

12. Populism, Illiberalism and Democracy

Section Chair: András Bozóki
(CEU Department of Political Science)
bozokia@ceu.edu

12.1. Panel

[Fri 11:30-13:00, Lecture Room I]

1. Zoltán Ádám (Corvinus University of Budapest, zoltan.adam@uni-corvinus.hu):
Democratic regression and economic growth: Can it work? The Hungarian case in comparative perspective

A vast literature both in economics and political science has been concerned with the relationship of democratic institutions and economic growth. The traditional view, presented by Seymour Martin Lipset in the 1950s, conceptualized liberal democracy as a luxury good of the rich: a political system likely to sustain in socially, economically and culturally rich societies. Classics in the economics literature, first of all Robert Barro in the 1990s, followed suit. The majority view in the more recent literature in both economics and political science, however, presents evidence for the beneficial economic consequences of democratization regardless of level of social and economic development. The works of Daron Acemoglu and his various co-authors are cases in point. Against this debate, it is interesting to evaluate the Hungarian experience of the 2010s, when a comparatively strong economic performance has been associated with deteriorating liberal democratic political standards. (Evidence for this is numerous, here I just refer to the fact that Hungary is currently the only EU member state with a partially free status by Freedom House.) The paper raises conceptual questions about this phenomenon, and seeks to provide empirically sound strategies for formulating potential answers.

2. Zsolt Enyedi – Stephen Whitefield (CEU Department of Political Science, enyedizs@ceu.edu): Populists in Power: Populism and Representation in Illiberal Democracies

Studies of contemporary populism have mainly focussed on their disruptive features. In this chapter, we consider populists who have held power in two post-Communist states, Hungary and Poland. While these governments share many of the characteristics of populists elsewhere, they have also significantly reshaped institutions and have developed distinctive modes of political representation. The chapter questions, however, the extent to which post-Communist populism can be replicated by similar parties in consolidated democracies.

3. Dániel Kovarek (CEU Department of Political Science, kovarek_daniel@phd.ceu.edu):
Bavarian Betrayal: Revival of the Western betrayal discourse in relation to Germany's role in enabling democratic backsliding in Hungary

Much ink has been spilled to scrutinize how democratic backsliding in European Union member states has undermined the rule of law, judicial or academic freedom, but little attention has been paid to how EU's response to illiberal policies (or lack thereof) has transformed citizens' perceptions about European-level political actors. The article explores a contemporary political discourse on how the European Union, and more specifically, German political actors enable de-democratization in Hungary by refraining from formal and informal sanctions against the increasingly authoritarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party. The study conducts a qualitative text analysis of Hungarian media and identifies the emerging discourse as 'Bavarian betrayal', as a reference to the close ties between Fidesz and CSU, EPP's Manfred Weber, as well as the overwhelming influence of Southern German, mainly Bavarian, industry on Hungarian policy-making and legislation. The article also underlines the striking parallel to historic variants of the 'Western betrayal' discourse, a common theme in many Central-Eastern European countries' collective memory, arguing that at some point of their past – mostly shortly before or after WWII – Western powers sacrificed their sovereignty or democratic institutional arrangement for the sake of their own benefits. It does so by scrutinizing three case studies: about the role of German automobile manufacturers in countenancing de-democratization; about Deutsche Telekom's role in tearing down press

freedom; and lastly, on EPP's inactivity in the context of CEU's expulsion from Hungary. The study reveals how the Bavarian betrayal prevails in discourses embraced by various political actors, having created an unprecedented consensus within the fragmented and ideologically divided opposition. Analysis of newspaper articles, MP/MEP statements and political speeches is accompanied by scrutiny of Eurobarometer survey data, assessing the quantifiable effect of the perceived betrayal on the European Parliament's and Germany's image among respondents opposing the government. Findings forewarn the EU of losing even its most ardent supporters, if Fidesz's authoritarian measures are left without response from EPP's and Germany's side.

4. Levente Littvay – Bruno Castanho Silva – Guillem Rico Camps (CEU Department of Political Science, littvayl@ceu.edu): The Thermostatic Model of Populist Attitudes

Populism was originally studied as an elite level phenomenon. But the ideational definition allowed researchers to move populism to the level of public opinion research. Comparative surveys are starting to implement attitude measures of populism. A consistent finding from these studies is that there is little to no relationship between the mass and elite level of populism in a country, if anything the relationship is negative. If, indeed, this is the case, it is possible that populist attitudes are, in fact, damped by the presence of populist parties in the party system. If people feel that their concerns are represented among the political elites of a country, they will be less inclined to harbor populist sentiments. In short, when the temperature of elite level populism turns up, the thermostat will cool populist attitudes among the people. We explore the presence of this phenomenon both with country level case studies using a comparative cross-sectional survey and elite speech coding for populist rhetoric, and within select countries using panel data. For Spain, results suggest that populist attitudes are, in fact, diminished with the rise of Podemos. We further explore the mechanism of this to see if the diminished support comes from the people who like or who dislike the newly risen populist party. We hope to cross-check our results with panel data from before and after the rise of AfD in Germany.