

We would like to draw your attention to our upcoming ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop on **The Technocratic Challenge to Democracy: Experts, Elites and the People**.

Democratic governments around the world are forced to deal with the increasing need for technocrats and expertise for effective governance, while at the same time remaining committed to and representative of the citizens who voted for them. The aim of this workshop is to dissect the uneasy alliance between technocrats and democrats at a time when the tension between the two is becoming more and more apparent. The key question explored in the workshop is how can we understand the role of technocracy and the political power of experts within democratic political systems? Before being able to define the best role for independent experts within representative democratic systems, we need to address the following series of questions: How much 'technocracy' is actually entailed in our democracies? What are the consequences of technocratic-based decision-making and how do citizens evaluate it? To what extent does independent expertise facilitate democracy and at what point does the technocrats' power pose a serious impediment to representative democracy? Lastly, and crucially for the future of democratic political systems, does technocracy share the blame for the challenges to party-government and the populist turn in many established democracies, or could it provide insights on how to counter the denigration of expertise and post-factual politics?

As the theme of this workshop draws upon work from various sub-fields of political science, we expect to bring together scholars working on the facets of technocratic politics; political representation, democratic legitimacy, experts in parties, cabinets and parliaments, the role of independent institutions and agencies, EU politics, as well as political attitudes and citizen preferences for different types of governance.

The workshop will take place between April 10 and 14, 2018 at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus. You can view the full workshop details below. If you would like to join us, please apply through this link. The deadline for proposals is **December 6, 2017**.

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Workshop Outline

Questions about technocratic politics have become increasingly relevant for political scientist, yet the existing academic work remains fragmented and is looking for a more systematic treatment in its diversity. Significant, but isolated theoretical investigations of the relationship between technocracy and representative democracy are informing the growing debate on the challenges to party democracy (Caramani 2017; Schmidt 2011; Meynaud 1969; Fischer 1990). Similarly, the appointment of technical executives, technocratic cabinets and independent expert ministers in diverse democratic systems around the world have prompted scholars to investigate their effects on policy and democratic accountability status (Centeno and Silva 1998; De la Tore 2013; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2012). We argue that technocracy is present not only in such independent expert appointments, but also in parties and parliaments across different countries and continents, in political language, communication

and policies formulated, as well as in citizen attitudes towards their political systems. Despite the difficulty in defining and measuring technocratic politics, or precisely because of this difficulty, we should study its role, the benefits it brings and costs it places upon existing democratic systems.

We expect that this workshop will bring together a collection of papers that will cover theoretical questions of technocracy and its relationship to democracy, as well as empirical papers on instances of technocratic politics, such as technocratic cabinets, parties and experts, independent institutions and agencies. We also expect papers to cover different world regions and levels of governance. We encourage works from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Empirical papers may be focused on one case study that can shed light on particular aspects of technocracy. Nevertheless, we particularly welcome empirical papers that are comparative in nature, as well as those that propose methodological innovations in the study of technocratic politics.

Earlier research:

Technocracy can be found in political thought as early as Plato's 'Philosopher King' and subsequently, following the wave of industrialization changes, in Taylorism and the Technocratic Movement of the 1930s (Akin 1977) and the writings of Saint-Simon (Saint-Simon 1952). As the 'technicization' and complexity of governance increased in the late 20th century, it also brought a surge of non-partisan, expert politics aimed at neutralizing conflict and promoting effective governance (Putnam 1977; Majone 1994; Radaelli 1999). Yet scholars highlighted the political power concealed in technical and expert-based politics, which could undermine the accountability of party-based government (Centeno and Silva 1998; Habermas 2015; Fischer 1990). The escalating pressures leveled at the partisan model of representative democracy from disaffected and critical citizens on the one hand (Norris 2001, Goldhammer and Rosanvallon 2008), extreme, populist and nativist politics on the other (Mudde 2004) have inadvertently brought to center stage the question of technocratic politics. The most recent theoretical investigations of technocracy by Bickerton and Invernizzi (2015) and Caramani (2017) provide an insightful framework that understands technocracy as a challenger to party-based representative democracy, and hence a partial complement to populism, but also an alternative form of representation and political power in its own right. The rejection of experts and elites in key democratic decisions, and the simultaneous urgency for performance-oriented competent governance is an example of these very tensions.

Another group of scholars has devoted attention to the specific case of technocratic government appointments, not only the recent string of such cabinets in the last decade in Italy, Greece, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and other European countries. McDonnell and Valbruzzi (2014) provided a much needed typology for studying technocratic cabinets based on their remit and composition, while Pastorella (2015) placed them side by side to electorally selected cabinets to compare their democratic credentials and assess their legitimacy. While the appointment of pure technocratic governments or technocrat-led governments attracts considerable attention from the public, it is still considered a rare event, usually as a response to an economic or political emergency. Less discernable, yet much more pervasive in democratic systems are the influential technically-trained ministerial appointments, which may stir policy away from party lines (Alexiadou 2016; Dargent 2015) and policy constraints posed by the EU, regulatory bodies and independent agencies (Habermas 2015; Centeno 1994). Studies on South and Central America have tried to identify the policy influence of technically trained elites (Centeno and Silva 1998, Dargent 2015),

while Alexiadou (2015) and Strom and Neto (2006) have sought to explain the logic of such appointments under different political systems and external constraints. Nevertheless, the impact of technocrats in cabinets and parliaments on policy, on government stability and on political party performance are only now beginning to be assessed.

Until recently, scholars focusing on ‘independent expertise’ or ‘technical management’ aimed at and promoting a successful regulatory state have contributed to a separate literature on supranational entities, non-state forms of governance and non-partisan agencies (O’Donnell 1994; Crouch 2011; Radaelli 1999). The democratic deficit of the EU was counter-balanced in the early years of the Union with an emphasis on output legitimacy and the technical nature of its policy-making that could deliver efficient governance (Majone 1994; Rauch 2016). However, the euro-crisis and the subsequent grievous imbalances exposed between member states undermined the entire edifice of apolitical decision-making and instigated a forceful backlash against ‘unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels’ and ‘unelected experts’ across the continent (Sanchez-Cuenca 2017). The, now infamous, statement by Michael Gove during the Brexit campaign that “this country has had enough of experts” appeared to resonate with large parts of the British people ahead of the EU referendum. Nevertheless, both the UK and the EU will still have to rely on unprecedented amounts of expertise along various policy sectors to proceed with the country’s extraction from the Union. It remains to be seen how modern democracies can respond to the ever-increasing need for expertise and effective governance in a highly interconnected world in terms of economy, security, energy and environment, and an increasing disdain for intellectualism and the scientific community (Fischer, 2009).

Academic research focusing on citizen attitudes towards experts and preferences for different types of governance is also relevant and crucial for understanding this paradox of a simultaneous rejection of and demand for more independent experts. The stealth democracy literature (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) has highlighted the growing preference for more ‘efficient and objective’ political decision-making among democratic citizenries around the world (Coffé and Michels 2014). A recent exploration of technocratic attitudes among European citizens has also revealed that political decision making by unelected experts is an appealing alternative to many Europeans and it is coupled with a rejection of party-based model of representative democracy (Bertsou and Pastorella 2017). Although technocratic attitudes have not received as much attention as populist attitudes among democratic citizenries, the existing literature is pointing to mounting tensions between the demands of diverse citizen groups; for more objective, non-partisan decision making on the one hand, and for more responsive governance and citizen input through direct democratic processes on the other. Further study in this area is needed to help political scientists understand how the opinion of experts and technocrats is portrayed in public discourse and how it weighs in current political debates, as citizens are called to make decisions about policies at national and international levels and answer difficult questions in referenda.

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