P03 / Explaining Democratic Backsliding: How Policy Dynamics Structure Politics in Hidden Ways

Topic : POLICY, POLITICS AND POLITICAL REGIME

Chair : Ebru Ertugal (Ozyegin University)

Second Chair : H. Tolga Bolukbasi (Bilkent University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel seeks to explore how dynamics at the policy level structure politics in backsliding democracies. There are many ways of building competitive authoritarian regimes. Based on the recent vibrant literature, we learn that democracies die increasingly through democratically elected leaders gradually subverting democratic processes themselves. These accounts show us that mechanisms like populism, 'executive aggrandizement', media control, court packing, harassment of and/or prosecuting opposition, strategic manipulation of election rules all effectively lead to democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Levitsky and Zibblatt, 2018). All of these mechanisms surface at the level of politics, and accordingly, the literature has overwhelmingly focused on the nature and dynamics of politics (and polity). Alongside all these mechanisms at the politics and polity levels, elected leaders engage in radical policy reforms to fulfill electoral populist pledges in certain policy sectors while at the same time gradually alter policies in other sectors to their own advantage beneath the veneer of policy continuity. We know, however, very little about the latter, in particular how incremental under-the-radar policy changes contribute to the politics of backsliding.

We draw on two bodies of literature. First, the comparative public policy literature has been booming, producing a great deal of knowledge on the dynamics of the policy process, policy styles and processes of policy change. We know a lot more about policy dynamics through using conceptual tools such as policy capacity, policy density or policy intensity capturing changing dimensions and characteristics of public policies. Yet, how these policy processes (ordinarily seen as 'effect') structure politics remains under-researched even though earlier scholars such as E.E. Schattschneider, and more recently leading comparativists Peter Hall and Paul Pierson had convincingly showed how 'effect becomes cause'. Dynamics involved in policy feedback, policy transfer and policy learning in comparative public policy have enormous potential in revealing the expanded opportunities offered by variegated policy instruments for various mechanisms of democratic backsliding. In this way, the comparative public policy literature promises much in revealing the structuring effects of policies, themselves (re)interpreted, and abused by political leaders.

Second, the comparative politics literature has increasingly been focusing on the dynamics of policy and institutional change. In particular, historical institutionalists have been taking seriously the gradual, incremental and easily overlooked changes in the nature of policies and institutions. In doing so, scholars have been identifying not only explicit but also 'hidden faces' of change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Processes culminating in democratic backsliding do not always take place out in the open. There are massive hidden changes beneath the façade of ordinary, casual continuity. The literature on comparative politics promises to capture these hidden incremental changes and help us illuminate the politics of who gets what, when and how as policies change, especially in weakly institutionalized environments.

This panel aims to develop synergies between the literatures on comparative public policy and comparative politics in order to explore those policy instruments, mechanisms and strategies incumbents use for backsliding that remain under our radars in our own disciplinary silos.

CALL FOR PAPERS

In this panel, we wish to explore the implications of policy dynamics for democratic backsliding in weakly institutionalized settings. While most of the scholarship investigates causes of such momentous political shifts in the politics and polity domains, this panel aims to show how, in everyday policy processes, policies are altered in under-the-radar ways to favor incumbents, who, in turn, bricolage retrogression from democracy. We aim to explore how leaders, in various stages of the policy cycle (in sectoral/national policymaking and implementation processes), pave not-so-easily-visible pathways for democratic backsliding. Our purpose is not to offer an alternative theory of de-democratization, but to complement existing explanations by showing how policy-focused analysis reveals often-inconspicuous ways in which

actors subvert procedures and rules in policy processes resulting in de-consolidation and erosion of democracy. In addition to contributing to comparative public policy, we also aim to contribute to the emerging ‘policy-focused political science’ (Hacker and Pierson, 2014) by investigating the ways in which policy processes, including through national or sectoral policy styles, structure politics in processes of de-democratization.

We invite theoretically informed and empirically grounded papers, which are explicitly (through comparative case studies) or implicitly comparative (through single-case studies). Empirical cases of de-Europeanization (for example in pre-accession countries in the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe as well as ‘new’ member states in Central and Eastern Europe) and Latin America are particularly welcome.

Papers could – but need not – address some of the following questions: Following up on Schattschneider’s work, in what ways incumbents' altering policies create favorable politics for their 'aggrandizement'? Under what conditions do leaders resort to policy change as a strategy for democratic backsliding? At which stages of the policy process are interventions more consequential for such desired political outcomes? Are interventions at the policy formulation stage more consequential than policy implementation, or vice versa? In what ways and which type of policy instruments are amenable to politicization and to what extent are they actually politicized in subverting democracy? Are there any specific policy styles which are particularly suitable for processes of bricolage for de-democratization? What are the mechanisms in which leaders can effectively engage in under-the-radar policy changes favoring their hold onto power? Which institutional environments are likely to endow leaders with resources in their efforts at policy change for backsliding?

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Session 1

Wednesday, June 26th 16:30 to 18:30 (MB 2.255)

Role of Public Policy in the Concentration of Economic Power in Democracies: The Case of Special Economic Zones in India

Kartik Misra (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

The process of economic development is historically characterized by the transferring of the factors of production like land and labour away from traditional agriculture to industry. India's Special Economic Zones (SEZs) which allow private companies to acquire rural land for setting-up of industrial complexes is one such policy. This process involves involuntary land acquisition using extra-economic methods ranging from coercion by powerful groups to the use of public policy. However, electoral democracies with universal suffrage should limit the ability of elected representatives to pursue these policy choices.

Forceful land acquisition under policies like SEZs may be resisted by agrarian groups and their resistance may be consequential in democratic countries like India. Movements opposing land acquisition in India have been widespread and, in several incidents, successful in stymieing the progress of SEZs across the country. The success of these land acquisition efforts is determined by the political conflict between the elite and the state on the one hand, and dispossessed farmers on the other. The outcome of this conflict is determined by the distribution of power in society and the success of different groups in mobilizing and enforcing their class interests. If political participation could ensure egalitarian economic policies, then we should expect non-democracies to favour polices like SEZs. On the other hand, democracies lead to policies benefiting the poor by increasing redistribution and reducing inequality by including the poor in the electoral process.

Using archival research based on newspaper reports, government reports and written replies to questions in the Parliament, this paper creates a new dataset with information on the size, date of formal approval and operation etc. for over 300 SEZs in India. This dataset covers a period between 2005 to 2015. I augment this dataset with information from the Night-Time lights data collected at the village level to ascertain the date when a proposed SEZ became operational.

Combining this data on SEZs with the Census of India, Agricultural Census, the National Sample Surveys and Land Use data, I find that factors like inequality in land ownership (class) and hierarchies of caste and gender hinder the ability of small and marginal farmers from protecting their class interests even though they have de jure political rights and majority in the voting process. Second, I exploit the regional and temporal variation between those SEZs which were approved by the government and those that got operational in an events-time framework. I find that SEZs result in a lowering of agricultural wages and employment. Moreover, the promise of employment generation for the local population remains unfulfilled as private employment and wages have negligible impact even after SEZs become functional. Finally, the indirect effect of involuntary land transfer from agriculture to manufacturing creates uncertainty associated with agricultural production and the proportion of rural land left fallow increases significantly. Once land grabs are legitimized by the state, small and marginal farmers, become vulnerable to further land grabs by local elite. This discourages private investment and reduces land under cultivation.

How Europeanization Breeds De-Europeanization: Conversion and Drift in EU Pre-Accession and Beyond

H. Tolga Bolukbasi (Bilkent University)

Ebru Ertugal (Ozyegin University)

This paper shows how Europeanization in public policies may also pave the way for de-Europeanization.

We argue that in the course of Europeanization of pre-accession countries, through essentially a process of policy transfer, the most important effect of the EU is to boost domestic ‘policy capacity’ and expand ‘policy density’ and ‘policy intensity’. Such policy expansion, in turn, creates opportunities for what historical institutionalists identify as ‘conversion’ and ‘drift’ in countries which otherwise suffer from poor policy development. Conversion and drift are strategies through which policymakers engineer under-the-radar changes resulting in unintended outcomes (in this case, de-Europeanization). We find instances of drift where imported policies are deliberately held in place at a time when their context shifts in ways that alter their effects. We also find conversion where imported policies are re-engineered to promote goals radically different from ones they were created for. We argue that EU’s mechanisms and instruments for policy transfer may be responsible for undermining their intended effects. We, first, demonstrate how the EU leads to expanded policy capacity through increasing policy density and intensity. Second, we illustrate hidden mechanisms through which actors subvert EU’s intended goals that result in de-Europeanization. Third, we recommend monitoring devices for the EU that mitigate against attempts at subversion of EU’s policy instruments. We draw on the literatures on public policy and comparative politics in addition to Europeanization research and rely on primary and secondary data for case study material on Turkey, Serbia, Poland and Hungary.

From hope to disaster: neodevelopmentalism and institutional crisis in Brazilian recent experience

Kleber Cerqueira (University of Brasília - UnB)

Jackson De Toni (Brazilian Agency for Industrial Development)

At the befin of the 21st century, Brazil has experienced a rare virtuous circle of economic growth combined with the reduction of inequality and poverty. The bold anti-cyclical policy adopted to address the severe international crisis started in 2008 led the country to virtual full-employment status in 2014, when jobs outside the world evaporated. The country, on its way, was coming to be the fifth economy in the world, consolidating itself as an increasingly relevant actor in the international scene. Lula won an unprecedented international prominence, able to elect his successor, an outsider of the political world. But the political and economic scenario has changed radically. The great mass demonstrations in June 2013 seem to have been the trigger for Lula and Dilma's neo- development experimentation, which seemed solid, to begin to crumble. The three years between March 2013 and March 2016 led Dilma from the highest approval rate ever registered by a president, to the impeachment. What accounts for the collapse of this neo-development experience and the unexpected destruction of a substantive part of his legacy? This paper intends to contribute to the elucidation of this question, systematizing its central contradictions and starting from a balance of the Brazilian neodevelopmental experience, its origins and dynamics, identifying the most important actors, institutions and ideas involved in it. It is intended above all to highlight the complex links between the economic and political dynamics of this critical period. Based on a critical re-reading of the history of Brazilian institutional development, it seeks to identify the deepest roots of the current institutional crisis experienced by the country. Based on the literature on path dependence, institutional change, institutional arrangements and arenas, and industrial policy, we conclude by pointing to the structural impasse underlying this crisis.