

power among multiple political institutions. This allows a parliament to maintain its institutional strength and prevent a president from assuming full power in a country. At the same time, a mixed governmental system coupled with a mixed election system allows a president to take on more power at the expense of a parliament. As a result, the parliament is weakened—but more slowly and to a lesser degree than in a presidential system. ■

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## A NEW PARLIAMENT IN THE ECONOMIC CRISIS: SLOVENIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 2008–2016

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DOI: 10.1017/S1049096518002251

In contemporary parliamentary research, the impact of external economic factors was linked primarily to electoral outcomes or even to the change of power relations within national political systems, whereas attempts to link them to the duration or early

economic system—which has remained particularly sensitive and vulnerable to external economic shocks (Mansfeldova 2011, 127).

This article is based on the hypothesis that economic crises have had a particular effect on the social conditions of large groups of population and, consequently, on the political stability manifested by great shifts of support to political parties. The impact of economic shocks is further linked to the stability of parliaments and coalition governments, whereby stability is understood as a parliament's or a government's capacity to complete its mandate. Political instability frequently reduces the possibility of regularly scheduled elections and increases the probability of conflictual cabinet termination and early elections.

To evaluate the impact of the economic crisis in Slovenia from 2008 to 2016, we used statistical data from the World Bank (2016) showing time trends in main economic indicators—namely, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate and changes in the unemployment rate during this period. We compared these data with those from seven other Central European countries: Italy, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Spain, and Croatia. Until 2008, positive trends were evident in GDP growth in all seven countries. The negative effects of the economic crisis in Slovenia first became clearly evident in 2009, when the Slovenian GDP declined by 7.8%. Within the comparison countries, a similar decline was observed only in Hungary (–6.6%) and Croatia (–7.4%). The second indicator that had the most significant direct effect on social conditions of Slovenian citizens was the unemployment rate. It showed a drastic change, dramatically increasing after 2009 from 4.4%, to 8.8% in 2012, and to 10.1% in 2013. Similar changes were observed during the same period in Hungary, Czech Republic, and Croatia.

These basic time trends in the main economic indicators are strongly connected to rates of the Slovene National Assemblies' and governments' terminations. In 2008–2016, there were two early elections and one change of government by a constructive no-confidence vote. The Slovene experience illustrates that the effects of an economic crisis on the stability of the National Assembly and the governments were not direct and immediate. The worsening of social conditions for many citizens had a significant impact on their support for traditional political parties, which were unable to find efficient measures to exit the crisis. These shifts in the support for political parties were demonstrated by high electoral volatility in comparison with previous elections and with other states of the region. Whereas the electoral volatility in Slovenia from 1992 to 2000 was 22% (Bielasiak 2005, 331), it increased to 40% from 2004 to 2014. As a consequence,

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termination of the mandates of parliaments and governments were rare. The impact of economic downturns on the survival of national parliaments and governments, as witnessed in recent years, warrants more attention. It is even more intriguing to attempt to relate economic conditions to the survival of parliaments, especially in new democratic countries such as Slovenia, where the process of democratization implied the transformation of the entire

several new and insufficiently consolidated parties entered the National Assembly. New coalitions were formed among old and new political parties, and governments formed on the basis of ad hoc anti-crisis programs. Subject to pressure from the EU, these governments used constitutional provisions to exert influence on the legislative process. They did so by prioritizing specific matters on the agenda and using fast-track procedures. This

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