



## Realignment and Stability in Politics

### The 30th Conference of the Hungarian Political Science Association

Budapest, 29-30 May 2025

HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences Institute for Political Science

<https://vandorgyules.tk.hu/en>

### CALL FOR PAPERS

Following the 2010 elections, Hungarian politics was characterised by relative stability. Although minor changes occurred beneath the surface, and significant external challenges—such as the pandemic and armed conflicts—impacted the country, these did not fundamentally alter the logic of political competition. Public opinion polls, with minor interruptions, consistently showed a significant lead for the governing party, and it seemed that domestic political events did not pose a substantial challenge. However, the year 2024 disrupted the seemingly frozen party system: the emergence of a new political force brought to the surface previously hidden socio-political realignment processes, such as the loosening of political attachments (de-alignment) and realignment along new cleavages. For this reason, the central theme of our conference is *realignment*. To what extent can this process be observed in the party system and in citizens' attitudes toward politics and political actors? Does realignment extend to other areas of politics, and if so, through what mechanisms?

Realignment is also evident in international politics. Shifts in power centres can be observed in the changing global balance of power, particularly with the rising global roles of China and India, while the relative influence of the USA and the EU is undergoing transformation. Regional conflicts and alliances are also evolving, as illustrated by the Russia-Ukraine war, the dynamics of the Middle East, and the changing roles of NATO and other regional alliances. The transformation and fragmentation of the global order into competing power blocs, the rise of protectionism, and the intensifying competition in technology (e.g., artificial intelligence, quantum technology) and for resources are creating new dynamics in international relations. At the same time, the effectiveness of international organizations (e.g., the UN, WHO) is increasingly questioned, while states are relying more on bilateral or regional agreements.

The year 2025 marks a special milestone for Hungarian political science, as the Hungarian Political Science Association (MPTT) is organizing the 30th Vándorgyűlés (Annual Conference). This anniversary provides an opportunity not only for the academic community to reflect on past achievements but also to showcase the latest trends in political science. The conference will thus serve as both a retrospective and a major academic gathering, as well as a forum for defining future research directions. We invite proposals for individual presentations and full panels (4-5 presentations) in Hungarian or English that align with the announced sections. Additionally, the open section welcomes political science presentations that do not strictly fit within the predefined themes.

## Sections

### 1) *Political theory and democracy theory*

Section chairs: Attila Gyulai and Artúr Baranyai

The main theme of this section, which hosts presentations and panels on political and democratic theory, is realignment. Recent trends in these fields have reopened debates on issues long considered settled, sometimes even anticipating shifts in political processes rather than merely responding to them.

Concepts that are either newly emerging or deeply rooted in political theory—such as statehood, political community, sovereignty, political obligation, and the universality of fundamental human rights—are once again at the forefront of discussion. The nature of political practice itself continuously challenges established standards: at times it appears as the primary force shaping these standards, while at other times it defies clear definition. Efforts to reassess the role, meaning, and substance of normativity are ongoing, and a notable trend has emerged: while realist political theory increasingly questions, or at least downplays, the role of morality, this very scepticism opens up new possibilities for reinterpreting moral considerations within political philosophy.

The evolving landscape of democratic theory is closely tied to growing dilemmas about how political regimes are classified and evaluated. While democratic theory has long sought to define the boundaries between democratic and non-democratic systems, it often struggles to keep pace with political realities. A key challenge for contemporary political science is to develop new frameworks for understanding democracy's limits and the role of normativity within it. This may require revising existing concepts or introducing entirely new ones—particularly in relation to political knowledge, the roles of voters and leaders, and the processes of de-democratization, autocratisation, and re-democratisation. At the same time, it is equally important to critically engage with the increasingly diverse attempts to classify political regimes.

### 2) *The "Untouchables": Political Leaders and Elites*

Section chairs: Rudolf Metz and Veronika Kövesdi

In contemporary politics, certain political leaders appear immune to criticism, maintaining or even increasing their popularity despite norm violations—even when facing legal proceedings. Their perceived "untouchability" challenges the democratic principle of accountability, fueling public discontent that, in extreme cases, can escalate into political violence or even assassination attempts.

This trend reinforces the dominance of political leaders while facilitating the rise of a new breed of leadership that actively opposes liberal democratic norms. These leaders skillfully navigate shifting media landscapes and public expectations, fostering an illusion of accessibility and direct engagement. As a result, the traditional model of politicians embedded in liberal democracy is becoming less attractive, gradually giving way to figures who employ populist strategies to broaden their appeal.

Simultaneously, political and economic elites have rebranded themselves to expand their influence, with some actively shaping public opinion and even transitioning into political careers. This evolving dynamic has led to a significant reshuffling of political leadership and elite structures, posing new challenges for democratic systems.

Themes of the Session:

- The impact of political leaders on regime stability and transformation
- The role of political leadership in times of crisis and war
- Political leadership in international politics and the European Union

- Leaders' behaviour, support, and communication strategies
- The composition, career paths, and influence of political elites
- The transformation of political representation

The session welcomes both theoretical and empirical contributions addressing these themes, reflecting on contemporary political transformations from diverse methodological and disciplinary perspectives.

### *3) Political institutions*

Section chairs: Gábor Dobos and Szabolcs Hadászi

Recent political developments have raised growing concerns about the legitimacy, effectiveness, and public acceptance of institutions, both domestically and internationally. Declining trust, shifting voter preferences, and increasing political polarisation have triggered a realignment that affects not only party systems but also the broader political institutional framework.

In Hungary, political institutions have remained relatively stable over the past 15 years. However, the political shifts of 2024 and the changing party preferences are reshaping public perceptions of these institutions. On a global scale, deepening political divides are not only redefining party competition but also testing the stability of national and international institutions. The restructuring of geopolitical power centres and challenges to liberal democratic systems further expose institutional vulnerabilities. A key question is how global challenges – such as technological advancements, climate change, and geopolitical conflicts – are shaping the international institutional order.

This section focuses on the changing role of political institutions in our evolving political landscape, with special attention on trust, effectiveness, and polarisation. What factors weaken or strengthen public trust in political institutions? How does polarisation affect institutional stability and governance? What are the consequences of emerging political forces, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and growing doubts about the effectiveness of international organisations?

We invite submissions from researchers studying these topics, especially those raising questions on the role and transformation of various political institutions – such as parliaments, local governments, and constitutional courts – and the challenges they face in the current political environment.

### *4) Political and Electoral Behaviour in an Era of Realignment*

Section chairs: Andrea Szabó and Annamária Sebestyén

While 2024 was marked by high-stakes elections around the world, 2025 is expected to be relatively quiet in this regard. This provides an opportunity for the presentations in this section to explore in greater depth and nuance the persistence or transformation of political behaviour among young and older voters, irrespective of specific political contexts.

However, the expression of political will is not limited to elections but also manifests itself through various forms of political participation. In certain cases, even “non-action” – such as disengagement from politics, disillusionment or apathy – can be understood as a powerful political expression. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in Central Europe, where opposition to authoritarian regimes has historically taken the form of passive resistance, and among younger generations who are increasingly reluctant to engage in traditional forms of political participation.

This session welcomes both theoretical and empirically based papers that explore the dynamics of public opinion, expected electoral outcomes, and the short- and long-term effects of elections, as well as the broader social contexts in which they take place. Another key aim is to examine elections from the perspective of political socialisation, assessing their significance for the evolution of political culture in Western democracies and in Hungary.

Finally, while elections are the primary focus of this session, we also encourage papers that address broader issues of political behaviour and contemporary debates on political socialisation. Given its interdisciplinary approach, this session integrates theoretical, empirical and methodological perspectives from political sociology and political psychology.

### *5) Political communication*

Section chairs: Márton Bene and Krisztina Burai

In recent years, significant transformations have taken place in political communication, both internationally and domestically. On the international level, political actors have had to contend with various external challenges, such as the pandemic and different war conflicts, which have introduced new communication opportunities and frontlines. In domestic politics, in addition to these factors, the rise of a new political force and its associated innovations in political communication as well as the changing communication structure have compelled both governing and opposition parties to adapt.

These transformations have also reached the local arenas of politics, where professional media is continuously losing ground (Hayes & Lawless, 2021), while social media and community self-organisation emerging on online platforms are playing an increasingly prominent role (Burai et al., 2024). The transformation of the political communication landscape has also given new momentum to citizen engagement, with a growing number of individuals expressing their opinions both on social media platforms and in offline spaces.

As a result of this realignment, public discourse has been reinvigorated regarding the role of social media in political success as well as the operational mechanisms and structures of professional media. One of the key developments in recent times has been the proliferation of the second generation of social media, particularly TikTok, and the transformation of earlier platforms under its influence—commonly referred to as "TikTokization"—which has opened new avenues for the dissemination of political information (Gerbaudo, 2024).

While these shifts are perceptible, we still possess limited knowledge about how they impact the communication strategies of political and media actors, the communicative experiences and practices of citizens, and the dynamics and forms of political representation. The political communication section therefore invites presentations that examine these changes from empirical or theoretical perspectives.

What transformations can be observed in mass media and social media? What communication strategies are political actors and organisations employing during these turbulent times? How does this affect the communicative behaviour of citizens? Which new actors are benefiting from the evolving political communication environment? What impact does all of this have on the functioning of political representation?

The 2024 "super election" year, with its domestic and international campaigns, provides a wealth of data and experiences for observing political communication trends. The final Vándorgyűlés before the parliamentary elections offers an excellent opportunity to map and document current domestic trends ahead of the upcoming campaign.

Burai, K., Solti, Á., & Bene, M. (2024). Feel local, post local: An ethnographic investigation of a social media-based local public. *New Media & Society*, 14614448241262988.

Gerbaudo, P. (2024). TikTok and the algorithmic transformation of social media publics: From social networks to social interest clusters. *New Media & Society*, 14614448241304106.

Hayes, D., & Lawless, J. L. (2021). *News hole: The demise of local journalism and political engagement*. Cambridge University Press.

## 6) *European Union: Continuity and Realignment*

Section chairs: András Bíró-Nagy and Ákos Holányi

The European Union operates in a constantly evolving political, economic, and social environment, where the duality of continuity and realignment plays a key role. Recent events — such as Brexit, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, the energy crisis, debates on EU institutional reform and enlargement, and the rise of Eurosceptic parties — have all posed new challenges to the integration process while the EU's core values and operational principles have remained stable.

In the new EU political cycle that began in 2024, we can observe both continuity and realignment. While the same party groups continue to dominate EU institutions, the traditional divide between the centre-right and the Eurosceptic right appears to be weakening on certain issues, and sovereigntist actors are gaining greater policy influence. Additionally, the EU's global role is being redefined. Transatlantic relations, political and economic strategies towards China and Russia, and the fight against climate change all indicate that the European Union is reassessing its global position and tools. The EU's internal cohesion and the forms of cooperation among member states are also topics that deserve significant attention from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

This section aims to explore how the European Union adapts to global and internal challenges, in which areas continuity is evident, and where substantial transformations can be observed. We invite presentations that examine the EU's continuity and realignment from a political science or public policy perspective. Topics related to the following research questions are particularly relevant:

- How do the political dynamics of individual member states influence EU decision-making and the functioning of EU institutions?
- What impact will the 2024 European Parliament election results have on the functioning of the EU during the 2024–2029 cycle?
- How do EU institutions and member states respond to various crises?
- Sovereignty and European integration: What cleavages can be observed in the debate on deepening integration?
- How does the EU react to global challenges? How is the concept of European strategic autonomy evolving, and what are the implications for transatlantic relations?
- How do populism and Euroscepticism influence the EU's political and social dynamics?
- How has European citizens' trust in the EU changed in response to recent crises? What trends are emerging in EU public opinion?
- What are the key impacts of EU membership on Hungary, and how might Hungary-EU relations evolve in the coming years?

We look forward to receiving proposals that contribute to the discussion on these pressing issues.

## *7) Public policy and governance at a time of realignment of global and Hungarian political actors*

Section chairs: Attila Bartha and Márton Zsuráfszky

Mainstream theories of public policy typically assume that public policy decisions are made under stable, democratic conditions, where the influence of particular actors on the decision-making process and their policy preferences are stable or at most incrementally changing. At the same time, the instability and recent realignment of power relations in the global, European and Hungarian political arena bring to the fore theories that examine the mechanisms of public policy change. New approaches that reflect on uncertainty, crises, the context of radical public policy change and the discursive features of governance are gaining ground. Global public policy shifts are being driven by climate change, pandemic waves and the uncertainties posed by the rise of artificial intelligence, but also by the Russian-Ukrainian war and the transformation of the American political landscape. In Hungary, the rise of a new opposition party and related socio-political realignments are shaping public policy processes in addition to the global public policy streams.

In this section, we are mainly looking for papers that investigate the public policy process and the mechanisms shaping policy change in a public policy area. Proposals addressing public policy problems in an international comparative context or using innovative theoretical and methodological perspectives are particularly welcome. We expect both English and Hungarian language proposals.

## *8) In the Shadow of Algorithms: Political Science in the Age of AI*

Section chairs: Orsolya Ring and Rebeka Kiss

Artificial Intelligence (AI) – encompassing machine learning, large language models, neural networks and generative AI tools – fundamentally transforms political systems, decision-making processes and geopolitical structures. While AI-based technologies create new avenues for democratic deliberation, collective decision-making and policy planning, they simultaneously accelerate social polarisation, distort information ecosystems and facilitate political manipulation. The algorithmic architecture of social media platforms poses challenges to democratic institutional frameworks and civic engagement through the intensification of affect-driven political mobilisation, AI-generated misinformation and microtargeted content dissemination. The rise of digital authoritarianism has enabled automated surveillance mechanisms (exemplified by China's Social Credit System) and state-coordinated information technologies (including algorithmic content moderation and the proliferation of AI-generated political narratives) to emerge as novel instruments of social control. Thus, artificial intelligence is not merely a tool for improving governance efficiency but serves as a transformative catalyst in reshaping fundamental structures of political power. The competition over AI development and governance represents a crucial dimension in transforming the global political-economic order, necessitating a fundamental reassessment of technological sovereignty. As AI evolves into a strategic asset, it shapes states' economic and military capabilities while accelerating geopolitical alignment into distinct blocs. The EU AI Act marks a significant milestone in establishing a comprehensive legal framework for AI governance. However, it faces substantial challenges: beyond the fragmentation of international regulatory regimes and diverging national approaches, key issues include reconciling the fast-evolving landscape of technological innovation with the comparatively slow legislative process, ensuring effective enforcement against global technology corporations, and addressing the practical applicability of the risk-based regulatory approach. Consequently, a key challenge for political science in the realm of AI governance and oversight is to ensure democratic accountability in algorithmic decision-making and to establish clear frameworks for political responsibility. This section welcomes submissions exploring the intersections of political science and AI, regardless of

methodological or theoretical orientation. We particularly encourage comparative and interdisciplinary approaches as well as research that integrates legal, social science, and technological perspectives.

#### 9) *The political economy of realignment in times of fragmentation*

Section chairs: Gergő Medve-Bálint and Tamás Tibor Csontos

Since the COVID-19 crisis, political realignment has accelerated worldwide. The pandemic led to executive aggrandisement in many countries, leaving a lasting impact on their political economies. Notions of protectionism and anti-globalisation have gained renewed strength, even in highly transnationalised semi-peripheral regions such as Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This shift marks a reversal of global economic integration, often referred to as geoeconomic fragmentation—a process that threatens to disrupt trade, deepen inequality, and lower global living standards, even in the short term. At the same time, the world faces pressing challenges such as climate change, the green transition, and the energy crisis—issues that demand cooperative solutions at both regional and global levels. Given its deep integration into global trade, foreign capital flows, and global value chains, the CEE region is particularly vulnerable to these changes. This session welcomes papers that examine the political economy of these contemporary challenges. We are especially interested in research exploring the relationship between CEE's domestic agency and its structural dependence on external resources. How does political realignment in an era of geoeconomic fragmentation shape central governments' ability to steer economic trajectories? How do these structural constraints evolve, and how are semi-peripheral regimes attempting to assert greater agency and control over their economies?

#### 10) *Historical political science: Trends, interpretations, perspectives*

Section chairs: Ervin Csizmadia and Daniel Kiss

When we think of politics, we associate it with the present: politics is what is happening today, what we are living in right now, and what we, therefore, explain in contemporary terms. Beyond our borders, however, our discipline takes for granted that many aspects of the political reality of the present can also be interpreted from a historical perspective. Indeed, history can, in many cases, provide relevant explanations for some of the more difficult-to-understand issues of the present.

In contrast, many of us see that political science in Hungary is largely characterised by disciplinary puritanism, with only a few scholars daring to apply interdisciplinary approaches and utilise history in this way. Those committed to historical political science are trying to change this state of affairs, to promote those explanatory principles in the discipline that have made it so rich and diverse abroad.

Our section was created to further this work. Related presentations are welcome in two panels:

- Concepts, trends, theoretical approaches
- Research directions and case studies

To the first panel of the section, we invite abstracts that seek to define the concept of historical political science, outline the characteristics of its mode of approach, and situate it within the realm of political science. In addition, we shall try to identify the most enduring and useful results of the trend (e.g. universal and specific features of political development) and to situate the sub-discipline within the scientific scene. We expect lectures on scientific history, political theory and political history.

We await abstracts on applied historical political science for the second panel: presentations that approach domestic or foreign issues from a historical perspective, either through international comparative studies (e.g. democratisation waves) or through historical-based studies of domestic processes (e.g. recurrent patterns at the level of elites and society, either in party politics and parliamentarism or in inter-group interactions). In addition, we also welcome specific country case studies to explore the causes and nature of uniqueness in contrast to the following of universal models (e.g. through a comparative study of the post-communist development of our region).

### *11) Tendencies of the transformation of international politics*

Section chairs: Krisztina Juhász and Richárd Kószó

The war between Russia and Ukraine has given new impetus to the debate on the transformation of the international system, namely that the unipolar world order based on the hegemonic role of the United States of America since the end of the Cold War is in the process of disintegration and will eventually give way to a multipolar international system. Several emerging countries, that are occasionally challenging the status quo too, have appeared on the horizon (e.g. China, India, Russia), and they are increasingly articulating and seeking to assert their interests, although for the time being mainly in regional terms. Albeit the hegemonic role of the United States of America began to decline in the early 2000s (Vörös – Tarrósy 2024), the process is far from complete, and it is questionable too, how the new posthegemonic world order (Tálas Péter 2021) will look like.

In the context of the transformation of international politics, we are facing not only the transition of the international system but also the nature of power is changing. Besides the hard power of military and economic coercion, the notion of soft power appeared in the 1990s and a bit later the idea of smart power emerged too (Nye 1990; 2009). Additionally, during the 2010s, the concept of sharp power (Walker – Ludwig 2017) was introduced, which is closely linked to the phenomena of hybrid threats and warfare, as well as foreign interference, which poses a series of challenges such as information and disinformation campaigns, or interference to the elections.

Lastly, we are also witnessing the deviation from a more cooperative multilateralism (see the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement or the withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council - the latter followed by Israel), which is complemented by economic protectionism (see the trade protectionist measures also announced by the Trump administration).

Papers and panels related to these issues are invited for this section.

Nye, Joseph Jr. (1990): Soft Power Foreign Policy, No. 80, pp. 153-171.

Nye, Joseph Jr. (2009): Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power Foreign Affairs Vol. 88, No. 4, pp. 160-163.

Tálas Péter (2021): A poszthegeomóniális hatalmi rend „hegemónjáról” *Nemzet és Biztonság* 2021/4. szám pp. 2-3.

Vörös Zoltán – Tarrósy István (szerk.) (2024): *Átalakuló világrend. Az unipoláris pillanat vége?* Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó Budapest, 2024.

Walker, Christopher – Ludwig, Jessica (2017): The Meaning of Sharp Power. How Authoritarian States Project

Influence Foreign Affairs November 16, 2017 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power> (2025.02.12.)

### *12) Open section*



Section chairs: Zsófia Papp and Anna Novák

Proposals not closely related to the above topics are welcome in the open session of the Conference.

### **Application information**

You can apply with a presentation or a full panel (4–5 presentations) by filling out the registration form available on the conference website:

<https://vandorgyules.tk.hu/en/registration>

### **Important deadlines**

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|----------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| – Submission of abstracts                          | 30 March 2025 |
| – Notification on acceptance                       | 7 April 2025  |
| – Registration and payment of the registration fee | 20 April 2025 |
| – Final programme announced                        | 29 April 2025 |

### **Registration fees**

- |                                                          |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| – Members of the Hungarian Political Science Association | 22 000 HUF |
| – Members of the Hungarian Regional Science Association  | 22 000 HUF |
| – External participants                                  | 30 000 HUF |