

Subnational Consolidation in Single-Party Dominant Regimes: Evidence from Hungarian Mayoral Elections

Matthew Stenberg
University of California, Berkeley

Abstract

Democratic backsliding is a widely studied phenomenon at the national level, but subnational governments play a crucial and understudied role in single-party dominant regime consolidation. Controlling municipal governments, particularly in cities of greater size or political importance, allows an aspiring dominant party to strategically restrict opportunities for the opposition to build up an electoral base to challenge the regime and to better control patronage possibilities. Using an original panel dataset of Hungarian mayoral election results from 2002 to 2014, this paper analyzes subnational politics under the Fidesz party, which is consolidating a single-party dominant regime. I find that Fidesz strategically fields candidates in cities with higher populations and is more likely to win elections in subnational capitals. I also find limited evidence that Fidesz considers the value of EU grants in a municipality in determining where to field candidates. Combined, this evidence suggests that Fidesz is strategically considering political contestation at the subnational level to minimize potential threats to the regime.