

Anger, Rage, Resentment as Drivers of Political Identity

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Universität Passau (Germany)

Call for Papers

The shift towards the affective dimensions of democratic crises fundamentally challenges the model of Western-type liberal democracy, which has long prided itself on technocratic governance and rational negotiation. The rise of populist fervour across the continent exposes the limits of this *clinical* politics. If identity is rooted in affect – as contemporary neuroscience suggests (Solms 2021; Feldman Barrett 2017) –, and if emotions can be both political and politicised (Pelluchon 2025, 2020; Fleury 2020; Nussbaum 2013) – then a democracy that ignores emotion becomes fragile rather than stable (Christoph 2025).

In the context of democratic resilience – which can be defined as the ability of democracy to withstand high levels of intensity without fracturing the rule of law (Merkel 2023), but also as a balance of robustness and adaptability (Hidalgo & Christoph *forthcoming*) – anger often functions as a moral compass or a protective defence mechanism. For many across Europe and the West, this emotion is not a blind outburst but a reasoned reaction to perceived misrecognition or contempt (Liu 2021). In this light, anger could be “a necessary response to immoral political discourse” (Diehl 2012). When citizens feel that their agency and their cultural or economic contributions are being erased by globalisation or shifting social norms, anger targeted at the *Other* – namely resentment (Fleury 2020) – acts as the element binding the individual to a defensive group identity. Within this framework, policy disagreements are reframed as existential threats, and opponents are recast as enemies. Anger can thus become the foundation for vengeance and retribution, thereby acting as what Martha Nussbaum described as a “poison to democratic politics” (2018).

In contrast, anger can manifest in constructive forms, evolving into a “rage for justice” (Jacobs 1996) or becoming a creative catalyst for social transformation (Mistreanu 2025). Thus, exploring anger in light of the *affective turn* – and recognising the role of emotion in reasoning and public life – allows researchers to distinguish between destructive resentment, corrective indignation and affective justice. Investigating anger from this perspective helps to identify the tipping points where healthy democratic friction turns into systemic collapse.

Particularly relevant to the crises we are facing, contemporary expressions of anger, rage, and resentment must be understood in relation to our shifting political, social, economic, and technological environments. Mapping this matrix requires paying attention to the reshaping of power relations that insulate the free market (Slobodian 2025), the intimate entanglement of capitalism and emotion (Illouz 2006), the emerging nexus between artificial intelligence and affectivity (Illouz 2026), and the instrumentalisation of fear in strategic political narratives (Madisson & Ventsel 2021). When paired with the role of humiliation in contemporary politics – understood as the “imposition of impotence by those with undeserved power, and the way it converts relations of power into crises of virility” (Euben 2025) –, these dynamics reveal that today’s affective crises are not mere psychological anomalies, but the psychological outputs of systemic structural violence and inequality. Ultimately, the current epistemic crisis is also an affective one (Ventsel & Selg 2025), and we believe that understanding anger provides a necessary window into the vulnerabilities and mobilisation patterns of a public in transition.

To this end, this interdisciplinary workshop invites researchers from any field with an interest in political emotions to present and discuss their work. Contributions are expected to focus on democratic societies or systems worldwide. Early-career scholars are particularly encouraged to contribute.

Research questions include, but are not limited to:

- Through which mechanisms do emotions and affects such as anger, rage, and resentment influence the formation of political identities?
- To what extent can anger, rage, and resentment act as drivers of, or obstacles to, democratic identities and practices?
- How can democracies cultivate resilience either through or against disruptive emotions?
- To what extent does the expression of anger constitute a claim for recognition, and how does this affect the political agency of marginalised or disillusioned groups within a democratic framework?

Please send your abstracts (max. 300-400 words) and a brief biographical note (max. 150 words) by 4 October 2026 to the organisers Dr Diana Mistreanu and Dr Stefan Christoph: angerconference@uni-passau.de

Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 18 October 2026.

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