



Democratic Backsliding and Public Administration

Liberal democracy is at risk. Its hallmark institutions – political pluralism, separation of powers, and rule of law – are coming under pressure, as authoritarian sentiment is growing around the globe. While liberal-democratic backsliding features prominently in social science scholarship, especially the branches concerned with political parties and political behavior, public administration research lags behind. However, without considering illiberal approaches towards the executive, efforts of actual and aspiring authoritarians remain only partly understood. State bureaucracies are, after all, important instruments of power. This timely and important volume addresses the administrative implications of liberal-democratic backsliding. It studies public administrations as objects and subjects in the context of illiberal dynamics. For this purpose, the volume brings together an international group of scholars to analyze authoritarian tendencies in several countries. The contributions combine theoretical with empirical work, providing the first comparative perspective on an overlooked aspect of one of the most important contemporary political trends.

MICHAEL W. BAUER is the Chair of Public Administration at the School of Transnational Governance of the European University Institute, Florence.

B. GUY PETERS is Maurice Falk Professor of Government at the University of Pittsburgh and founding President of the International Public Policy Association.

JON PIERRE is Professor of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

KUTSAL YESILKAGIT is Professor of Public Administration at University of Leiden.

STEFAN BECKER is Researcher at the Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, the Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries, Germany.

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How Populists in Government Transform
State Bureaucracies

Edited by

MICHAEL W. BAUER

European University Institute, Florence

B. GUY PETERS

University of Pittsburgh

JON PIERRE

University of Gothenberg

KUTSAL YESILKAGIT

University of Leiden

STEFAN BECKER

Thünen Institute of Rural Studies



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Contributors

Michael W. Bauer holds the chair of Public Administration at the School of Transnational Governance of the European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole.

Stefan Becker is a researcher at the Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Germany.

Zsolt Boda is research chair and Director General of the Centre for Social Sciences – Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence as well as a part-time professor of political science at the ELTE University of Budapest.

Héctor Briceño is a PhD candidate in Political Sciences, at Rostock University, Germany, and researcher at the Center for Development Studies at the Central University of Venezuela (CENDES-UCV).

Fabrizio Di Mascio is Associate Professor at the Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning, University of Turin, Italy. He is also President of the Observatory on Regulatory Impact Assessment (Osservatorio AIR).

Eliška Drápalová is a Vinnova postdoctoral fellow at the University of Gothenburg and the QoG Institute, and Principal Investigator of her project on determinants of administrative capacity building in Southern and Eastern European Local Government (CAPA-City).

Mauricio I. Dussauge-Laguna is Professor-Researcher at the Public Administration Division of the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) in Mexico City.

João Victor Guedes-Neto is a PhD student at the University of Pittsburgh.

György Hajnal is Professor at the Corvinus University of Budapest, and Director of the University's Institute of Economic and Public Policy. He

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also holds a part-time position of Research Professor of Public Policy and Governance at the Centre for Social Research, Hungarian Academy of Science Centre of Excellence.

Stanisław Mazur is Professor at the Cracow University of Economics, Rector of the Cracow University of Economics, former Dean of the College of Economy and Public Administration, and Head of the Department of Public Policies.

Donald Moynihan is the inaugural McCourt Chair at the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University, and is a visiting professor at Oxford University and Aarhus University.

Wolfgang Muno holds the Chair for Comparative Government at the University of Rostock.

Alessandro Natalini is Associate Professor of Political Science at the Department of Law at Parthenope University in Naples.

Edoardo Ongaro is Professor of Public Management at The Open University, UK.

B. Guy Peters is Maurice Falk Professor of Government at the University of Pittsburgh, and founding President of the International Public Policy Association.

Jon Pierre is Professor of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

Gerry Stoker is Chair in Governance at the University of Southampton, UK.

Bastian Strobel is Project Manager of the Census 2022 in the Statistical Bureau of North Rhine-Westphalia and PhD candidate at the Chair for Public Management at the University of Kassel. He is Lecturer at the University of Kassel and Contract Researcher at Leibniz University, Hannover.

Sylvia Veit is Professor of Public Management at the University of Kassel in Germany.

Kutsal Yesilkagit is a full professor of public administration at Leiden University.

Preface

In 2018, Stefan and Michael began working on a paper about populism, backsliding, and public administration. They came across papers from Guy and Jon, as well as from Kutsal, that approached the topic from different angles. We decided to join forces and organize a workshop on the topic that was supported by the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies and the new School of Transnational Governance of the European University Institute. This workshop took place on several cold, snowy days in late January 2019. The workshop brought together junior and senior colleagues from all over the discipline and from many parts of the world – and the discussions we had were both theoretically and empirically stimulating. This workshop, in the wonderful Capella of the Villa Schifanoia of the European University Institute, constituted the start of the intellectual journey that led to the present volume analyzing populists in government and how they attempt to transform their bureaucracies. We are indebted to all the participants of the Florence workshop, and we are happy that many of the original presentations have been transformed into chapters of the book. The process of moving from those papers to the current volume was longer and more taxing than any of us would have liked, but we believe it has definitely been worth the effort.

Apart from the financial support from the EUI, we are grateful for the encouragement given to us by Professor Brigid Laffan, director of the Robert Schuman Center, as well as by Professor Miguel Poiras Maduro, then director of the School of Transnational Governance. Other colleagues at the EUI, as well as at the German University of Administrative Sciences, Speyer, including Alix Weigel, Mia Saugman and Andrea Arendt, contributed to the success of the workshop. We are extremely grateful to Nora Wagner for invaluable help in managing the production of the volume, and to John Haslam from Cambridge University Press for his encouragement to engage in an edited volume.

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We are also indebted to the reviewers who provided apt and useful comments on earlier drafts.

The topic of this book is one of great importance in contemporary democracies, and we hope that, at least in some small way, we are contributing to maintaining and improving democratic governance. The process of producing this volume has been a learning experience for us all, but also a highly gratifying personal experience of working with great colleagues.

Michael W. Bauer, B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre, Kutsal Yesilkagit, and Stefan Becker.