

An Ethno-nation Deeply Divided –  
The Center Periphery Cleavage and the Rise of Right Wing Populism In East Central Europe

Hadas Aron

Abstract

In the past decade, Central Eastern Europe has seen a rise of populism that seeks to transform liberal institutions and concentrate power in the political center. Common explanations for the current rise of populism as a response to globalization, economic crisis, or demographic changes, fail to explain the variation in the type of populism we observe in different countries. This work attempts to fill this gap. The book develops a theory of the persistence and impact of center periphery cleavages on political outcomes. I demonstrate that transformative populism emerges where the political space is defined by a cultural center-periphery cleavage. This was the case in Hungary and Poland. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia an economic left-right cleavage was more notable, in the Czech Republic the entire political system was more liberal cosmopolitan, in Slovakia the entire system was more nationalist-conservative. Further, using a rich multi-method research, I show that the cultural cleavage becomes salient when there is a material gap between center and periphery, where the cleavage has been mobilized often in the past and is a of the country's national ethos, and where there is an elite motivated to mobilize on the cleavage.