



National-Level Political Innovations: Concepts, Institutions, and Ambiguities of Democratic Renewal

At Pázmány Péter Catholic University, PPKE-Faculty of Law and Political Science,
Dean's Council Room,

1088- Budapest, [Szentkirályi u. 28-30](#)

On 28 November 2025

Political systems around the world are undergoing profound transformations. While the nation-state remains the primary framework for organising legitimacy, authority, and collective decision-making, its traditional democratic institutions are being increasingly questioned and reconfigured. Although debates on democratic innovation often focus on local experiments or transnational cooperation, the national level remains crucial in determining the extent and significance of political participation, representation, and sovereignty in the 21st century.

Innovations at this level take many forms. These include new institutional arrangements, participatory mechanisms, and digital tools, as well as conceptual and discursive innovations that redefine our understanding of democracy, legitimacy, and citizenship. Importantly, such innovations are not limited to democratic systems. Authoritarian and hybrid regimes are increasingly imitating democratic practices and adopting participatory rhetoric, not to deepen democracy, but to reinforce control, legitimacy, and stability. This duality—innovation as both democratization and simulation—raises fundamental questions about the future of political systems.

The aim of this conference is to explore political innovations at the national level, including both democratic and authoritarian, as well as conceptual and empirical innovations. We invite contributions that examine how states and political elites reinterpret the language and institutions of democracy, adapt to social and technological change, and strategically innovate to maintain power. How do such innovations alter the conceptual boundaries of democracy, representation, and participation? What kinds of institutional and procedural creativity can be observed across different political regimes? How do citizens and civil society actors respond to, resist, or adopt these innovations?

Through this conference, we aim to promote a nuanced understanding of innovation as a political phenomenon—one that has the potential to revitalise democratic governance, yet which can also be exploited by authoritarian regimes to strengthen their hold on power. By examining the conceptual and institutional dynamics of innovation at a national level, we seek to reconsider the potential and constraints of democratic renewal in the 21st century.



PROGRAMME:

Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Dean's Council Room)

Introduction

09.00-09.15 László Komáromi/Csaba Madarász/Zoltán Tibor Pállinger

Panel 1: Conceptional Foundations

09.15-09.45 László Komáromi: „The Use of Referendums in the Practice of Communist Regimes in the Eastern Bloc between 1945 and 1989”

09.45-10.15 Dragan Prole: „Democracy Beyond Political Parties - Organisation from Below”

10.15-10.45 Zoltán Tibor Pállinger: „Subverting Democratic Innovations: Autocratic Appropriation of Democratic Instruments”

10.45-11.00 Coffee Break

11.00-11.30 Dániel Oross: „How Voters, Party Members, and Politicians See Deliberation in Hungary”

11.30-12.00 Ellen Bos: „How to prevent electoral defeat? The undermining of democratic elections by doctoring electoral laws”

Pázmány University building tour 12:00- 12:30

Lunch Break 12.30-14.00



Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Dean's Council Room)

Panel 2: Political Innovations

- 14.00-14.30 Máté Szabó: „Families of ombuds institutions in Europa? National and Regional differences”
- 14.30-15.00 Csaba Madarász: „Obvious opportunities for expanding direct democratic rights in Hungary and the European Union following the introduction of official digital signatures (EUID) in Europe and Hungary”
- 15.00-15.30 Melani Barlai: „Training Democracy: Electoral Integrity and the Institutionalization of Poll Worker Education in Europe”

15.30-15.45 Coffee Break

- 15.45-16.15 Uwe Serdült: „Democratising Election Campaign Financing with the Help of a Voucher System”
- 16.15-16.45 Arne Pautsch: „The Citizens' Assembly on Nutrition in Germany: a missed opportunity?”

Concluding Remarks

- 16.45-17.15 László Komáromi/Csaba Madarász/Zoltán Tibor Pállinger