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**Social Responsibility of the State? The Welfare State and Legitimacy of the State**
Michael Ochsner, FORS Lausanne and ETH Zurich, Switzerland

**Abstract:**
Europe has seen a rise of populist parties recently and, in some countries, democracy is at danger as country leaders extend their power, cutting back freedom of press and academia. These challenges to the legitimacy of the democratic state coincide with a long period of neoliberal ideology and new public management, which was often linked to a reduction in public service and cutbacks of social security. At the same time, there has been a severe economic crisis causing precarity.

My research asks whether, against the neoliberal paradigm, the state has a social responsibility for the weak. Is there a link between how people perceive the welfare state and the legitimacy of the state? Does this link differ between countries, controlled for several predictors of legitimacy? I will apply multilevel modeling as well as two step regression models (accounting for differences in determinants of legitimacy between countries) to the second release of EVS2017. Preliminary results with the first prerelease of the EVS2017 show that there is considerable variance between countries in perceived legitimacy. There is also variance in how much the confidence in the functioning of the social security system affects the perceived legitimacy of the state: In Eastern Europe, the effect of the confidence in the social security system on legitimacy is stronger while the level of confidence is lower; at the same time, the preference for a strong leader is more pronounced. The results thus suggest that investing in social solidarity might reinforce legitimacy of the democratic state.