

Political polarization and party patronage: Evidence from political appointments in Hungary

Meyer-Sahling Jan-Hinrik

*University of Nottingham, School of Politics and International
Relations, Nottingham, United Kingdom*

Petr Kopecky, Leiden

Maria Spirova, Leiden

Fanni Toth, Loughborough

Abstract: The contemporary literature on political parties has identified their gradual but consistent shift away from civil society and towards the state. Parties are becoming increasingly dependent on state resources and exclusively interested in governing. Party patronage is fundamental to this relationship between parties and the state. This paper examines how party patronage is shaped by the nature of political competition. In particular, it explores the effects of political polarization on patronage practices, arguing that ‘extreme polarization’ incentivizes political parties to develop heavily partisan strategies of party patronage. Empirically, the paper assesses patterns of party patronage in Hungary from 1990 until 2022. Specifically, it presents findings from a dataset of nearly 2,000 political appointees that allows for the identification of different degrees and modes of party patronage in the wake of changing patterns of party competition.