STUDYING CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPEAN POLITICS IN THE AGE OF AI

A WORKSHOP ON DATA AND METHODS

NOVEMBER 23-24, 2023

4 TÓTH KÁLMÁN UTCA, 1097 BUDAPEST

NOV 23 (THURSDAY)

Room: T.2.37-38.
(Körtárgyaló)

12:00-13:00   Registration

13:00-13:15   Welcome

13:15-14:45   *Panel A: Media*

Chair: Jakub Stauber
Discussants: Michal Parizek, Csaba Molnár

Sinem Kandemir: *Uncertainty about the War in Ukraine: Measurement and Effects on the German Economy*

Michal Parizek and Jakub Stauber: *The Narratives of the War in Ukraine in News Media Worldwide*

Daniel Schulte: *Automatic Coding of Morality Policy Issues in Central-Eastern Europe using the Factiva Newspaper Database*

Orsolya Ring and György Márk Kis: *The Geopolitics of Vaccine Media Representation in Hungary*

14:45-15:00   Coffee break

15:00-16:30   *Panel B: Legal/constitutional*

Chair: Zsolt Ződi
Discussants: Boldizsár Szentgáli-Tóth, Rebeka Kiss

Ezgi Siir Kibris: *Does democratic backsliding affect international courts? Evidence from the European Court of Human Rights cases of Hungary, Poland, and Turkey*

Kálmán Pócza: *Measuring Strength of Constitutional Adjudication Methodology and First Results of JUDICON-EU*

Max Steuer: *Why Words Matter for Reservoirs of Resilience: Examining Conceptions of Democracy by the Constitutional Courts in Hungary and Slovakia*

Boldizsár Szentgáli-Tóth and Dorottya Deáki: *New Perspectives on Comparative Constitutional Law: Methodological Bases and Challenges*

16:30-16:45   Group photos

18:30-22:00   Dinner @VígVarjú Restaurant

NOV 24 (FRIDAY)

Room: T.2.37-38.
(Körtárgyaló)

9:00-10:30   *Panel C: Politics and Policy*

Chair: Ákos Máté
Discussants: Theresa Gessler, Daniel Schulte

Betül Aydoğan Ünal: Textual Analysis of Defense Strategies: A Comparative Study of Visegrád and EU Reactions to the Ukraine-Russia War

Ákos Máté: *Using Multilingual Large Language Models for Large Scale Classification of Manifestos*

Dániel Mikecz and Pál Susánszky: *Protests and outcomes: a computer based content analysis research design*

Csaba Molnár: *They Foretell. An Analysis of Party Switching via Text-Mining*

10:30-10:45   Coffee break

10:45-12:15   *Panel D: Parliamentary*

Chair: Miklós Sebők
Discussants: Sinem Kandemir, Mehmet Yavut

Betül Aydoğan Ünal: *Party Polarization Under Different Governmental Systems: A Case of Turkey*

Theresa Gessler: *How opposition parties discuss autocratization in parliament*

Dean Schafer and Mehmet Yavuz: *Illiberalism In and Out of Power: Using Text Analysis to Map Parties' Liberal-Illiberal Position in Five Policy Areas across Seven European Countries, 1990-2022*

Ákos Holányi: *Drifting towards East? The evolution of attention in the Croatian, Czech and Hungarian parliament regarding global powers (1994-2017)*

12:15-12:45   Closing plenary

12:45-13:30   Lunch

ABSTRACTS - PANEL A

Sinem Kandemir: Uncertainty about the War in Ukraine: Measurement and Effects on the German Business Cycle

We assemble a data set of more than eight million German Twitter posts related to the war in Ukraine. Based on state-of-the-art methods of text analysis, we construct a daily index of uncertainty about the war as perceived by German Twitter. The approach also allows us to separate this index into uncertainty about sanctions against Russia, energy policy and other dimensions. We then estimate a VAR model with daily financial and macroeconomic data and identify an exogenous uncertainty shock. The increase in uncertainty has strong effects on financial markets and causes a significant decline in economic activity as well as an increase in expected inflation. We find the effects of uncertainty to be particularly strong in the first months of the war.

Michal Parizek and Jakub Stauber: Narratives of the Russia-Ukraine War in News Media Around the World: A Machine Learning-based Exploration

In defending its war of aggression on Ukraine, Russia presents a narrative in which the war is a defensive response to NATO's Eastward expansion. In the narrative, the war is part of a larger geopolitical re-ordering, where the U.S. and its allies despise the continuing shift away from U.S. dominance, toward multipolarity. This narrative apparently resonates, to a varying degree, in different parts of the World, especially in the Global South. Whether this Russian narrative of the war prevails in the long-term, globally and in individual countries, will have important implications for the war and post-war Ukraine itself, for the Central and Eastern European region and the EU at large, but also for the broader dynamics of the international order and the position of Western countries in it. News media is the essential vehicle that carries the competing narratives of the war. In this presentation, we demonstrate our approach to estimation of the diffusion of the Russian narrative in news media around the world, over time, and across states. We do so by deploying natural language processing tools to analyze more than 6 million news articles from 150 states, and more than 2,500 media outlets, between January 2022 and July 2023. The narrative detection uses a supervised machine learning model based on the transformers architecture (BERT) fine-tuned with a human-coded dataset. We further explore the possible use of the most powerful open-source and proprietary chatbots (GPT, Llama-2) for the classification task.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL A

Daniel Schulte: Automatic Coding of Morality Policy Issues in Central-Eastern Europe using the Factiva Newspaper Database

Machine learning and AI offer promising ways to automate the coding of textual data. The Factiva Newspaper Database by Dow Jones Industrial offers newspaper coverage in over 32 languages and is a powerful tool for analyzing trends and distribution of media coverage of different political outcomes of interest. Central-Eastern European languages included in the database are Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, and Turkish. This project aims to develop algorithms to automate the data collection, cleaning and coding required for categorizing the coverage of more than 30 different morality policy issue areas across the languages of Central-Eastern Europe. The creation of such a dataset using machine learning or AI would contribute to the study of morality in politics across a large number of political science literatures. This project would also help create a template for the automation of coding with Factiva for public policy scholars regardless of their particular sector. This project delves into the challenge of developing coding rules that are equivalent across the languages of the region.

Miklós Sebők, Orsolya Ring, György Márk Kis, Áges Dinnyés: The geopolitics of vaccine media representation in Hungary – A machine learning analysis

Extant studies on the European media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic generally posit a linear relationship between the severity of the public health emergency and the volume of reports. However, factors such as the impact of domestic politics and geopolitical factors may also have a purchase on the volume and distribution of coverage in different outlets. Under Viktor Orbán's right-wing populist leadership, Hungary sought deals for ventilators and vaccines from China and Russia–a deviation from joint European procurements of the time. In this article, we conduct a content analysis of pro-government and Orbán-critical media to examine differences in their treatment of Eastern and Western vaccines. We trained a large language model (emBERT) and relied on state-of-the-art machine learning analysis to investigate all COVID-19-related news (72339 articles) published on three major Hungarian news portals between March 2020 and March 2022. Our results show a positive correlation between the number of sentences for each outlet mentioning one of a vaccine and the (first) shots administered and a significant difference between the vaccine attention rates of the analyzed outlets. Remarkably, the pro-government portal showed more positivity towards Western vaccines than a hard-right, anti-government one. This latter, alfahir.hu, also produced more positive reports in relation to the Russian vaccine, while its coverage was more negative towards the Chinese vaccine. These results about alfahir.hu can be explained by the Russian political connection (at the time) of the party sponsoring the portal and lend support to our hypotheses.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL B

Ezgi Siir Kibris: Does democratic backsliding affect international courts? Evidence from the European Court of Human Rights cases of Hungary, Poland, and Turkey

Does democratic backsliding affect international courts? Using the Eu- ropean Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgments, this paper analyzes whether democratic backsliding affects the decisions of judges. The focus is on all the Court judgments of Hungary, Poland, and Turkey from 1995 to 2018 to grasp whether changing the political atmosphere in these countries has any effect on the ECHR. The results suggest that as the level of democracy decreases, it is more likely to have human rights violations and dissenting opinions in the ECHR cases, and national judges are more likely to vote in favor of their governments.

Kálmán Pócza, Gábor Dobos, Attila Gyulai: Measuring Strength of Constitutional Adjudication: Methodology and First Results of JUDICON-EU

Recent confrontations between constitutional courts and parliamentary majorities have sparked international interest in the relationship between the judiciary and the legislature. Several political actors have argued that the constitutional courts have assumed so much power, that politics has become extremely judicialized. These claims are explicitly or implicitly linked to the accusation that the courts have restricted the legislatures' room for manoeuvre too heavily. Nevertheless, the question of the extent to which this concentration of power has limited the scope of action of the dominant political actors has never been examined systematically and in detail. JUDICON-EU project aims to fill this research gap by investigating the constitutional adjudication of 19 European countries in the period 1990-2020. The presentation introduces the methodology of JUDICON-EU and presents the first results of the project with a special focus on the constitutional courts of the Central and Eastern European region. We argue that the different trends in judicial constraints in the countries of CEE can be explained by their diverse institutional frameworks and by event-related factors.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL B

Steuer Max: Why Words Matter for Reservoirs of Resilience: Examining Conceptions of Democracy by the Constitutional Courts in Hungary and Slovakia

The global spread of autocratization accompanied by the tendency of democracy's opponents to cloak their ambitions in the language of formal legality has enhanced the significance of studying the reservoirs of democratic resilience of political institutions. Central among these institutions are apex courts, which, given widespread powers of authoritative interpretation of their communities' laws, are the prime targets of antidemocratic actors. This contribution introduces an alternative approach to study apex courts' reservoirs of democratic resilience vis-à-vis autocratization, one that builds on a combination of interpretive institutionalist theory and democratic political thought, recognizing the essential connection between apex courts' authority and conceptualizations of democracy that go beyond minimalist readings of sheer majority rule. The contribution argues that the approach is particularly useful when combined with qualitative comparative case study design, underscoring the mutual significance of legal discourses for comparative democracy studies, and of theories of democracy and political decision making for comparative (socio-)legal research. To illustrate the applicability of the approach, the contribution argues that analyzing the judicial conceptions of democracy by constitutional courts benefits from avoiding the traditional selection method based on 'canonical' cases recognized by the legal doctrine, or only selected types of proceedings. Instead, it advocates the significance of explicit references to the concept which allows keyword-based selection. Particular attention is given to separate opinions and the distinction between independent references by the court and references by the petitioner which are not taken up in the court's own reasoning. However, interpretation informed by theory remains necessary, as merely statistical data do not suffice to capture the contexts in which references to democracy arise. The approach, demonstrated through data collected from more than two decades of operation of the Hungarian and Slovak Constitutional Courts can help uncover judicial self-understandings, and be the basis for further (for example, interview-based) qualitative study.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL B

Szentgáli-Tóth Boldizsár, Bor Bettina: A global database from the constitutional
case law related to the Covid-19 pandemic: lessons to be learned with special
regard to the Central-European region

Our research project aims to map out the constitutional implications of the Covid-19
pandemic with a global database from the related constitutional case law. Several
scholars have pointed out several legal aspects of the public health emergency during
the recent years. Significant contributions have focused on the extra-ordinary
restrictions on fundamental rights and also the separation of powers aspects of the
crisis. However the comparative analysis of the related constitutional case law is still to
be systematized by the literature. The constitutional courts (or supreme courts with
constitutional
review competencies) have reflected on several aspects of the pandemic. The deeper
understanding of this constitutional practice would lead to the reconsideration of
several issues even in the theoretical and practical field concerning the scope and the
extent of
emergencies, the limitations on fundamental rights during these periods, on the
separation of powers between the main constitutional actors under extraordinary
circumstances, and also on the constitutional impact of a global pandemic. However, on
several occasions during the recent months, it has been reported that the difficulties as
regards the availability of the required information constitute significant obstructive
factors for such research projects.
Therefore, our research group, comprised of constitutional lawyers and experts with
relevant informatics and database-related knowledge, will establish a database from the
constitutional court rulings linked to the extra-ordinary public health situation. This data
set will serve as a key source for numerous further research projects. The conference
would provide us an excellent opportunity to discuss the details of our project and to
illustrate its applicability in a special Central-European context.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL C

Betül Aydoğan Ünal: Textual Analysis of Defense Strategies: A Comparative Study of Visegrád and EU Reactions to the Ukraine-Russia War

In the wake of the Ukraine-Russia War, shifts in power dynamics have compelled European Union (EU) member states to reassess their foreign policy paradigms. Among the EU nations, the Visegrad countries have displayed notable divergence in their responses to the conflict. Specifically, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary have adopted comparatively pro-Russia stances. These states have refrained from providing military support to Ukraine, guided by the prevailing belief that such involvement could potentially embroil them in the ongoing conflict. Hungary has been subject to criticism for its conspicuous alignment with Russia. In stark contrast, Poland has taken a proactive stance in addressing the crisis and extended substantial military assistance to Ukraine. This assertive position by Poland underscores its unwavering commitment to fortifying the Visegrád alliance and mitigating the perceived threat emanating from Russia. This study aims to evaluate the impact of the war on the defense-related documents of both EU and Visegrád countries. To achieve this, we will use advanced natural language processing (NLP) techniques and quantitative text analysis to scrutinize strategy papers published by the Visegrád countries, in addition to all documents issued by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and High Representative Josep Borrell since the inception of the Ukraine-Russia War. By comparing the convergence or divergence of their priorities and strategies, our analysis aims to shed light on the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy in the face of this complex geopolitical challenge.

Ákos Máté, Miklós Sebők, Orsolya Ring, Viktor Kovács: Using Multilingual Large Language Models for Large Scale Classification of Manifestos

Introducing an automated text classification solution that utilizes multilingual large language models (e.g., XLM-RoBERTa) to categorize input files based on the main content analytical variables in the Manifesto Project's codebook. We fine-tune model variants for 31 languages using publicly available Manifesto corpora. When fine-tuned on all corpora, XLM-RoBERTa achieves 65% accuracy on the out-of-sample test set. However, accuracy significantly drops for low resource languages like Slovenian when fine-tuned individually. To demonstrate the scalability of multilingual large language models in comparative research, we apply them to classify texts based on the Comparative Agendas Project's codebook. XLM-RoBERTa's performance depends on training data size and quality, particularly the number of codebook categories. We explore mapping categories between the two codebooks to extend available training data for both projects. This step aims to improve classification accuracy and enhance the generalizability of our text classification solution. In conclusion, our study showcases the power of multilingual large language models in automating text classification across diverse languages and research contexts. We acknowledge the challenges posed by low resource languages and emphasize the importance of carefully curating training data to optimize performance. By bridging the gap between different codebooks, we contribute to the broader advancement of comparative research methodologies.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL C

Dániel Mikecz, Pál Susánszky: Protests and outcomes: a computer based content analysis research design

Protest event analysis has been conducted with computational linguistics in recent years (Wüest et al. 2013, Croicu and Weidmann 2015, Makarov et al. 2015, Hürriyetoğlu et al. 2020, Papanikolaou & Papageorgiou 2020, Lorenzini et al. 2022, Yörük ez al. 2022). However, such projects do not analyze the outcomes of protest events. In our presentation we offer a research design that aims to assess the policy outcomes and the agenda setting potential of protests in Hungary between 1989 and 2023. While the outcome of protest can be manyfold, in our project we scrutinize the impact of protest on the media agenda (cover pages of major newspapers), the legislative agenda (interpellations and questions in the parliament) and on policies (laws and decrees). The three dimensions of protest outcome are interrelated, as social movements can outreach to the public through the media and can exert pressure on decision makers by convincing their reference group voters (McAdam 1999). The media coverage of protest is also a matter of newsworthiness, hence the numbers, the social conflict and especially violence can increase the attention of the media and consequently the media agenda setting of protest (Jennings and Saunders 2019). Our design project follows in the footsteps of research, which also interconnected protest event analysis with the Comparative Agendas Project (Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012, 2019, Vliegenthart et al. 2016).

Csaba Molnár: They Foretell. An Analysis of Party Switching via Text-Mining

Parties are central actors of politics in contemporary democracies. They grant almost unattainable advantage for their members compared to non-partisan actors. However, we can experience that their politicians regularly switch them because of different reasons. In the following paper, we investigate six cases of party splits in the Hungarian context via text-mining methods. We develop three hypotheses on the causes of party switching and their predictability by analysing parliamentary speeches' text and policy agenda.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL D

Betül Aydoğan Ünal: Party Polarization Under Different Governmental Systems: A Case of Turkey

Scholars have traditionally focused on examining the relationship between governmental systems and party polarization across different countries. However, this approach often overlooks the importance of considering various country-specific factors that may exert a substantial influence on the dynamics of political power. In this study, we take a novel approach by investigating how party polarization has evolved over time within the same country under different governmental systems. Our research specifically focuses on Turkey, where we quantitatively measure party polarization using parliamentary speeches spanning the period from 2011 to 2023. This period encompasses Turkey's transition from a parliamentary system to a semi-presidential system and subsequently to a presidential system. Our comprehensive methodology involves data collection, preprocessing, classification, and time series analysis, allowing us to explore the effects of dataset structure and interactions between political parties. Additionally, we assess the impact of significant events using regression and Bayesian models. The findings reveal a noteworthy trend: party polarization in Turkey has steadily increased during its shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system. Surprisingly, during the semi-presidential phase, party polarization has remained relatively stable. Furthermore, the variance in polarization has become more pronounced throughout these transitions. While polarization between parties in power and opposition parties has intensified, polarization within each group has shown a decreasing tendency. These findings have implications for other countries facing the challenges of party polarization and potential transitions in their governmental systems, more broadly, democratic stability.

Theresa Gessler: How opposition parties discuss autocratization in parliament

How do democratic actors rhetorically oppose their own disempowerment? Autocratization as a gradual process not only erodes democracy, but also progressively reduces the power of domestic actors to fight this erosion. Often, incumbent governments disable the institutions meant to hold them accountable. At the same time, domestic responses are crucial to mitigating autocratization, whether by holding incumbents accountable or offering policy alternatives. Drawing on the case of Hungary, the manuscript studies how (opposition) parties politicize democracy within the institution of parliament. As a drastic cases of autocratization, Hungary saw fundamental changes, including the transformation or abolition of several democratic institutions over the past years, heavily criticized by domestic and international actors. Moreover, new laws also restricted the rights of parliament itself, thereby narrowing the opportunities for public debate around democratic procedures. The paper addresses two related research questions: How salient is (liberal) democracy and democratic principles in the parliamentary debate as opposition parties challenge these changes? And do government and opposition systematically differ in their rhetorical use of democracy? The paper uses text-as-data methods to study plenary debates from the start of the Fidesz government in 2010 until 2019. This builds on similar studies of the politicization of democracy across Europe but analyzes debates in a place that experienced democratic breakdown.

ABSTRACTS - PANEL D

Dean Schafer; Mehmet Yavuz: Illiberalism In and Out of Power: Using Text Analysis to Map Parties' Liberal-Illiberal Position in Five Policy Areas across Seven European Countries, 1990-2022

The illiberal ideology of parties in government exerts an independent causal effect on democratic erosion (Kellam and Benasaglio Berlucchi 2023). But, before getting into government, do illiberal parties signal their anti-democratic positions? Or, do illiberal parties become more expressly illiberal only when in power? Further, by comparing transitions of power between liberal and illiberal parties in seven European countries over 30 years (1990-2022), what varieties of illiberalism can we identify? This project uses a combination of text-analysis methods to build a liberal-illiberal scale covering five policy areas: education and culture, the environment, foreign policy, immigration and citizenship, and social policy. It brings together an original dataset of speeches by heads of state, in addition to three datasets of speeches in parliament—the Comparative Agendas Project, ParlSpeech, and ParlEE—covering seven European countries: Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Austria, France, Italy, and the UK. Given the party identity and policy topic of actors' speeches in parliament, we calculate the terms that most define each party by topic. Then, developing methods validated by Maerz and Schneider (2020) and Jenne, Hawkins, and Silva (2021), we build a liberal-illiberal dictionary and use word embedding techniques to map parties' position in these seven European countries on our liberal-illiberal scale. We argue that illiberals in power tend to converge on cultural issues but diverge on two dimensions: the role of the state (paternalistic vs minimalist), and the legitimacy of state institutions (support for technocratic efficiency vs accusations of corruption). Therefore, this article both develops an early warning signal of democratic erosion and provides evidence of the varieties of illiberalism emerging in Europe.

Miklós Sebők, Csaba Molnár, Péter Gelányi, Orsolya Ring, Ákos Holányi: Drifting towards East? The evolution of attention in the Croatian, Czech and Hungarian parliament regarding global powers (1994-2017)

Following the post-socialist Central Europe's integration into western economic and defense organizations there is now a growing consensus present, that some of its countries are drifting away from traditional western allies to strengthen its relationships with eastern powers such as China and the Russian Federation. This paper seeks to verify these assertions, and measure the extent of the potential drift, through the use of modern text mining methods, on a corpora composed of all parliamentary speeches from three countries (Croatia, Czechia and Hungary). We measure both the salience and sentiments of Western and Eastern global powers in these speeches.