

Call for Papers

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTHERN EUROPE: DEMOCRATIC DECLINE OR RESILIENCE?

Conference organised by the
Political Studies Association (PSA) Greek, Italian, Spanish & Turkish Politics Specialist Groups,
in conjunction with the ECPR Standing Group on Southern European Politics
and the Aston Centre for Europe

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ASTON UNIVERSITY, BIRMINGHAM, UK

This conference aims to assess the current state of democracy and patterns of governance in five Southern European countries: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey. It has been more than a decade since the Eurozone crisis began and 15 years since Freedom House first observed the retreat of democracy globally. Southern European countries have been at the centre of both events. The financial and political crises have gone hand in hand in Southern Europe and led to observable changes in party systems and regional politics. Taking account of the changes in these past years, the main goal of the conference is to comparatively evaluate relevant developments since the beginning of the 2000s, the reasons behind these, and the prospects of democracy and governance at the periphery of Europe.

The debate on the global decline of democracy has been conceptualized variously as democratic “decay”, “backsliding”, “deconsolidation” or “recession”.¹ Although there is no agreed-upon name, the main observation is the same. In many countries, democracy has undergone detrimental change, to the extent of passing the threshold of authoritarianism in some cases. This type of decline is often more difficult to observe than an abrupt transition from one regime to another.² This is perhaps why the debate on democratic decline in the literature has so far focused mainly on describing the change and what it means for the future of Western democracy.³ Despite this conceptual richness, the literature on democratic

¹ See for instance Levitsky, S. & Ziblatt, D., *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018); Foa, R.S. & Mounk, Y., ‘The Signs of Deconsolidation’, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 2017), pp. 5-16, <<https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-signs-of-deconsolidation/>>; Waldner, D. & Lust, E., ‘Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 21 (May 2018), pp. 93-113; Diamond, L., ‘Facing Up to the Democratic Recession’, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (January 2015), pp. 141-155, <<https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/facing-up-to-the-democratic-recession/>>.

² Levitsky & Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

³ See for instance the ‘Online Exchange on “Democratic Deconsolidation”’, *Journal of Democracy*, June 2017, <<https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exchange-democratic-deconsolidation/>>.

decline has not yet been theoretically linked to the previous literature on transitions from democracy to authoritarianism; nor has it addressed the causes of the recent decline.⁴

Southern Europe holds the key to fill this gap in the literature. As the region where the Third Wave of democracy started, Southern Europe was the centre of attention for the transition paradigm, which dominated the literature in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past 15 years, Southern European countries were among the first to experience democratic decline and problems with effective governance, though some are perhaps also the first to show signs of recuperation.

We invite papers that address these developments in Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal with the goal of explaining them in light of the earlier literature on regime change and the current analyses of global democratic decline. Comparative papers, as well as single case studies, are welcome. Contributions should focus on one or more of the following dimensions:

- Inter-party competition and party system change
- Intra-party democracy (party organisations, role of leaders, role of members)
- Institutions and effective governance, including relations between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and relations between central, regional, local governments
- Role of the media, civil society, interest groups and/or non-governmental organisations
- Role of citizens' perceptions and support for democracy, including public opinion
- Political behaviour, ranging from conventional means of participation (such as elections, referenda, etc) to unconventional methods (such as protests, rallies, violent acts, etc)

Paper titles and abstracts of 150-200 words, along with author names, institutional affiliation and contact details, should be sent to **SouthernEuropeConference@gmail.com** by Monday **16 March 2020**. Limited amount of travel funding may be available. Authors will be informed about funding opportunities and the application process for travel grants after their papers are accepted.

⁴ Waldner & Lust, 'Unwelcome Change'.