy from the perspectives of political science and law.

If you are interested in participating in the workshop, please send us your abstract by the **15th of June 2024** through submitting [this online form](#). Abstracts should be no longer than 400 words and set out the topic, main argument and methodology of the paper.

Applicants will be notified by the **end of June 2024** of the outcome of their submission. Ahead of the workshop, by **November 1st at the latest**, participants will be asked to circulate their full draft papers. Publication plans will be discussed at the workshop, but we intend to publish revised versions of selected papers in a special issue of a leading journal.

We strongly encourage in-person attendance at the workshop; however, online participation will be possible should this be necessary for professional or sustainability-driven reasons.

Two nights' accommodation (Wednesday and Thursday) and costs for lunches and the workshop dinner on Thursday night will be covered for all participants. Funding is also available to contribute towards presenters' travel expenses and will be allocated according to needs and climate considerations (e.g. journeys within eight hours should be made by train or alternative modes of transport, not by plane; and there is no full coverage of intercontinental flights in line with Dutch universities' travel policy).

We look forward to your submissions. For queries, please email us!

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