#asen2026

Nationalism Democracy & Freedom

21-23 April, Edinburgh

Call For Papers

Welcome

We return to Edinburgh in 2026 for our thirty-fifth annual conference – our jade anniversary!

The theme for the conference is nationalism, democracy, and freedom. We hope that this theme will be both interesting and productive; we have endeavoured to make it sufficiently focussed for our conference to be coherent but broad enough for everyone studying nationalism and ethnicity to be able to attend, contribute, and learn.

2026 also marks the tenth anniversary of the passing of ASEN's founder, Anthony D. Smith. We are proud to be holding the biennial Anthony D. Smith Lecture alongside our conference.

At the time of writing, we are still confirming prices but we expect a conference pass to be around £100. We will have a limited number of fee waivers available; more information is on our website.

Submissions

Abstracts of up to 250 words for individual papers should be submitted at asen.ac.uk/conference/submit by 2359UTC on 5th December.

Proposals for themed panels of three papers, should also be submitted by 2359UTC on 5th December using the dedicated form on our website. There is also a form for book panel proposals.

If you have any other proposals you think would work for the conference – we had a very successful short film showing last year, and are very much open to new ideas, please email us at conference@asen.ac.uk.

Timeline

The timeline for the lead-up to the conference and the conference itself follows below. While we very much intend to keep to these timescales, they are not absolutely fixed but we will publicise any changes.

13th October – call for papers opens

5th December – call for papers closes

5th January – results communicated

5th January – registration opens

6th March – registration closes

13th March – final programme published

20th April – informal get-together in Edinburgh

21st April – conference day one and Smith Lecture

22nd April – conference day two and conference dinner

23rd April – conference day three and announcement of ASEN27

Keep In Touch

If you have any queries, please email conference@asen.ac.uk or telephone/WhatsApp +44 (0) 7885 991 633.

We will post any updates to our social media at facebook.com/asenevents, asenevents.bsky.social, and linkedin.com/company/asenevents, as well as on the conference updates page at asen.ac.uk/conference/updates.

The hashtag for the conference is #asen2026.

Call For Papers

Three rallying calls have shaped much of the world we inhabit – the calls of freedom, of democracy, and of the nation. The questions of who makes up the demos, what are the rights and obligations of the demos, and, more generally, how the 'nation' should be governed, are always salient but the present polycrisis has brought them and the tensions and contradictions between them to the fore.

Nationalism often presents itself as the vehicle for collective self-determination and popular sovereignty and as an enabler of democracy and freedom, while it has also been invoked to restrict rights, exclude minorities, and justify authoritarian rule.

Democracy is claimed as an ideal without agreement on what it entails and the long-standing assumption of a connection between the liberal and the democratic is challenged from India to Hungary to the United States. Growing up alongside but in tension with nationalism, the relationship between the two is increasingly strained in an era of economic privation and growing populism.

Freedom remains a uniquely powerful word, claimed by nationalist and anti-nationalist, liberal and illiberal, democrat and authoritarian alike, but used to advance different ideas of how the state and the people should relate to one another.

Drawing on both contemporary developments and long-standing theoretical debates, we invite contributions that interrogate how these concepts support, challenge, and transform one another.

The conference welcomes work grounded in a variety of political, cultural, and historical

contexts, from antiquity to the present day. Papers may address all forms of national resistance to alien or authoritarian rule, national revolutions for democracy, or against empire, anti-colonial struggles for self-rule, post-colonial political institutions, and current debates over populism, national sovereignty, minority rights, and liberal constitutionalism. We are interested in both normative and empirical accounts: critiques of exclusionary nationalisms, defences of democratic nationalism, and analyses of how different visions of freedom are mobilised in national projects across time and space.

In addition to questions that examine the philosophical and historical underpinnings of these phenomena, we are also keen to explore their practical implications in everyday life and institutions. What forms of nationalism sustain or threaten democratic freedoms? When does national self-determination empower, and when does it constrain? How are ideas of freedom and national identity mediated through law, education, media, memory, and protest?

We welcome papers from across disciplines and theoretical perspectives, including (but not limited to) political science, political theory, sociology, history, anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, law, education, international relations, critical race studies, and media and communication studies.

Possible themes follow on the next page.

Themes

Themes may include, but are not limited to:

- Theorising the nation as a site of freedom or unfreedom
- The nation-state and democracy
- Democratic nationalism and its discontents
- Nationalism, populism, and illiberal democracy
- Nationalism and liberal constitutionalism
- Liberal nationalism
- Nationalism and the politics of rights
- Nationalism against empire
- Conceptions of freedom in narratives of national self-determination
- War and national freedom
- The struggle for ‘freedom’ in postcolonial nationalisms
- Authoritarian nationalism and democratic erosion
- Nationalism, citizenship, and political participation
- Minority rights, recognition, and democratic inclusion
- Protest, resistance, and the nation
- Educational institutions and national-democratic values
- Media imaginaries of national and democratic freedom
- Gendered, racialised, and classed dimensions of national freedom
- Diaspora, transnationalism, and the reimagining of national belonging
- Nationalism and democracy in historical revolutions
- Nationalism and international law
- Democracy and identity in national constitutions