Adapting to Reality: Policy Feedback and the Evolution of Citizen Attitudes towards Local Government in Hungary

Kakai Laszlo

University of Pecs, Department of Political Science and International Studies, Pecs, Hungary

Abstract: The literature on centralisation or decentralisation pays little attention to how the structure itself influences voters' and, ultimately, consumers' access to and attitudes toward public services. Do those who consider local governments to be essential providers of public services consider local autonomy to be more important than those who expect the state to ensure the quality of services? Hungary is an excellent example for empirical research on this question, as the fundamentally decentralised structure established in 1990 has shifted increasingly toward centralisation in recent years. The empirical background of the study consists of two public opinion polls, the first wave of which was based on a representative sample of 1,500 people in 2018, and the second wave, repeated five years later (in December 2023), surveyed 1,875 people. The two data collections allow us to assess how the ongoing centralisation process, implemented in several waves since 2010, shapes citizens' attitudes and expectations towards local governments and public services. It also seeks to answer the central question of how the government's reduction of local government autonomy affects voters' trust in local governments and public services. The research examines the consequences of a long-standing policy direction in which citizens' attitudes are shaped by their daily interactions with the changed public service system, focusing on Hungary and drawing on the well-documented Policy Feedback Theory in the international literature.