

CEE Doctoral Days 2026:

Connecting Citizens and Politics: Mediation and Political Representation in Contemporary Democracies

The current moment is often described as a 'crisis of representation,' as established forms of political intermediation are being challenged and new ones are emerging. In this context, parties and non-party actors alike race to interpret popular demands and claim themselves as their true representatives. The CEE Doctoral Days will explore this process of reconfiguration, asking who mediates between citizens and politics, how representative claims are constructed and received, what changing forms of mediation mean for democratic participation and political representation, and how these dynamics shape major collective challenges such as climate change, where conflicts over whose interests are represented and how competing demands are mediated are especially acute.

We invite doctoral researchers to engage with these questions through **four themes** that span diverse fields and that we seek to bring into dialogue. We therefore welcome work approaching these questions from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, as well as work that cuts across the four themes or addresses political mediation and representation in other empirical contexts. The purpose is precisely to explore these shared questions of mediation and representation from different perspectives and across different areas of political life.

1. Party-based linkage amid political disintermediation

Representation does not simply transmit existing interests. It also shapes how demands are expressed and political constituencies defined (Disch 2015; Saward 2006). Political parties have long played a central role in this process, connecting citizens and social groups to political institutions. This theme examines how parties create and sustain these connections at a time when established forms of political intermediation are weakening and engagement is becoming more fragmented and personalised (Jäger 2026; Mair 2013). How do parties construct and mobilise the constituencies they claim to represent, and how do organisational structures shape this process? How do changes in party organisation (including centralisation, professionalisation, and the growing prominence of individual leaders) reshape how parties mediate between citizens and politics? Contributions may examine party membership and activism, local organisation, internal democracy, representative claims, or citizens' experiences and perceptions of party mediation.

2. Democratic innovations and the reimagining of mediation

Democratic innovations (e-referenda; participatory budgeting; deliberative civic platforms) have long been touted as having the potential to transform how citizens engage with politics (see for example Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014, or Dryzek 2002 for a more general discussion of participatory politics and its potentials), reconfiguring it in a direct, unmediated and therefore automatically representative fashion. This theme seeks to examine if and how these innovations

really reshape political mediation, focusing on who can access them, whose voices become legible, and through what mechanisms legitimacy is constructed. Rather than treating participatory tools as neutral extensions of democratic practice, contributions may explore how institutional and, increasingly, technological design mediates, amplifies, or distorts representative claims and embeds particular assumptions about citizenship and inclusion. Topics may include, but are not limited to, access and inequalities, algorithmic mediation, scalability, institutional design, or the conceptualisation of representation in participatory and digital arenas.

3. Mediating the green transition

While the importance of the distributive effects of climate policies on their public acceptance are well documented (e.g. Aklin and Mildemberger, 2020; Colantone et al., 2024), the role of representation and mediation in shaping the political viability of the green transition has received less scholarly attention. Yet the transition is not only a matter of how costs and benefits are distributed, but also of how people, interests, and ways of life are represented and mediated along the redistributive process. This theme examines how the (mis)representation may sustain or hinder the green transition, and how relations between citizens, experts, and policymakers are mediated through the distributive, institutional, and epistemic conflicts arising from it. Contributions may explore these questions in the context of public policy, changing social norms, social movements, changing supply-side dynamics, policy rollbacks, electoral reactions, or other forms of mobilisation surrounding the transition.

4. Credibility in representation: experience, expertise, and trust

In Peter Hall's seminal paper on policy change, he argues that in times of crisis and uncertainty, questions of authority become crucial in determining who gets to speak credibly and define policy issues. Facing a raft of overlapping crises amidst falling political trust, rival parties, interest groups, and epistemic communities increasingly compete to assert both the credibility and popularity of their ideas. These struggles are also struggles over representation: in asserting their authority in order to influence policy, actors may explicitly state - or strategically obscure - whose interests, identities, or knowledge they claim to represent. This theme aims to examine why some representative claims are perceived as more legitimate than others, and how concerns regarding popularity and representativeness transform competition over credibility between policy actors. They may also study how new paradigms have emerged within polarized policy areas like climate change, defense, and immigration.

Across these themes, we welcome contributions from doctoral researchers in political science, political sociology, public policy, and related fields whose work engages directly with questions of political representation and mediation. We particularly encourage methodological innovation in the study of mediation and representation, including experimental and computational social science approaches, alongside qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research. The call is open to researchers at different stages of their doctoral studies, including work in progress, provided that the proposal presents a clearly defined research question and analytical approach.

We invite interested doctoral researchers to submit an abstract of approximately 300–500 words and a short CV by 9 October 2026 through [this form](#). Selected participants will be invited to give a 15-minute presentation and will be asked to circulate a draft paper in advance.

Participants from outside Paris are welcome to apply. We expect to be able to contribute towards travel and/or accommodation costs for selected participants. Further information on financial support will be provided upon acceptance.