

Contentious Politics and Neo-Militant Democracy

The research is motivated by the following observations: during the past decade, European democratic regimes began to take on the features of non-democracies by using legal restrictions on contentious politics, constitutional amendments, refusals of party registration, and restrictions on referendums. The systems have taken these measures to guard themselves against anti-democratic forces and to survive in a new social milieu. Nowadays, the regimes fail to meet the essential features of the old neutral model of liberal democracy which assumed that all political views give people the same rights of expression and association. These factors have brought about the rebirth of the studies on militant democracy understood as the democratic system that legally restricts certain democratic freedoms in order to protect itself from the threat of being changed by legal means. However, contemporary political regimes are substantively different from the system which was the subject of the first study of militant democracy, namely the political regime in a time of Adolf Hitler's Germany. This project uses the category of neo-militant democracy to differentiate between the phenomena which existed in various historical contexts.

The main research objective is to formulate the middle-range theory that determines the causal relationships between contentious politics and neo-militant democracy in Europe. This theory is to explain why particular European neo-militant democracies emerge, while others decline, how they differ from each other, what brings the differences and similarities between them, how and why they change over time.

The research covers the neo-militant democracies that occurred in the 28 member states of the European Union (EU). Their membership in the UE provides a common ground of experience for political subjects, which is of vital importance to control the analysis for confounding factors. Additionally, these political regimes were faced with "the crisis of democracy" after the 2008 financial crisis. The qualitative regime change was not rapid, but clearly visible after the imposition of austerity measures by the EU and governments on the states since it was reflected in the discourse on citizenship, rights and freedoms, and austerity policies. Although the static approach allows us to observe neo-militant democracies over the particular critical juncture, the dynamic approach enables us to understand the nature of their changes. Therefore, it is important to delve analytically into the trajectories of the regimes' continuance to capture what and how has shaped the neo-militant aspects of democracies over time. Thus, the research field encompasses the period from 2008 (the great economic crisis) to 2019, which is the expected date for the implementation of the EU's procedures against the violations of political rights of citizens and denizens of the EU. The proceedings may contribute to the significant change of the quality of European neo-militant democracies and the end of the particular phase of the regimes' continuance.

The analysis makes use of desk research. It employs a qualitative method of written sources analysis. This methodological choice is followed by a need for conceptual qualitative content analysis. The research techniques of data collection are the following: an analysis of secondary data gathered in the state police databases, reports, and records, the GDELT database, Eurostat, Europe, Venice Commission, state statistical offices, IMF, Countryreports, Earthtrends, Infoplease, Ameco, the Freedom House reports, non-governmental organization databases; secondary literature on neo-militant democracies and indicators involved in explanatory frameworks; and articles and visual materials published in public, commercial, and social media. The sources triangulation aims to verify the reliability of data, generate reliable databases, and facilitate the creation of statistical software for data analysis. The major criterion for sources selection is their utility to verify the hypotheses effectively, so the principle of theoretical sampling drives the collection of data. The research uses fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis to verify the hypotheses. This technique allows us to accept or reject assumptions on the causal relations between the types of neo-militant democracy and the features of contentious politics.