



Democratization

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Neo-militant Democracies in Post-communist Member States of the European Union

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BOOK REVIEW

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A huge literature is devoted to research on the causes of, essence, and consequences of democratic backsliding, the deepening of authoritarianism and despotism in contemporary democracies. At the same time, complex studies of those relatively young democratic regimes, which, due to the influence of various powerful factors, are gradually transforming into quasi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes, haven't been a focus of the research mainstream until recently. Most of these regimes are, as a rule, rather small states with relatively recent traditions of democracy, and all of them are defined by the apt term "neo-militant regime". The monograph under review, edited by Joanna Rak and Roman Bäcker, aims to fill the gap in the study of such regimes in the post-communist countries of the European Union. The main research question of the monograph is to determine why particular post-communist European neo-militant democracies emerge, while others decline or transform into quasi-militant democracies, what are similarities and differences between them, and what contributes to their rise and growth.

The monograph opens with a chapter by Joanna Rak and Roman Bäcker, which contains an assessment of the theoretical foundations of the concept of neo-militant democracies in the context four dimensions of democracy and sovereignty of a political nation. The authors identify those dimensions as the level of freedoms of a political nation's participation in society as a whole, the range of essential matters subject to the judgment and decisions of a political nation, the quality of the decision-making process which depends on the way a political nation holds a debate, and the common institutional framework of democracy which include a system of appropriate legal and moral norms. It is important that the criterion proposed by the authors for defining a threat to democratic regime is based not on declarations but on the meaning of political decisions and their projected results. Researchers may use such a multidimensional model to determine the speed and direction of a given political nation's shift on the continuum of ideal types of neo- and quasi-militant democracy. The authors' substantiation of the distinction between neo-militant and quasi-militant democracies at the common continuum is an important contribution to political theory. The authors prove that despite using the same set of tools, the deep difference between these two types of regimes is in the pursued goals. While neo-militant democracies aim to strengthen a political nation and its sovereignty, quasi-militant democracies intend to eliminate the sovereignty of a political nation and to expand and strengthen authoritarianism in various forms under the guise of militant democracy.

The central part of the monograph consists of case studies drawn upon the same methodological framework described above.

The case studies are divided into three parts according to the configuration of neo- and quasi-militant elements in a state's political and legal structures. The authors elegantly solved the problem of the primary typology of cases: the cases of the Baltic countries represent a group of relatively strong democratic regimes, the development of which is complicated by the Soviet legacy (in particular, by the national composition of the population) and the proximity to the hostile Russian Federation. The cases of Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria are united under the telling heading "Triumphs of quasi-militant democracy". This title clearly indicates the position of these countries' regimes on the neo-militant –quasi-militant democracy continuum. Circumstances of individual cases show significant external differences between these regimes, however, paradoxically, a well-chosen methodology captures an essential similarity of these modes within the four-dimensional framework. The third group of cases, to which the authors devoted the third section of the monograph, consists of countries that are still balancing closer to the middle of the distance between the neo-militant and quasi-militant regimes. The authors of the relevant chapters convincingly attribute the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia to such countries.

The main conclusions of the case studies are supported by a brilliant comparative analysis by Agnieszka Bien-Kacała from the comparative constitutional law perspective and by Joanna Rak and Roman Bäcker in the comparative politics aspect. Particularly, Joanna Rak and Roman Bäcker describe the most important instrument of quasi-militant democracy, the manipulation of fear.

Despite the monograph is devoted to the study of the period 2008–2019, contemporary events show the relevance of the authors' methodology for studying new facets of the development of neo-militant and quasi-militant democracies, especially in the aspect of manipulating fear, which immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic-related fears mentioned by the authors is accompanied with the fears associated with Russian armed aggression against Ukraine and hybrid aggression against EU countries and, first of all, post-communist EU countries. Undoubtedly, similar studies of neo-militant democracies should be expected to continue in the future. The events of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 and the growing threat from Russia to the post-communist EU countries will undoubtedly become additional factors in the development of militant democracies. Moreover, it should be expected that the events of the war will expand the interest of the authors of such studies to external factors in the development of militant democracies, among which, in addition to the direct threat of invasion, there will be external economic pressure, cyber-attacks, and various means of hybrid wars. After the active phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war is over, Ukraine may very well turn into a specific but intriguing example of such a regime. The authors achieved their research goals. The book is undoubtedly strong in the integrity of its methodology and case studies. At the same time, the study would have benefited if the proposed methodology of assessing a political nation's decision-making processes had separately taken into account the opportunities and risks of manipulation with the help of modern digital media.

In view of the above, the monograph is recommended as a sound contribution to case studies of contemporary political regimes in the post-communist EU countries. It provides a common methodological foundation for future research on young democracies and comparative studies. Professionals in political theory, applied politics,

and simulations of political processes will benefit from familiarizing themselves with the monograph's grounded methodology and cases.

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