VALPOP

Understanding the influence of societal networks on the distribution of public goods

Fair and equal access to public goods

Fair and equal access to public goods, such as clean air and water, education and information, is a fundamental principle in democratic societies governed by the rule of law. Yet, in practice, the co-creation, governance and distribution of these goods can be shaped by competing interests, with outcomes that may limit access to certain social groups.

Our mission

The VALPOP project investigates how societal actors such as politicians, businesses, media and civil society organisations interact and influence the governance of public goods in Europe. We focus particularly on the role of networked populism: the way populist ideas and behaviours from individuals spread through interconnected social and political networks and affect decision-making.

By examining such connections, VALPOP provides insights into how the influence of societal networks operates across systems and how governance can be strengthened to prevent the misappropriation and misallocation of public goods.

Our goal

To support policymakers, institutions, organisations and citizens in ensuring fair, transparent governance of public goods through evidence-based practices, robust checks and balances and active civic participation.

Examples of public goods

» Public infrastructure

» Free press & access to information

» Biodiversity

» Education

Approach

01 First, we collect data about societal networks and public goods outcomes in a contemporary and historical context. By combining information from news articles, social media, corporate, local and national policies, regulations and electoral rules, we create extensive datasets of societal networks and public goods over the last ten years and identify populist rhetoric in the public discourse.

02 The data are then analysed and combined with experimental studies to understand how societal networks affect the distribution and valuation of public goods as well as their socio-economic consequences. The focus is on how certain interest groups and layers of society use networks to transform public goods into club goods - goods that are accessible only to specific members or groups - with a particular emphasis on the role of populist actors in these processes.

03 Based on the obtained knowledge, VALPOP will produce recommendations for measures to strengthen governance and audit mechanisms in the distribution of public goods and in the reporting of their use. One such measure is the involvement of civic society in the decision-making processes to help safeguard the rule of law and prevent the misappropriation of public goods by societal networks and populist actors.

Methodology

VALPOP uses cutting-edge **computational social science methods** to investigate networked populism in Europe and beyond.

» Data collection

The project applies text mining methods to large-scale data sources:

- News articles and social media for information about network dynamics and populism

- Corporate financial reports for information about issues related to the rule of law, populism and salient public goods

- Local electoral rules, remuneration policies and regulations to capture variations in the rule of law across Europe

- Public goods and tender data to establish the state, condition and distribution of public goods over the last ten years

» Data analysis

The project will employ machine learning, econometric, network analysis and experimental study methods to investigate public goods' outcomes, quantify social costs and conduct comparative analyses:

- Establishing how societal networks influence public goods' outcomes and their interaction with populism and the rule of law

- Determining how different network structures and degrees of networked populism facilitate the misappropriation and misuse of public goods

- Quantifying the social costs and benefits of different populist scenarios and policies, the rule of law and public goods outcomes

- Comparing results across local and national governance levels, different contexts and periods

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KEY OUTPUTS

Datasets of societal networks, their levels of populism and the value of public goods

Open-source tools for detecting network relations in unstructured texts

Academic studies on the relationship between societal networks, the creation of public goods and the distribution of their value based on the rule of law

Policy briefings documents on governance measures and civic participation in the context of public goods

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Valuing Public Goods in a Populist World
A Comparative Analysis of Network Dynamics
and Societal Outcomes

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