



Cultures of Democracy in Serbia and Bulgaria: How Ideas Shape Publics (Southeast European Studies)

James Dawson

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At a time when some EU member states are attracting attention for the rise to power of illiberal, anti-democratic political movements, this book's analytical focus on ideas and identities helps explain why institutional progress is not necessarily reflected in the formation of liberal, democratic publics. Starting from the premise that citizens can only uphold the institutions of liberal democracy when they understand and identify with the principles enshrined in them, the author applies normative public sphere theory to the analysis of political discourse and everyday discussion in Serbia and Bulgaria. From this perspective, the Serbian public sphere is observed to be more contested, pluralist and, at the margins, liberal than that of Bulgaria. Considering that Bulgaria has been a full EU member since 2007 while Serbia remains stuck in the waiting room, it is argued that democratic cultures are not shaped by elite-led drives to meet institutional criteria but rather by the spread of ideas through politics, the media and the discussions of citizens. Moving beyond the narrow focus on institutions that currently prevails in studies of democratization, this book demonstrates the value of a more ethnographic and society-oriented approach.

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