

Hybrid Regimes Going Global & Viral: “Hybridity” as Complex Social Domination and Resistance Strategies

HYBRID.RESIST

Abstract

HYBRID.RESIST focuses on the duality of hybrid regimes, seeking to identify resistance strategies towards both political and societal hybridity. We claim that, besides *political* hybridity that is widely investigated and documented as form of electoral democracy with political authoritarianism, decisionism and the concentration of power in the hands of a few political actors, there is a second, *societal* hybridity that intersects with the first one – it combines authoritarianism exemplified by collectivism, strong polarization, reliance on charismatic leaders and cultural conservatism, with post-Fordist techniques of embedding the social change not to allow system change. These regimes *stand for an avant-garde new form of regimes* able to adjust and contaminate the central societies of global capitalism meant to be embedded democracies.

HYBRID.RESIST combines several theoretical approaches with the aim to conceptualize and identify the *forms of social engagement* that are capable of challenging hybrid regimes and *forms of democratic institutional design* that would be better capable of resisting all forms of “hybridization”. We complement the Foucauldian apparatus of “logic of the police” – the simultaneous “totalization” and “individualization” of social reality – with Luc Boltanski’s concept of “complex domination” that points out to the form of social domination that “incorporate” critique and other challenges to the order by constantly reshaping the institutional order not to threaten the (unjust) system itself.

HYBRID.RESIST aims at conducting a systematic comparative analysis of seven countries – four from Central and South-Eastern Europe (Serbia, Hungary, North Macedonia and Turkey) and three from other continents (India, Brazil and United States). North Macedonia and United States present different stages of political vulnerability, offering unique insights into the kinds of political and societal factors that are crucial for *preventing* hybridization (USA) or its resurgence after change (North Macedonia). The remaining countries present existing hybrid regimes that are to be investigated as laboratories for key factors affecting the resistance strategies for *fighting* and *dismantling* hybrid regimes as forms of complex domination.

We would rely primarily on critical discourse analysis, with the focus on forms of public communication where we 1) identify the forms of political hybridity, then 2) proceed to investigate the presence of the societal dimension of “hybridity” in these discourses – simultaneous totalization and individualization of the societal space accompanied by a constant simulation of social change (complex domination). The consortium would finally attempt to conceptualize, and preliminarily identify empirical instances of promising resistance strategies within hybrid regimes. We would be looking at 1) the main features of innovative

institutional designs; 2) potentials of their extrapolation to less favorable environments, i.e. hybrid regimes; (3) and at which stage they could have a chance of success.

Justification

Autocratization has gone viral recently. Relevant international organizations and research institutions such as V-Dem-Project, Freedom House, Economist Democracy Index, Bertelsmann Transformation Index and others speak unanimously of “global wave of autocratization”, “bad year for global democracy” or “democracy under siege”. A growing number of political regimes in Central/Eastern Europe, South Asia and Latin America fit into this broader picture and can be characterized as “hybrid regimes”. It is precisely the “hybridity” as a term that we use to define a political system that intertwines, in complex ways, aspects of *functional democracy with political authoritarianism, decisionism and the concentration of power in the hands of a few political actors* – most often a ruling political party which hijacks the democratic institutional system and maintains, more or less successfully, a façade of functional democracy.

This project starts from the premise that the term *hybrid regime* is heuristically fruitful, but that it should be elaborated further to enable a more comprehensive diagnosis of the novel techniques of government and neutralization of democracy that have evolved globally over the past two decades. The project would conceptualize hybrid regimes in social-theoretical terms, combining perspectives of Michel Foucault and Luc Boltanski, and apply them in a novel comparative research design on several case-studies. We propose Serbia, Hungary, North Macedonia, Turkey, India, Brazil and United States. Observed in general, there is a clear tendency towards the development of a dominant party system within parliamentary system, but also a form of presidentialism in which leaders, often informally, expand the circle of power.

The project departs from the argument that hybrid regimes such as the ones in present-day Hungary, Serbia, India, Turkey or Brazil combine political and societal authoritarianism with specific techniques of *societal fragmentation* (atomization) that are characteristic for the post-Fordist stage of capitalism. These techniques, such as the fostering of the “entrepreneurial self” theorized by Luc Boltanski and Lauren Thevenot in the *New Spirit of Capitalism*, or the “institutionalized individualism” theorized by Axel Honneth (systematic fostering of individualistic action-orientations in all domains of life) are characterized by an encouragement of constant personal “self-transformation” and development of institutional arrangements (such as the “flexible” regulation of labour relations) that are supposedly conducive to the realization of such personal strivings.

In terms of hybrid regimes, this means that, alongside the standard, political dualism of democracy and authoritarianism that constitutes the “hybridity” of hybrid regimes, there is a second, *societal dualism* that intersects with the first one – that of the conventional societal authoritarianism exemplified by *collectivism, strong induced polarization, reliance on charismatic leaders and cultural conservatism*, on the one hand, and post-Fordist techniques of *societal that simulate progressivism and social change* on the other.

We aim to elaborate this second dimension of the “hybridity” of hybrid regimes by means of two conceptions: Michel Foucault’s concept of *omnes et singulatim* developed in his 1979 Tanner Lectures “Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Critique of Political Reason” and Luc Boltanski’s concept of “complex domination” developed in his later work *On Critique*. For Foucault, the specific rationality of the modern state that has evolved over the past centuries as a correlate of political democracy is the “logic of the police” – the simultaneous “totalization” and “individualization” of social reality through individual surveillance and disciplining, which stands in some tension with the liberal-democratic “logic of politics”. In our understanding, contemporary hybrid regimes present attempts at resolving this tension in favor of the “logic of the police” without brutally suppressing the logic of politics. To elucidate this technique of hybrid regimes, we complement the Foucauldian apparatus with Luc Boltanski’s concept of “complex domination”. This concept denotes a form of social domination that does not stifle criticism of the institutional order of a political community or suppress social engagement, but *aims to “incorporate” critique and other challenges to the order* (e.g. contingent events such as the current pandemic) by constantly reshaping certain aspects of the institutional order in a way that does not threaten its (unjust) foundations. In this way it simulates a permanent “social change” and a capacity of that order to fully absorb the contingency of the empirical world including critique, opposition and any other challenges to the regime.

Based on this new “hybridity” rather resilient to outside challenges we don’t refer to hybrid regimes as simply “deficient” or “stuck” in-between old forms of authoritarianism and liberal democracy. It is rather that *they stand for a dangerous (even avant-garde) new form of regimes* able to adjust the disciplinary and totalizing logic of the police to the constant challenges coming from the “democracy dimension” (the logic of politics) of the political community, embodied in such principles as personal autonomy, pluralism, anti-authoritarianism and collective self-determination. These new form of hybrid regimes are no longer limited only to the “semi-peripheral” societies of global capitalism. Recent developments in the “central” states such as the success of Donald Trump in the United States and new anti-democratic regime trends in some of the member states of the EU signal that the model of the hybrid regime is now a global phenomenon also pulsating in the “center” as well, having proven a successful way of resolving the police/democracy tension.

Research Design and Conceptual Framework

The project aims at conducting a systematic comparative analysis of seven countries – four from Central and South-Eastern Europe (Serbia, Hungary, North Macedonia and Turkey) and three from other continents (India, Brazil and United States). We would rely primarily on critical discourse analysis, which would focus on forms of public communication (in traditional media, social media, political speeches, discourses of “governmental non-governmental organizations, etc.) that can *prima facie* be identified as hybrid in the traditional sense, i.e.

synthesizing within themselves the logics of liberal democracy with right-wing authoritarianism. The analysis would then proceed to investigate the presence of the *second*, societal dimension of “hybridity” in these discourses – the logic of *omnes et singulatim*, of simultaneous totalization and individualization of the societal space accompanied by a constant simulation of social change (complex domination). The consortium would finally attempt to conceptualize, and preliminarily identify empirical instances of, promising political strategies of combating the logic of *omnes et singulatim* operating within hybrid regimes. This stage would involve two tasks: conceptualizing and identifying *forms of social engagement* (political movements, engagement of the social sciences, forms of social critique) that are capable of challenging hybrid regimes, and *forms of democratic institutional design* that would be better capable of resisting all forms of “hybridization”.

In conceptualizing forms of *social engagement against hybridization*, the project would rely, among else, on the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory’s rich body of research within the Group for Social Engagement Studies, which investigates engagement by means of social ontology, critical theory, social movements theory and empirical research of new forms of democratic civic activism.

With regards to the forms of *democratic institutional design capable of resisting hybridization*, the project would focus on both the democratic constitutional framework and the structural features of self-governance. It would explore the contemporary “New Diversity Theory” accounts of Open Society, as developed by Gerald Gaus and Fred D’Agostino, and address their advantages and shortcomings in response to the “logic of the police”. Moreover, we would utilize insights of political philosophy and institutional epistemology of the New Diversity Theory to provide an analysis and critique of Adrian Vermeule’s “common-good constitutionalism”, a development in theory of an administrative state which broadens its powers to include illiberal moral and religious paternalism, and which serves as a particularly dangerous theoretical foundation for hybrid regimes. Second, we would explore the inherent political and epistemological flaws of electoral representative democracy as a system of political competition between elites, which conditions the emergence of complex domination and compromises epistemic reliability.

Finally, we would explore potential *institutional democratic designs* which avoid these shortcomings. Recently, scholars have been invested in exploring novel designs of participatory processes, innovative forms of deliberation and decision-making processes. For instance, Kristoffer Alhstrom-Vij has focused on reliable aggregative agenda-setting processes such as information markets, whilst E. Glen Weyl has presented a strong case for quadratic voting. Lottocratic forms of deliberation and decision-making have received much scholarly attention ever since the ground-breaking work of Helene Landemore. These exciting new democratic procedures have been mostly tested in advanced democracies. In our research, we would aim to explore if and how they could be implemented in the context of hybrid regimes. We would be looking at (1) the main features of these innovative institutional designs; (2) potentials of their extrapolation to less favorable environments, i.e. what adaptations would be necessary to

make them workable beyond matured democracies; (3) and at which stage they could have a chance of success.

Case Study Selection

In terms of the seven selected countries that the project would investigate through the above outlined conceptual framework, two of them – United States and North Macedonia – deviate from the other five. In essence they are not simply examples of currently existing hybrid regimes, but are important for the project's attempt to understand what kind of institutional design and civic engagement are best suited for resisting forces of "hybridity" both *before* they become a full political regime or *after* they have been removed from power. The United States have, since the rise of Trumpism, been an example of a "hybrid discourse" rather than regime, that is, a hybrid regime not-yet-in-power, operating as a strategy of political mobilization – the US is thus a case of "pre-hybridization", facing the challenge of resisting becoming a fully-fledged hybrid regime (a second electoral win by the Trumpist movement would likely signal the beginning of this process). North Macedonia, on the other hand, is a country which has had experienced a hybrid regime, but its citizenry and oppositional political forces managed to remove from power the political actors in power who were the primary agents of hybridization – the country can therefore be seen as a case of "post-hybridization", facing a possible threat of a restoration of the hybrid regime. The two countries thus present different stages of political vulnerability, each one offering unique insights into the kinds of political and societal factors (institutional design and forms of social engagement) that are crucial for *preventing* hybridization or its resurgence. The remaining four countries which present (different varieties of) currently existing hybrid regimes, Serbia, Hungary, Turkey, India and Brazil, offer unique insights into the kinds of political and societal factors – forms of social engagement and conceptions of the good society that can inspire such engagement – that are crucial for *fighting* and *dismantling* hybrid regimes as forms of complex domination.