

LOCATION

Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung
Pariser Str. 1, Ilse-Zimmermann-Saal,
Meierottostr. 8, Eberhard-Lämmert-Saal
10719 Berlin-Wilmersdorf

CONCEPT AND ORGANISATION

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CONTACT

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WORKSHOP

THE RETURN OF OLIGARCHY

CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL
DIMENSIONS OF A POWERFUL
PHENOMENON

10-11 SEPT. 2026



Bundeszentrale für
politische Bildung

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LEIBNIZ-ZENTRUM
FÜR LITERATUR- UND
KULTURFORSCHUNG

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THE RETURN OF OLIGARCHY

The oligarchs are back. Following the most recent U.S. election and the growing political involvement of tech entrepreneurs, the concept of oligarchy has once again become a topic of public debate. For a long time, the term was primarily associated with the post-socialist transformations of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Today, however, oligarchic power increasingly appears as a distinctly Western, technology-driven phenomenon operating at the centre of political and economic life, not merely behind the scenes.

Despite the term’s renewed prominence, the conceptual and historical dimensions of oligarchy remain surprisingly underexplored. As the first event in a series dedicated to this subject, our workshop will adopt an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to examine the historical trajectories and conceptual foundations of oligarchic rule and power. How does oligarchy relate to democracy and state-building, imperialism and decolonisation, late capitalism, accelerationism or extractivism? What kinds of social structures and institutions are produced by oligarchic forms of power? Can societies or social norms themselves be described as oligarchic?

The workshop will be accompanied by a public evening event. Andreas Kalyvas from the New School for Social Research in New York will be in conversation with Andrea Binder about how the “oligarchic imaginary” is shaped by liberal market logics.

The workshop forms the basis for further programs of political education.

FURTHER EVENTS

3 Feb 2027, HAU Hebbel am Ufer
Panel Discussion “The Oligarchy of the Future”

11-12 March 2027, ZfL
Workshop “The Return of Oligarchy: How Technical Revolutions and Financial Patronage Affect Arts and Culture”

THURSDAY, SEPT 10, 2026

14.00 (Ilse-Zimmerman-Saal)

OPENING

14.30

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF OLIGARCHY

EMILY KATZENSTEIN *TU Munich*
The Rule of the Rich? Theorizing Oligarchic Power

FLORIN-RĂZVAN MIHAI *NIST Bucharest*
The Many Lives of Oligarchy:
A Conceptual History of “Oligarchy” in Romanian
Political Culture from the Mid-Nineteenth Century
to the Present Day

16.00 *Break*

16.30

THE POSTSOCIALIST PHENOMENON OF OLIGARCHY

FLORIAN PETERS *FSU Jena*
Children of Liberal Populism?
Reconsidering the Rise of Postsocialist Oligarchy

INNA MELNYKOVSKA *Copenhagen Business School*
Ukrainian and Russian Oligarchs during the War

18.00 *Break*

Evening event

18.30 (Eberhard-Lämmert-Saal)

THE OLIGARCHIC IMAGINARY AND ITS LOGIC

ANDREAS KALYVAS *New School for Social Research, New York*
in conversation with **ANDREA BINDER** *FU Berlin*

FRIDAY, SEPT 11, 2026

10.00 (Ilse-Zimmerman-Saal)

THEORETICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

OLUWAFUNMINIYI WASIU RAHEEM *Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife*
The Nigerian Oligarchic Elite:
Power in a Postcolonial African State

ANDREA BINDER *FU Berlin*
Powering Wealth. How Entrepreneurial Families
Shape the Energy Transition

11.30 *Break*

12.00

POSTCOLONIAL AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

HUGO DROCHON *University of Nottingham*
The Return of Oligarchy or Its Permanence?
Michels, Pareto and the Elite Theorists

XIAOFEI TU *Appalachian State University, Boone*
The Return of the Oligarchy: An Asian Perspective

13.30 *Lunch*

14.30

HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF OLIGARCHIC POWER

MATTHEW HAJI-MICHAEL *CEU Vienna*
Towards an Archeology of the Plebeian Alternative

SHALIN JAIN *University of Delhi*
Courtly Mutualism Before Modernity:
Jain Merchant Oligarchies and the Politics of Wealth
in Early Modern South Asia

16.00

CLOSING REMARKS