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

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Abstract
Democratic backsliding is widely studied at the national level, but subnational governments play a crucial and understudied role in single-party dominant regime consolidation. The evidence suggests that dominant parties strategically contest subnational elections to minimize potential threats to the regime, particularly focusing on cities of greater size or political importance. This 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 2019, this paper analyzes subnational politics under the Fidesz party, which is consolidating a single-party dominant regime. I find that, consistent with the literature on party system nationalization, Fidesz strategically fields candidates in cities with higher populations; however, it is more likely to win elections in subnational capitals, where it can better control administrative and economic resources.