process brought the National Assembly into a subservient position. A particular characteristic of this period of economic crisis was the absence of legislative-strengthening projects and expert counseling. This lack was especially unfortunate given that the National Assembly had no previous experience in dealing with an economic crisis or countering its effects. Our research confirmed the results of previous investigations indicating that prolonged weak economic conditions have a strong impact on political stability, survival of governments, and early termination of parliaments in Western Europe (Warwick 1992, 885). It also contributes new knowledge to existing theory by attempting to explain the effects of an economic crisis on a country that has been especially vulnerable to external economic shocks. At the same time, our analysis shows the key influence of the EU in the economic and financial policy areas of a member country, especially when the EU recommends a number of national policy goals and austerity measures (Olson and Ilonszki 2011, 250). ■

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GRADUAL EROSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL MANDATE AND THE SHIFT TO MAJORITARIANISM IN POLAND

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DOI: 10.1017/S1049096518002263

In recent years, Poland has joined a growing number of countries plagued by democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2003) as opposition parties have failed to challenge the ruling party's infringement on the rule of law (Nalepa 2016; 2017). Many pundits, policy makers, and even scholars (Sadurski 2018) have been quick to blame this state of affairs on the weakness of formal institutions.

We take a different view and argue that institutional features blocking the opposition from effectively limiting grand policy changes have been in place for at least a decade. Furthermore, strong rather than weak institutions—particularly those governing the executive–legislative relations—allowed for shutting out the opposition from any institutionalized forms of protest.

We take a different view and argue that institutional features blocking the opposition from effectively limiting grand policy changes have been in place for at least a decade. Furthermore, strong rather than weak institutions—particularly those governing the executive–legislative relations—allowed for shutting out the opposition from any institutionalized forms of protest.

At the time of Poland's transition to democratic rule in 1989, provisions were put in place to suppress the emergence of strong parties. The rationale behind this choice was clear: majoritarianism was not a viable basis for establishing power sharing due to conflict among elites relating to pre-transition matters. In contrast, consensus institutions offered the flexibility necessary to reduce the power of factions (Lijphart 2012).

Three key institutions were used to implement this consensus model: (1) strong individual mandates of individual legislators, (2) recorded voting, and (3) the open-list proportional representation (OLPR) electoral system. The first was meant to enable private Members of Parliament (MPs) to propose legislation whenever they could gather 15 signatures from other private MPs. Cabinet proposals had to pass stringent requirements. Recorded voting was supposed to signal to voters how their representatives voted so they could hold them accountable. By allowing voters to control the order in which candidates from a party list enter the legislature, OLPR was to raise the costs of party discipline (Carey 2007) and result in less unified and weaker parties (Kitschelt 1995).

In summary, proportional-representation parliamentarism "should have" promoted consensus institutions, but it did not. Instead, the "center of gravity" among the three branches of government shifted to the cabinet—specifically, the office of the prime minister, who proceeded to use other governmental institutions, especially the legislature, as an extension of his powers (Nalepa 2016). Party leaders eventually overcame institutional handicaps and turned legislative prerogatives into tools of majoritarian control. The accumulation of the leadership powers of the lower house (i.e., the Sejm) in the hands of a single agent—namely, the Marszałek, who became an emissary of the ruling party—is only one example. Eventually, even the powers of private members to propose legislation more easily than cabinet members were usurped by ruling parties that banned their members from cosponsoring bills with other parties' members and used their own members to propose legislation that had been prepared in ministerial departments. Consequently, whereas in the third Sejm, 30% of proposals that reached a final vote came from private opposition MPs, in the current eighth term, very few proposals made it to the floor agenda (Nalepa 2017).

Recorded voting, according to Carey (2007), should decrease the power that political leaders hold over their members because it makes them aware of constituents' observing them and toeing the party line that much more difficult. However, in large assemblies in which the volume of votes is high, the constituency pressure is overshadowed by the ease with which party leaders can monitor how their members voted. Indeed, the fact that Sejm votes started being recorded as roll calls stems exclusively from the collective action of party leaders, who bypassing the Sejm's rules for recording, pressured the Sejm staff to release to them—first secretly and then publicly—the rolls of every single Sejm vote.

Undermining parties via OLPR was supposed to promote the independence of individual legislators. However, party leaders used candidate selection to recruit like-minded members who did not need to be disciplined to vote with the party leadership because

they already shared their leaders' policy. A by-product of this process was the emergence of programmatic parties.

Whereas scholars applaud the emergence of programmatic parties (Kitschelt 1995), in a new democracy such as Poland, the combination of programmaticism, majoritarianism, and high societal polarization is particularly threatening. Once the majoritarian control of the Sejm—largely emulating that of the US House of Representatives (Rohde 1991), although without strong institutional checks characteristic of the US Constitution (Patty 2007)—had been established, functioning as an incoherent party was no longer an option. To even have a chance at governing—a task at which both Civic Platform and Law and Justice (PiS) succeeded—acting as a unified party has become an absolute necessity. Moreover, while in the government, a party had the means and—given high polarization—the incentive to shut out any voice from the opposition. Consequently, by 2018, the only opposition to the rule of PiS is coming from street protesters and the European Union. ■

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DE-DEMOCRATIZATION: THE CASE OF HUNGARY IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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DOI: 10.1017/S1049096518002275

In this decade, we can observe a process of de-democratization in countries having experienced a political transformation, democratic consolidation, and Europeanization (Szymański 2017). The strengthening of the executive power at the cost of the parliament is a part of this process. In this article, Hungary is compared with Poland and Turkey to demonstrate that this phenomenon occurs in more than a single region. I argue that the deterioration of the standards of a liberal democracy has only strengthened the dominance of the executive power that has been gradually developing since the mid-1990s.

Parliamentary systems—those with a limited role for the president (with some delay in Poland) and a position of prominence for a parliament—were a reality at beginning of the 1990s. In Hungary, the "coordinate" parliamentarianism meant that although the legislative initiative belonged to the government, the parliament was "strong enough to get some of its legislature approved" (Ilonszki 2007, 55). However, changes from the mid-1990s to 2010 led to an increase in the role of the executive and incumbents, especially relative to the parliament and opposition.

In Hungary, the number of parliamentary parties decreased (due to the electoral system and the threshold) and bipolarization increased. This resulted in the development of majoritarianism, which meant the dominance of incumbents in the parliamentary bodies. Moreover, an increasing number of government laws were approved whereas opposition proposals were blocked (Zubek 2011). Incumbents also used questions or interpellations as a means for government deputies to publicize governmental policies. Furthermore, the formal institutionalization of the parliament (following the legalistic tradition of communism) meant it had formal competences but no real authority. Paradoxically, the EU accession process also contributed to a relatively stronger government, primarily due to the EU's "fast-track legislative procedures." Almost all of these factors could be identified in Poland and many of them in Turkey, although the timing of their appearance differed (Ilonszki 2007; Mansfeldová 2011).

These factors created a fertile breeding ground for a more noticeable strengthening of executive power and the power of incumbents after 2010. This was the result of an assumption and consolidation of power by single-party governments or those with a dominating coalition partner (e.g., Hungary), which then preferred a majoritarian understanding of democracy. These consolidations took place in Hungary and Turkey through subsequent elections, in which incumbents made extensive use of their advantage. Hungary's particular "supermajoritarianism" (since 2010) means that Fidesz and its partner have a two-thirds majority and, therefore, the possibility to change the constitution or appoint people to the judiciary, electoral, or media bodies without participation of the opposition (Pozsár-Szentmiklósy 2017).

Further strengthening of executive power in Hungary and other countries is a part of demolishing the system of checks and balances. However, although we observe a similar strengthening of executive power at the cost of the judiciary, there are differences between Central Europe and Turkey in government and parliamentary relationships (influenced by different political cultures and historical experiences).

Any legal short-term measures attempting to restore balance between the legislative and executive branches in Hungary and other countries seem to be either counterproductive (e.g., new competences for parliaments) or unrealistic (e.g., returning to procedures that guarantee the influence of all parties in the parliament). What remains is to consider long-term measures that may reverse the current trends in the party/political systems.