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## Parallel System Narratives—Polish and Hungarian regime formations compared A structuralist essay

The Polish election results of 2015 seem to have brought Hungarian and Polish development into synchronicity again, a congruence that has been apparent many times throughout history. At first glance, it may appear that we are dealing with regimes of an identical nature, especially taking into account the similarities of the authoritarian politics practiced by Jarosław Kaczyński (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) and Viktor Orbán (*Fiatat Demokraták Szövetsége*, Fidesz), characterized by a tendency to eliminate autonomous social forces and control mechanisms, as well as the application of similar ideological frames.

But beneath the superficial similarities, these attempts are aimed at establishing different types of autocratic regimes—as this paper ultimately concludes. Orbán’s regime, which I define as a mafia state, is built on the twin motivations of power centralization and the accumulation of personal and family wealth; the instrument of its power is the adopted political family, freed of the limitations posed by formal institutions. Kaczyński’s regime is better described as a conservative-autocratic experiment, driven by ambitions of power and ideological inclinations. The active subject of the Polish experiment in autocracy is the ruling right-wing party, PiS. While the Hungarian regime essentially exploits ideology for pragmatic purposes, the Polish regime is driven by ideology.

The widely-held kindred spirit of Polish and Hungarian people is cemented in historically extant socio-structural parallels, rather than particular historical links. These include the traditionally high proportion within

both societies of the middle nobility, the defining role of the feudalistic culture they transmitted, as well as the assimilation of this former nobility into the structure of modern state bureaucracy following the decline in the political and economic influence it previously enjoyed. Their shared historical fates, despite the apparent historical similarities, are based as much in myth as fact. In much of the nineteenth century the lack of sovereignty, the independence struggles against absolutist dynasties, the similarities in the way the nations were formed, the feudal serfdom, and the absence of industrialization were common to both nations. But while Poland, separated into three parts, was almost homogeneously Catholic, Hungary, while being predominantly Catholic, had strong, influential Protestant churches as well. While the Protestant churches were more in favor of independence, the Catholics institutionally stood more for loyalty to the ruling house. The Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867 brought Hungary quasi-sovereignty and half a century of extraordinary economic prosperity. The nationalities comprising the majority of the population, however, also faced many restraints and state-driven efforts of assimilation. World War I concluded very differently for the two countries. Poland regained its territory, independence and sovereignty. Hungary, on the other hand, not only lost two-thirds of its territory and half of its population, but also the middle power status it believed to have as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In addition, it had to pay punishing war reparations and face serious military restrictions. Both countries experienced either perceived or real betrayal by the West (Hungary in 1920, 1947, and 1956; Poland in 1939 and 1945).

A long quarter century after regime change in 1989, the rule of both the PiS and Fidesz seem to display certain characteristics that have their roots in the period between the two World Wars. Although the regimes hallmarked by the figures of Horthy and Piłsudski show a good deal of similarity, there were also a number of structural differences between the two.

Despite the great difference in the roles the two countries played in World War II, both became communist dictatorships integrated into the Soviet sphere of influence after 1945. At the same time, divergent courses of development in the period from 1945 to 1989 are also apparent, and these continue to determine the different attitudes of their societies today.

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## From regaining independent statehood to World War II

At the end of World War I, **an independent, autonomous and sovereign Polish state was established** after a gap of one hundred and twenty-three years. The borders of the new Poland were the result of military conflict, uprisings, and a war fought against the Soviet Russian state. **The Polish political elite and society felt they were victors**, and became defenders of the new European status quo. The new Poland had become **a remarkably heterogeneous state in ethnic and cultural terms**, with no significant number of Polish people outside its borders. Only a small segment of the large Jewish population assimilated, a majority kept apart both socially and culturally.

The formation of the Polish state was closely tied to the figure of Marshal **Józef Piłsudski**, though he did not accept any **formal political office**. The constitution of 1921 was one of the most democratic constitutions in Europe, with the predominance of **legislative power**.

According to Piłsudski's understanding of nationhood, **citizenship consciousness was more important than a sense of national-ethnic belonging** where the relationship of the individual to society

Paradoxically the **birth of an independent Hungarian state was simultaneously entwined with national trauma**. In the now sovereign Kingdom of Hungary (which happened to be a monarchy without a monarch), brought about by the Peace Treaty of Trianon following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, **Hungarian society felt beaten and humiliated**, and strived to change the European status quo. The Little Entente constructed around Hungary with French backing isolated the country internationally. The new Hungary became an **ethnically homogeneous nation state**, but remained heterogeneous denominationally, while a quarter of ethnic Hungarians were stranded in the neighboring successor states.

**Miklós Horthy's** authoritarian regime was limited to the forced path of **grievance politics grounded in Trianon**, with growing power for the Regent. No constitution was ratified in Hungary, and the political praxis shifted weight towards **preponderant executive powers**.

The politics of the **Horthy era** realized the concept of a homogenous nation state (with Schwab and Jewish minorities). In the relationship between the individual and the community **the nation**

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was concerned, since Poland was a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous state. Piłsudski's **state (rather than ethnic) nationalism** declined to give a unified ideological image to the nation. He considered loyalty towards the state of prime importance for all ethnicities. Piłsudski's concept of the nation was relatively democratic: **all who are loyal to the state are members of the nation**. Piłsudski's **chief opponents** were the national democrats, composed in part of the **large land-holding aristocracy**, and in part of the petite-bourgeois educated classes with close ties to the Church. At the same time, however, the middle classes themselves were rather weak. Furthermore, the existence of a five-million strong Ukrainian minority, which responded to repression with separatist ambitions, caused quite a problem, destabilizing his premise of the state.

- The political system was largely in pieces, and due to the **democratic electoral laws not a single party could gain a majority** in the Sejm until 1930. In a system reminiscent of the former Polish “noble republic,” governments crumbled one after the other. Society soon became disillusioned with the unstable political system, and Piłsudski took advantage of this in his 1926 coup. Even the communists, forced underground, welcomed this turn.

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**overshadowed everything**. Horthy's **ethno-nationalism** gave the regime a unified ideological image proclaiming a “Hungarian cultural superiority.” The most important factor was not loyalty to the state, but ethnic belonging to the Hungarian state. Though a decisive majority of Hungarian Jewry assimilated, even this did not make it possible for them to win acceptance into the state apparatus, and did not protect them from discrimination, or prevent the ultimate murder of the overwhelming proportion of them during the Holocaust. This was a “controlled democracy,” in which it was **always “the nation” that governed**: that is, the **large landholding aristocracy and the landed nobility**. Moreover, the defensive mechanisms of the state-dependent gentry elite only strengthened the closed, feudal nature of the regime.

- Continuing **electoral constraints** and an **open ballot** (unlike anywhere else in Europe) ensured the operation of a **dominant party system overseen by the government parties**, in which marginal roles were afforded to the left, liberal, and until the mid-1930s, extreme right-wing parties. Mandates of a two-thirds majority were frequent (Unified Party 1922: 58%, 1926: 69%, 1931: 64%; Party of National Unity 1935: 69%; Party of Hungarian Life 1939: 73%).

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- At the time, Poland still had **the right to strike and freedom of assembly**, along with **independent workers' unions**. The communist party was finally brought to its knees and liquidated not by Piłsudski, but the Comintern under Stalin. The main **opponents of the system were the radicalized and anti-Semitic national democrats** (Camp of Greater Poland, National Party, National Radical Camp). **No anti-Jewish laws were passed** or Jewish wealth expropriated and redistributed after the coup, or under the so-called “rule of the generals” after Piłsudski’s death. Still, there were many atrocities committed against Jews during this time, including discriminatory local regulations, the “ghetto seats” for Jews at the universities to which the government turned a blind eye, and attacks on shops and markets. After Piłsudski’s death the whole government camp also shifted heavily to the far right.
- Poland was **threatened by Germany from the start**, a danger that became even more stark after Hitler took power. The German-Soviet Treaty of 1922 in Rapallo constantly hung as the Sword of Damocles over Poland. Piłsudski and Foreign Minister Józef Beck **rejected the block policies**, joining neither the Little-Entente

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- In 1922, Prime Minister István Bethlen forced a pact upon the **social democrats**. **In exchange for official permission to exist, they renounced recruiting** state employees, rail workers, and postal workers, limited their propaganda work among agricultural workers, gave up organizing mass strikes and republican propaganda, desisted from criticism of foreign policy, and took up a moderate opposition stance. The government also took forceful steps against extreme right movements after consolidation, though it itself ultimately swung to the extreme right. At the 1939 elections, however, with the introduction of a secret ballot, the **Arrow Cross Party received 14.3%**. Between 1938 and 1942, **four anti-Jewish laws were passed**. By means of the anti-Jewish laws, Jewish properties were robbed and widely redistributed, without any notable social or agricultural reform.
- Hungary **went out of its way to form a good relationship with Germany and Italy from the start**. It **joined the Anti-Comintern Pact**. This alliance made it possible for Hungary to regain a significant portion of the territory that had been handed to successor states (Upper Hungary in 1938, Northern-Transyl-

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nor the Anti-Comintern Pact. Beck's **Intermarium (between-seas) concept** served the purpose of building an alliance of states between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas.

- Following the Soviet-German occupation of Poland in 1939, **armed resistance organizations were immediately formed**. The largest Polish armed opposition organization of World War II, the Home Army, was established, but the communists (People's Guard), the radical national front (National Armed Forces), and even the peasantry (Peasant Battalions) had their own armed units. The leadership of the earlier opposition parties formed the government in exile, which directed resistance at home from Paris, and later London. Two significant uprisings broke out against the Germans: the Ghetto Uprising of 1943, and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

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vania in 1940, and South Hungary in 1941). The Country was swept into war alongside the Germans, and attacked the Soviet Union, with catastrophic consequences.

- Hungary attacked the Soviet Union as an ally of Germany, and suffered a major defeat there. At the same time, in a Europe mostly under occupation, Hungary formally preserved its independence, with its internal set-up unchanged. **No significant resistance movement formed** within the country: neither against the Horthy regime or the later German occupation of 1944, nor against the discrimination of the Jews or even their later deportation. In October 1944—after an unsuccessful attempt to exit the war—Horthy handed over power to the leader of the Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi.

## Absorption into the Soviet empire

**Poland came out of World War II victorious**, but the Allies—in opposition to Stalin—did not acknowledge the merits of Poland, and they were not allowed to take a seat among the victors. **After they were tried in Moscow, leaders of the Home Army, which leaned towards**

**Hungary came out of the war defeated**, and branded as Germany's last ally, continuing to fight on the side of Germany even at the end of 1944. The prime ministers responsible for the war (Bárdossy, Imrédy) were executed, as

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the West, were executed or given life sentences by the Soviets, as were the delegates sent to Poland by the London government in exile.

The new Poland established after the war lost significant territories in the East, but gained huge western territories as “compensation.” **The new borders were determined by Stalin’s strategic interests.** At the beginning of the war, the Soviet leadership had already made up its mind: if any Poland would be left at the end of the war, **it must have Soviet leanings.** This was the master plan into which the **Katyń massacres** fit, aimed explicitly at the liquidation of the middle-class Polish elite considered to be anti-Soviet.

The adoption of Polish Stalinism began with the active participation of the NKVD from the last day of the war. Having learned from the Hungarian parliamentary elections of 1945, **free parliamentary elections were not even announced**—with all probability, Stanisław Mikołajczyk’s Polish People’s Party would have won. The Polish Labor Party established in Moscow formed the government instead in Lublin, and though under Western pressure it was made to appear as a coalition government, the internal ministry and the police remained in communist hands. The West accepted the fact

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was Ferenc Szálasi. **Horthy, however, escaped a court trial.**

After the war, Hungary once again lost the territories it had regained through the revisions, territories it only had a chance to keep if it had broken the alliance with Germany in time. **Hungary was not of special importance to the Soviet leadership,** and although it was placed under the oversight of the Allied Control Commission under Marshal Voroshilov, a checked course for democratic development was left open, allowing for political pluralism built on a multi-party system.

Hungarian Stalinism began with the **“strangling of democracy.”** The Soviet-type regime had weak internal support. This was proven by the **parliamentary elections of 1945, where the Independent Smallholders Party won a landslide victory of 57%** under the leadership of Zoltán Tildy. The communists were given far greater influence in the coalition government than their mandate. The internal ministry, the political police, and even the economy came under their direction, **making way for the salami tactics, directed first against the Smallholders’ Party, and later the rest of the political opposi-**

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of Soviet occupation, while a serious **civil and partisan war** was underway in the country, against the Soviets and their Polish followers. Finally, in January 1947, **through electoral fraud** the communists took full control of the country, later merging with the socialist party in December 1948. This was when Gomułka was removed from the post of chairman of the communist party, since he would have wished to incorporate the traditions of independence from the socialist party into the new party program.

After the war, Poland was considered the most important area for Stalin, both in geopolitical and military terms. After the liquidation of the national forces and the de facto division of Germany into two states in 1949, it ceased to be a frontier country, and became simply a military staging area.

In Poland power came to be held by a trio: **Bolesław Bierut, Hilary Minc and Jakub Berman**. All three were “Muscovites,” yet while Minc and Berman were of Jewish origin, Bierut was of Catholic peasant stock.

In the series of show trials launched in Eastern Europe in 1949, the Polish communist **Władysław Gomułka was marked** for the role of chief accused. However, **Bierut did not show too**

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**tion. Even so, they could only secure 22.2% of the votes in the rigged elections of 1947. Power was nevertheless more and more openly concentrated in their hands, though** the first completely communist government was only formed in December of 1948—after the annexation of the Social Democratic Party by the communists.

Immediately after the war, Hungary did not have any particular strategic significance, since Soviet troops were stationed to its west, in Austria, and Tito’s still friendly Yugoslavia neighbored it from the south. From 1948–49 however, with the heightening Soviet-Yugoslav conflict, the strategic importance of the country grew from Moscow’s perspective.

Power came to rest in the grasp of a trio, **Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő and Mihály Farkas**. All three were “Muscovites” (belonging to the Moscow-based emigré wing of the Party), and of Jewish origin.

In the series of show trials that began in Eastern Europe in 1949, the Hungarian communist **László Rajk was picked out** for the role of chief accused, and **Rákosi**, as “Stalin’s best pupil” led the



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**much willingness to organize the trials.** Mass executions did, however, occur in the army. Later the trials took an anti-Semitic turn, for which Gomułka no longer fit the description, but he was nevertheless kept under arrest for three years from 1951. **Polish Stalinism** had fewer victims in comparison to the other Eastern European countries. **Attempts to break the Catholic Church were unsuccessful;** in fact, Primate Wyszyński signed an agreement ensuring the Church relative autonomy, though he was under arrest for three years from 1953 onwards without trial. **Collectivization also ran aground.**

After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Bierut's death, and the worker's uprising of Poznań, **Gomułka became the most popular "local" communist,** who was expected to loosen the ties of dependence from the Soviet Union and introduce reforms of the Soviet model to Poland. In October 1956, Khrushchev finally agreed to Gomułka's return, and Stalinism ended with a bloodless revolution. **The Polish Stalinists did not defend their positions, accepted Gomułka's leadership,** and did not begin bloody rear-guard actions. The Soviet defense minister and councilors were sent home.

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way, **having him executed by September 1949.** Hungarian Stalinism became one of the **most repressive regimes** in Eastern Europe. One in ten Hungarians were prosecuted for a variety of charges. The **church was completely broken,** with the Prince Primate, Archbishop of Esztergom, József Mindszenty imprisoned as the result of show trials. In agriculture a **"dekulakization" and a violent, though only partially successful, collectivization was underway.**

After the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Ernő Gerő became General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party instead of Rákosi, while **Imre Nagy became the most popular communist,** though he had been thrown out of the party earlier, and his return raised expectations of loosening ties of dependence from the Soviet Union and a reform of the Soviet model. Following the first Soviet intervention in the aftermath of October 23, 1956, and the bloody response from state security forces, the revolution turned into a freedom struggle. When events got out of control for the Soviets—and the reticent stance of the Americans was taken to mean a continued recognition of the existing status quo—on October 31 they decided to repress the revolution.

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## 1956: The consequences of the two revolutions

In the year following the events of October 1956, further reforms were the subject of hot debate. Polish society felt more than mere sympathy for the Hungarian Revolution—many watched the young people fighting against the Soviets with envy. They also believed that the reforms could be continued, that Gomułka would carry through with the reforms of the Soviet model, and a decentralized, grass-roots, democratic socialism would come into being and take into account the specificities of the Polish nation. Instead, Gomułka progressed in the opposite direction, and in the autumn of 1957 there were protests against him for banning the weekly *Po Prostu*, which supported the reforms.

After 1956, Gomułka took leadership of an **unbeaten society**:

- Polish society largely experienced the events of October as a victory;
- The leadership of the party was dominated by moderate communist forces, and Gomułka was a rather popular political figure; though officially maintaining the policy, they in fact gave up on the experiment of forcibly collectivizing private farms, but at the same time their modernization was also neglected;

As Soviet troops repressed the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, around two hundred thousand citizens fled the country. In the course of the reprisals following the Revolution, Imre Nagy, the reform-communist prime minister of the Revolution, and hundreds of its participants were executed. Meanwhile, in spite of the Soviet occupation and reprisals, the new leader János Kádár not only declined to rehabilitate the first line of the earlier Muscovite-Stalinist leadership, but from 1962–63 began to openly distance his economic, social, and cultural policies from the practices of the Rákosi regime, both in word and deed.

After 1956, Kádár gained power over a **beaten society**:

- Hungarian society suffered its third defeat of the twentieth century after November 4, 1956;
- Kádár's political circle was composed of representatives of the orthodox communist line, and he was reviled both at home and abroad;
- Between 1959 and 1962 agricultural collectivization was completed, followed later by the modernization of agriculture and villages;

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- The Catholic Church held onto its integrity and social influence, under the leadership of the earlier imprisoned Cardinal Wyszyński, and at a later stage became a pillar of support to forces critical of the regime.

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- The communist regime made the Church its vassal; Archbishop Mindszenty took refuge at the American embassy, and was forced into emigration years later.

### Processes of consolidation and deconsolidation from the mid-sixties

The result of the 1956 uprising in Poland was not a society degraded and broken to the extreme. The grounds for negotiation between society and politics were not—as in Hungary—the presence of the Soviet troops, the mass executions, the imprisonments and hundreds of thousands of fleeing émigrés. What followed was not a social compromise based on constant concessions made by a hardline dictatorship, but a **permanent deadlock** between the ruling powers and society. Though the communist party maintained its dominance over society, it could not settle into a mellow sense of security. In order to strengthen its legitimacy, it constantly sought closer relations with the Church. In the Polish socialist system, society moved constantly in a triangle of **resistance-acceptance-participation**, but there was no sharp boundary between these three forms of behavior.

The reprisals following the repression of the Revolution of 1956 made it clear to Hungarian society that there would be no return to either the coalition governments of the period prior to 1948, or the regime that existed between the two world wars. With the acknowledgement of these conditions, there came to exist a new form of unspoken “**social contract**,” a “**compromise**” (or as it was called back then, **consensus**) between the regime and society (including a significant segment of the intelligentsia, and the Church leadership), which developed and functioned until the end of the eighties. Essentially, this compromise meant that so long as citizens did not interfere with politics, the regime would not interfere with their private lives, while also promising citizens increasing, though limited, prosperity. The foundations for this were laid in early 1957, with a large increase of wages for laborers.

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The Polish leadership **did not have a socialist “national strategy,”** because it was not able to create the economic foundations for the gradual and predictable improvement of its citizens’ living standards.

Polish society did not become depoliticized, because it expected further reforms, while the regime took the opposite direction. They turned away from the path of reforms, while the standard of living did not improve, and the cultural freedom that had been secured was also increasingly curtailed. As a result, the first opposition debate circles and critiques appeared already in the sixties. There was also no socialist petite-embourgeoisement such as that in Hungary.

A characterization of the period:

- The nationalization program for **private farms** was never taken off the agenda. In fact, it existed as a threat throughout; only the time of its execution was continuously delayed by new party decrees. The absence of collectivization did not mean the rehabilitation of the private farms, but merely a hibernation in the state that had preceded collectivization. **Cold collectivization** meant that even if the state could not expropriate the land, or take it into farming collectives, it expropriated the eco-

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The Kádár regime’s “national strategy” meant that everyone could be a part of the nation so long as they accepted the rules of the game. Yet rather than giving ground to nationalism, this was a strategy of **antinationalist nation-building.**

The popular epithets found to describe the “soft” communist dictatorship of the following decades reflect the burgeoning of a depoliticized petite-bourgeoisie: among them “**gulyás communism,**” or “**refrigerator socialism.**” In the phrase “the happiest barracks in the socialist camp,” on the other hand, there is a reference to the forced social acceptance of geopolitical realities and collusion with power.

A characterization of the period:

- The communist party proclaimed a new, relatively de-ideologized way of building a relationship with society at its Congress of 1962, stating that “those who are not against us, are with us”;
- in education, the system of discrimination on the basis of class of origin (“class alien”) was ended;
- in agricultural cooperatives—unlike during the collectivization efforts of the fifties—the former semi-rich or rich farmers (kulaks) and their descendants could

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conomic environment of the private farms:

- it prevented the concentration of estates, which meant that the ownership structure of private farms remained essentially the same from 1945–1970;
- it upheld the system of compulsorily submitting produce until 1972;
- it continued with the wide use of state-set prices;
- the trade in agricultural tools was in state hands, along with curbs on the growth of free market trade.
- The Polish leadership—not having a cultural politician of such weight as György Aczél—showed a disinterest in cultural issues: apart from demanding respect for the basic taboos, a relatively free cultural life emerged, with great variety in genres (jazz, beat, rock, abstract art). This intellectual-cultural stratum had become the indirect, or in some cases even direct, opposition to the regime already by the mid-sixties.

The Gomułka-leadership **had no strategy for modernization**; it neither could, nor desired to substantially change the political system, or the mechanism of economic control. Even though it was clear that further growth of living standards could not continue without a

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advance to leadership positions based on a clear and unequivocal offer from the regime: either you fill the position of a leader in the collective, or you will be stripped of your land and be marginalized. From the mid-sixties onwards, agriculture was provided with large development resources, and the collectives functioned increasingly as independent economic organizations rather than as kolkhozes;

- in 1963, amnesty was declared for the majority of political prisoners, putting an end to the period of reprisals;
- party leaders sought to demonstrate that there would be no return to the Rákosi-Stalinist period by decommissioning the majority of the pre-1956 hardline state security personnel, transferring them to the spheres of production;
- official Marxist-Leninist dogma still held primacy in cultural life, but certain “civic” trends were also accepted. In a cultural policy directed by György Aczél, the politics of the “three Ts” (in Hungarian: *támogatjuk* [support], *tűrjük* [tolerate], and *tiltjuk* [prohibit]) dominated. The system was able to integrate broad swaths of intellectual life placed in the tolerated category, which did not require displays of ideological commitment.

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surge of development in agriculture and modernization of the countryside, since the PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*) never had total control over society, any attempt at decentralization and sharing of decision-making authority would have led to further weakening of the establishment. On the other hand, the concentration of estates and modernization of the countryside would have further encouraged the flow of the population to the cities, which was not desirable during an ongoing population boom. This boom had caused between two and three hundred thousand new people to appear on the employment market from the mid-sixties, a cause for great concern. For this reason, the “well tried and tested” program remained in place: a majority of investments went into construction and other large-scale industries that could engage such large labor forces.

The establishment did not have the strength to:

- vanquish the peasantry, but could prevent the development of peasant farms. By these means it not only caused tensions among the peasantry, but also undermined the foundations of food supplies to the cities;
- earn the loyalty of a majority of workers, but meanwhile shut them up in the large state corporations,

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In order for the compromise of “don’t politicize, but prosper” to become sustainable, a restricted marketization of the economic system had to be carried out under the banner of a **modernization** strategy, that would uphold the monopoly of the state and cooperative property, and not encroach the least bit on the political system. The establishment of the **socialist market economy** and fulfillment of the requirement of continuous growth in living standards was assisted by the introduction, in 1968, of the **New Economic Mechanism** (NEM):

- In the field of production and development the role of central organization was reduced, and company independence in decision-making was supported: excepting Yugoslavia, this was the only communist country where the command economy was abolished (**decentralization**);
- the price system was reformed, leading to an increase in the range of so-called freely priced products, which contributed to preparing conditions for the market activity of companies (**price liberalization**);
- average wage regulation was introduced to the wage system, which made it possible for companies to decide the salaries of employees based on a provided overall fund for wages (**wage liberalization**);

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- stripping them of any opportunity to earn legal extra income;
- win the ideological battle with the Catholic Church. In fact, the Church would ultimately become the most important support for Polish society;
  - educate the young intelligentsia to become followers of socialism, or even accept it. It did, however, have the means to “reward” the young intelligentsia with prison sentences from time to time.

In summary, the regime obstructed every social layer from pursuing its own interests, achieving its goals, and fully playing its roles, but on the other hand it could not present a positive vision for the future either. These bleak prospects led to violent action in 1968, when the establishment assaulted the young intelligentsia, and on the pretext of the Arab-Israeli War, started a brutal anti-Semitic campaign with which it drove away most of the remaining people of Jewish origin, mostly intellectuals. Two years later, with the massacre of protesting workers, it also turned the laborers against itself permanently. The regime remained successful in turning the various social layers against one another at this time, but by 1976 it no longer had strength even to achieve this. After the

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- an extended system of **secondary manufacturing branches and small farms attached to the cooperatives** developed. The secondary manufacturing branches simultaneously served rural needs for part-time employment and diversification of consumer goods, as well as that of flexible suppliers to the rigid state structure. The over one and a half million backyard farms ensured families comprising both peasants, and industrial laborers working away from home, a stable source of food and income.

The New Economic Mechanism was strongly influenced by Polish economists such as Oskar Lange, Michał Kalecki, and Włodzimierz Brus, who had in fact completed the theoretical aspect of the work in Poland, but their ideas had never been realized in practice.

The halt called upon the processes of economic reform at the end of the seventies, and a partial withdrawal from some changes already introduced, drove the country into a crisis situation. The **broadening of mechanisms offering means of self-exploitation** served to uphold the compromise based on continuous growth of living standards: within state companies, surreptitious small-scale production (*fuszás*), often during official working hours and using the tools and resources

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brutal repression of the summer strikes, the workers and intellectuals found an alliance.

In the seventies, the regime tried to dampen social tension through renewed investment in—outdated—large-scale industry, financed by Western loans. While the Hungarians spent their Western loans on maintaining the growth of living standards, Poland used them to bring about outmoded large-scale industrial concerns.

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of the company, was legalized by the creation of the so-called economic work partnerships (GMK). The introduction of this form of economic association was prompted by a fear of the spread of the demands of the Polish Solidarity movement. This simultaneously increased the income of the more resourceful workers, while simultaneously reducing the inflexibility of the rigid state companies. But the mid-seventies also gave way to an increasing reliance on Western loans, necessitated by the continuous increase of consumption and the provision of state-subsidized services. Furthermore, these loans also came to be employed to stave off financial bankruptcy, and made the Hungarian economy comparable to a collapsing house of cards.

### The social foundations of anti-regime politics, or its absence

The lesson Poland took away from 1956 was that as long as public demands do not challenge the country's position in the Soviet Bloc, it is possible to effect change. At the same time, **the system did not bestow the masses with paths to individual happiness**: it restricted peasants in their role as private farmers, while shutting the labor force up in large state enterprises. Due to the lack of reforms and continuous decline in living standards, the groups that can be considered as the "opposition" already

In Hungary, the reprisals that followed 1956 taught society that resistance to the power establishment was futile, and that they would have to make their lives more comfortable within the framework of the communist system. At the same time, the leadership of the Kádár regime learned from 1956 that a peaceful society could not be sustained through total repression. With the lack of fundamental freedoms, the improvement of living standards and conditions became a necessity. The Kádár consolidation and



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appeared by the mid-sixties, with the seventies bringing the masses to radical manifestations of social discontent.

- In 1968, a series of protests by students began; the regime took brutal action against intellectuals.
- In 1970, strikes in Gdańsk protesting drastic hikes in food prices were violently repressed. 44 people were fatally injured, and over a thousand more wounded. Edward Gierek replaced Gomułka at the helm of the party in the aftermath.
- In 1976, protests broke out in a number of cities due to rising food prices; these were brutally repressed by the regime, and many workers were imprisoned. In the aftermath of these events, an organization of intellectuals aiming to help those who suffered repression was established, called the **KOR** (Komitet Obrony Robotników).

The relationship between the radical workers and the system-critical intellectuals was, thereafter, institutionalized and permanent in Poland. The KOR was not merely an aid organization; through a work by **Adam Michnik**, *A New Evolutionism*, it was also ideologically and strategically formative. As

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“compromise” embodied in part by the constant growth of general consumption established **safety valves for the release of social tensions**, giving those critical of the regime private means of escape through individual accumulation of wealth and other deals within the framework of the system. All of this ruled out mass support for any initiative critical to the regime. Society was immunized to oppositional thinking, so the opposition movements critical of the regime were limited to rather small circles.

- In 1968, a small group of philosophers protested against the occupation of Czechoslovakia.
- In 1977, a few dozen dissident intellectuals acclaimed the formation of the Czechoslovak Charter '77.
- In 1979, approximately 250 individuals, largely intellectuals, signed a petition against the imprisonment of Václav Havel. This event can be considered the first step towards the institutionalization of the anti-communist dissident movement.

The Hungarian anti-communist dissident movement led by **János Kis** followed the Polish opposition's strategy, without it gaining any form of broader social support. For in Hungary, unlike Poland, the sort of social deadlock arrived at by constant conflict with the regime had never come into existence. So-

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such it rejected the dilemma between whether to improve the operation of the system while remaining integrated in it, or to try to overthrow it from outside. Instead it proposed the building of parallel civil structures, thereby also demonstrating that it had understood the geopolitical power situation that kept the communist system in place for the moment, but neither recognized nor legitimized it. The institutions of the parallel society generated by the intellectuals were the so called **flying universities** and **independent publishers**. Both were mass based and multi-centered.

By 1980, the Solidarity movement, growing out of the shipyard of Gdańsk under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, was no longer just a parallel society, but also an embodiment of a parallel political power. The Solidarity movement was unique in the region, not only for its vast size (ten million members), but also its heterogeneity. It joined individuals and groups of various world views, of different social positions, and was strongly supported by the Catholic Church as well as Pope John Paul II, former archbishop of Kraków. A constellation of this sort was unimaginable in any other socialist country. In the course of the one-and-a-half-year existence of Solidarity, it became clear that this deadlock could not be sustained and would have to go in one direction

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ciety, with its peculiar compromise not only tolerated, but accepted the soft dictatorship ruling over it. In the spirit of the adopted Polish strategy, the “flying (underground) universities” and samizdat literature began to spread more quickly with the greater visibility of the Polish Solidarity movement, though it remained always more restricted, single-centered, and with fewer copies in circulation.

Though the Hungarian communist party observed the rise of Solidarity with some concern, its fall in 1981 only resulted in a temporary surge of repression against opposition movements. Nonetheless, while avoiding imprisoning dissident intellectuals, every effort was made to impede the logistics of the samizdat publications and the material wellbeing of the few dozen opposition leaders. The contact of the isolated, small opposition movement with the broader “masses” was ensured by Radio Free Europe, which reported on opposition actions and publications. Hungarian society at large did not participate in the system-critical movements and was, at most, an audience.

Apart from the system-critical anti-communist dissident movement, from the eighties onwards there were also the environmental protection groups taking action against the dams of Bősnagygyar, who however kept their

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or the other. Though Jaruzelski's coup defeated Solidarity at significant cost, it was not able to reinstate the legitimacy of the regime even to its previous level.

After the introduction of a state of emergency, the Jaruzelski leadership fell into complete international isolation, at a point when it would have severely required Western loans. On the other hand, the economist intellectuals of Solidarity had had enough of collectivist illusions, and a program promoting liberalization of the economy grew increasingly popular among them. After joining the IMF in 1986, no other course was left open for the leadership of the party either.

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criticism within the “paradigm of public policy,” without politically challenging the regime. Others involved in politics included the activists of the peace movement Dialogue, who kept their distance from the radical opposition groups, and the Catholic grass-roots community, which came into confrontation with the Catholic Church. The circle of so-called *népi* (folk) writers did not think in system-critical terms either, but wholly in terms of protecting the rights of the Hungarian minority across the border within the system, remaining undecided between joining the opposition and bargaining with the reform communists even in the last third of the eighties.

In Hungary, in spite of the economic crisis, few concrete propositions for the transition materialized. A “social market economy” grew to become a popular formula.

### 1989–1990: the two peaceful, negotiated regime changes of the Eastern Bloc

The demolition of the communist party in the Soviet Union was carried out by the communist party itself, with the leadership of Gorbachev, as a continuation of Perestroika—a process beginning in the second half of the eighties and lasting over many years. In the rest of the East-Central European countries with a hard dictatorship—the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria—regime change took the form of a sudden break, without negotiations. Among the satellite states of the Soviet sphere of influence, a **negotiated regime change** was only conducted from 1989–90 in the two soft dictatorships of Poland and Hungary, between the ruling communist parties and the actors of the

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political opposition. In both countries, the segment of the communist party ready to accede to talks, was the one ready to face reality. In neither country was transition or regime change the aim of these members of the communist party, but rather the legitimization of measures required to deal with the economic crisis made it seem worthwhile to involve an opposition they perceived as weak. Regarding Solidarity, they assumed that seven years after the state of emergency, it would not be capable of the show of force it had in 1980–81. The Hungarian democratic opposition lacked broad social support. One must add that these events did not unfold simultaneously in the two countries, but the Hungarians (both the reform communists and the opposition) followed the Polish developments. The adoption of the form of roundtable talks and then the results of the semi-free Polish elections, along with the Soviet response to them, showed that regime change had become a real possibility.

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In Poland, it was the broadly supported Solidarity, as the pioneer of the process and a movement gathering actors critical of the system, who negotiated with the regime—with the mediation of the Catholic Church. Peaceful transition and regime change was meanwhile guaranteed by a conditionally free electoral system, which ensured the Polish communist party and its allies retained power in the Sejm, while fully opening the reinstated Senate to free political competition. This is where the first semi-free elections of the eastern bloc took place in the summer of 1989. Solidarity set out to win 35% of the mandates in the Sejm, and the seats in the Senate under the name of Citizens' Committee. Though neither the PZPR, nor Solidarity, believed that the latter could win a landslide victory, this did in fact occur. In the two-round election system Soli-

The program of the democratic opposition in 1987, the "Social Contract," still represented the Polish strategy of power sharing. However, after the international thaw and transformation in Poland, the opposition parties established in 1988 brought about the Opposition Roundtable in the spring of 1989, unifying the opposition for talks with the communist party to ensure a peaceful transition. But the Hungarian opposition parties, lacking real links with the masses, represented the various trends in the opposition intellectual elite. The two most significant formations were: the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), grouped around the *népi* (folk) writers and representing a popular, national and Christian ideology with a conservative identity; and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), which had grown out of the anti-communist dissi-

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darity won everything it could. Solidarity, therefore, ran for the elections as a unified but heterogeneous movement, with the existing internal differences only bringing about permanent divisions after the elections.

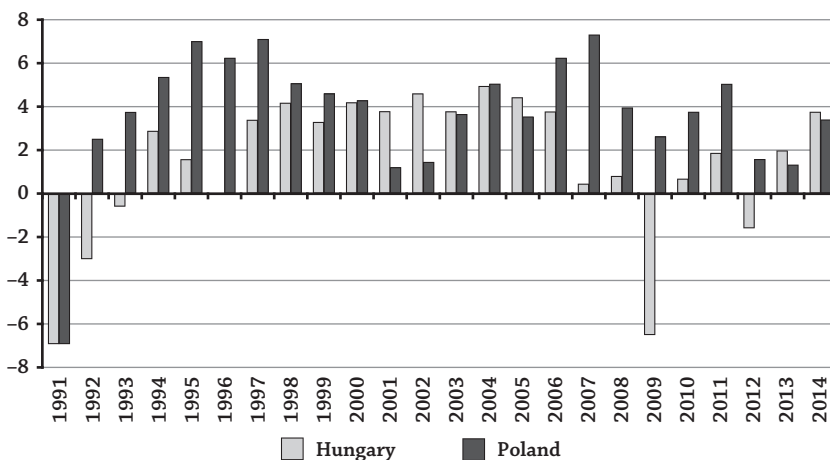
Following the elections, Solidarity succeeded in splitting earlier followers of PZPR, the Democratic Party, and the United People’s Party away from the alliance, which made coalition formation necessary. Adam Michnik came up with a proposal: “we will delegate the prime minister, and you delegate the president.” Thus, in exchange for Jaruzelski being elected president by a majority of one vote in the Sejm and the Senate, in September 1989, Tadeusz Mazow-

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dent movement, with a Western orientation and a leftist, liberal approach that represented radical system-criticism. In this case, therefore, the differentiation and institutionalization of opposition forces with different ideological foundations had concluded even before free elections were held.

In the course of the negotiations, the reform communists no longer had the chance to ensure themselves a guaranteed powerbase unaffected by political competition, as the Polish Sejm did. Instead, they aimed to create a semi-strong presidential position with similar authority vested in it. A separate deal between the MDF and the reform communists was forestalled by a referen-

Figure 19.1: The intersecting cycles of economic growth in Poland and Hungary (in percentage of annual growth of GDP)



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iecki became the first non-communist prime minister in the region since 1947. After the elections, a number of parties emerged out of the Solidarity Movement, while Solidarity began to function as a real labor union.

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dum at the end of 1989 initiated by the SZDSZ, that preceded the first free elections in the spring of 1990 and resulted in the victory of the MDF, leading to the formation of the national-Christian coalition.

### Hungary 2010, Poland 2015: the second regime changes

The first time Viktor Orbán came to power, in 1998, he summed up his goals in his party's campaign slogan: "More than change of government, less than change of regime." The PiS, led by the Kaczyński brothers, voiced a similar demand from 2005. Orbán's government remained for one full term, while Jarosław Kaczyński's stayed for less than two years. Their return to power took place eight years later. Orbán defined Fidesz's return to power in 2010 as a ballot box revolution, and his government as a second change of regime, while Kaczyński also made claims of regime change on a similar scale upon his return to power in 2015. They consider themselves the keepers of a tradition of Polish-Hungarian historical friendship. Poland symbolically supported the pro-government demonstrations in Budapest expressing loyalty to Orbán (called the "peace marches") by transporting Polish PiS activists to Hungary for the occasion, and Orbán also ensures the new Polish government of his solidarity through exercising his veto against any EU sanctions which threaten it. In spite of the similar ideological models and political language, however, the immediate antecedents of these governments and their natures are quite different.

### Antecedents: the electoral defeat of the Polish government parties and the collapse of the third Hungarian republic

- The concept of "welfare regime change," used with predilection in Hungary, is **unknown** in Poland. Three right-wing, or center-right, governments carried out **shock**
- The coalition between the former reform-communist MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) and the liberal SZDSZ that came to power in 2002, following the program of "welfare re-

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**therapy reforms**, which had a social cost that cannot be dismissed. The first shock therapy program was initiated by the finance minister of the Mazowiecki government, Leszek Balcerowicz, in 1990, which helped complete a relatively quick switch from a state socialist shortage economy to market competition based on private ownership. The second round of shock therapy is attributed to the Buzek government (1997–2001), in which Balcerowicz was deputy minister and finance minister. Significant reforms were introduced in four major fields: education, pensions, public administration, and health-care. Finally, under the first PiS government (2005–2007), new radical changes were introduced in the battle against corruption, for lustration, and to “clean up” the secret services.

- The leading politicians and intellectuals—experts of the PiS, in government between 2005 and 2007, and the Civil Platform, in government from 2007–2015, all followed in the footsteps of the Mazowiecki and Buzek administrations. **The Polish right wing has believed in the free market and capitalism right from the start.** They have not changed these fundamental principles even after both the Mazowiecki and the Buzek governments suffered huge electoral defeats.

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gime change” declared by the Socialist Party, went on a spending spree that the economy could not afford: it raised the wages of public employees by fifty percent, introduced an extra month’s pension for December, and various social benefits were also raised significantly. The program could not be made sustainable even with a growth in debts, and so the policies of halfheartedly and necessarily accepted austerity began. In contrast to the logic of the Kádár consolidation—in which the harsh reprisals and sanctions once applied were followed by the politics of continuous, incrementally introduced little “rewards,” concessions and improvements in living standards—in this case the one-time boost in welfare spending, which would be forgotten in a few months, was followed by a constant policy of austerity. This undermined faith in the future of the government and its credibility.

- The reform of large social welfare systems also stalled, partly because its implementation would have required the support of two-thirds of the parliament, and partly because Fidesz’s so-called “welfare referendum” of 2008 excluded the institutional introduction of market elements in health-care and education. In its aftermath, the government coalition fell apart, and the following

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- Following the failure of the first PiS government, the coalition of the center-right Civil Platform and the agrarian—ideologically nationalistic, economically slightly left-leaning—Polish People’s Party formed a government in 2007. **The politics of the government led by Donald Tusk was calm and predictable.** The Polish economy was in full swing; even in the worst year of the economic crisis (2009), it could still produce growth of 1.8%. By 2010 this figure was 3.9%, and in 2011 had risen to 4.5%. Tusk’s defeat was due to the fact that significant social groups were left out of this prosperity: notably those in small cities, villages, and the eastern regions.
- The World Bank’s “Doing Business 2015” index ranked Poland in 32nd place. This means that **conditions for investors are constantly improving** in Poland; indeed, they are the best among the East-Central European members of the European Union. Thanks to EU funds directed to Poland, more than 160,000 projects have been successfully completed in the period between 2004 and 2013. **The huge infrastructural development is highly apparent.** Poland can avail itself of **120 billion euros** of the EU budget from 2013–2020, the greatest total value among all the EU member states.

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- two years up to the 2010 elections passed with a minority government.
- A few months after the electoral victory of the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition in 2006, a speech given by Ferenc Gyurcsány to the MSZP faction became public: in it, he admitted the manipulation of budget deficit figures in a statement paraphrasing the slogan of 1956 (“we lied morning, noon and night”), causing an irreparable breach of confidence. The violent anti-government protests that erupted in the aftermath, and the police reaction to them, were merely the prelude to a period of **cold civil war**—which composed the essence of Fidesz’s politics in opposition.
- Fidesz’s strategy of cold civil war in opposition replaced the necessary consensus that had been built into the constitutional order with a politics of bribery and liquidation. On the one hand, they did not support systemic reforms requiring a two-thirds majority in the national assembly, whatever compromises they may have included; on the other, when it came to the election of heads or members of the institutional control mechanisms of liberal democracy, they either approved the appointment of their own nominee only, or paralyzed the operation of the institution by withdrawing their cooperation.



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- Poland has achieved significant prestige in international politics as well, primarily on account of its **consistent commitment to a Euro-Atlantic alliance**, and stable, predictable governance. In 2014, Prime Minister Donald Tusk was elected to lead the European Council. Jarosław Kaczyński personally congratulated him on his appointment.
- In 2015, **the defeat of the PO-PSL government surprised many, but it bequeathed a prosperous economy and an internationally respected Poland** to the incoming PiS administration.

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- Going beyond the—at times justly critical—tenor and norms of political battles until then, they used character assassination and the influence of the prosecutor's office to paint government politicians in diabolical colors.
- Initially, the erosion of any ability to govern, followed by the governing parties' loss of credibility and paralysis, revelatory cases of corruption, the economic crisis of 2008, as well as the political climate of cold civil war, finally brought about **the collapse of the third republic in Hungary**.

### The effect of different electoral systems on the concentration of power and the extent of regime conversion

- The regional list electoral system results in a relatively proportional distribution of mandates. The PiS won the 2015 elections with 37.6%, gaining a 51% majority in the Sejm. The results were distorted in favor of PiS, as the United Left did not win any mandates despite achieving 7.6% of the vote; as such, if the SLD had appeared on the ballot alone, the PiS would not even have a majority in the Sejm. In 2011, the Civil Platform won the elections with 45% of the mandates, after gaining 39.2% of the total vote. Neverthe-
- The mixed election system effective in Hungary until 2011 (a single chamber parliament of 386 seats, filled by 176 representatives elected from single-member constituencies, a minimum of 58 mandates from the national list and a maximum of 152 seats from the regional lists) made it possible for Fidesz to secure a two-thirds majority in Parliament with only 52.7% of the vote in 2010, providing it with practically **unlimited political power**. On the one hand, it could rewrite the Constitution alone (which it did in 2011, amending it

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less, even with this distorted distribution of the mandates, the PiS was only capable of a simple change of government, and **not a complete appropriation of political power**. A change of constitution (requiring, unlike in the Hungarian system, the support not of two-thirds of all the members of parliament, but only of those present for the vote) would have required extreme manipulation. Appointments in the institutions of political control, however, do not require a two-thirds consensus, and the limits for changes are set instead by the fixed terms of their appointment. At the same time—not having the cardinal Acts that can only be changed by two-thirds of the parliament—it has more leeway in introducing broader changes to the system, though all such changes can be just as easily undone by a new government.

- Changes to Polish electoral law, along the lines of the Hungarian ones, are not allowed by the constitution, which demands proportionality. Moreover, PiS already enjoys a comfortable majority in the Sejm, and a switch to a mixed election system (individual and list) would in any case have unpredictable con-

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multiple times since as its political needs dictated), and could easily pass any legislation. On the other hand, it was able to directly appoint the heads and other officials of institutions meant to serve as balances of power in a liberal democracy (Constitutional Court, Media Authority, National Council of Justice, election overseeing bodies and so on) without any need for consensus with the opposition, simply installing its own cadres. Moreover, the terms in office for numerous positions were unrealistically extended: the Chief Prosecutor, along with the President and members of the Media Council have terms of 9 years, while the President and Vice-President of the State Audit Office of Hungary are appointed for terms of 12 years each. Therefore, the systemic changes wrought by the Fidesz government are virtually irrevocable even after the government is defeated, since the currently scattered opposition would be unable to gain a two thirds majority, but the people appointed by Fidesz will remain in their positions even after any change in government.

- Through changes to the electoral law (increasing the disproportionality of the system, redrawing single-member constituencies, introducing a shorter time-period for the collection of signatures required to stand

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sequences. Since it is impossible to change the proportionality of the electoral system, power machinations are limited mainly to a state-owned public media.

- The legal system and the PiS' lack of a two-thirds majority prevent any change to the constitution, and by extension, the overthrow of democratic institutions. As such, the new regime turns to **open violation of the constitution**, or modifies the old institutions in such a way as to be able to give positions to its own cadres (as demonstrated, for example, by the current alteration of the court system and the media). Yet these laws cannot be cemented across governmental terms.

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for elections, establishing a one-round election system (that forces opposition parties to form a coalition prior to the elections), giving ethnic Hungarians outside Hungary the right to vote, and so on) by 2014 Fidesz could secure a two-thirds majority in Parliament with only 44.9% of the votes. The parliamentary majority was only lost later, as a result of defeats in by-elections.

- The two-thirds majority Fidesz secured in Parliament allowed it to conduct a **constitutional coup** through the new Constitution and its continuous amendments. If new laws it had passed were declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, then rather than adjusting the laws to the Constitution, it adjusted the Constitution to the laws.

### Various attempts to dispense with liberal democracy: attempted Polish conservative autocracy vs. established Hungarian mafia state

- Kaczyński's politics is motivated by **power and ideology**: the concentration of power goes hand in hand with the goal of achieving hegemony of the "Christian nationalist" value system, which is not to be confused with the value system of Christian democracy.
- The regime is more driven by **ideology**, and its "inconsistencies" do
- Orbán's politics is motivated by **power and wealth**: the concentration of power and the accumulation of wealth in the political family.
- The system is not ideologically driven, its approach to ideology is utilitar-

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not mean a multitude of 180 degree turns, as in the case of Hungary. As conceived by Jarosław Kaczyński, the state and the Catholic Church operate in concert (“the Church is an organic component of being Polish.”) It follows from this that **the liberal value system built on the autonomy of the individual is viewed as an enemy**, since the interests of the Polish collective nation are seen as higher than the interests of the individual. At the same time, the regime still **endorses free market competition and respect for the freedom of enterprise**, because it considers the collectivist economy a “communist invention” that destroyed Poland. It should be noted here that the majority of Polish society also rejects collectivism.

- They wish to break with the values of liberal democracy, but at the same time, they take the break with the communist legacy seriously.

The divergent approaches of the two autocratic tendencies to ideology (namely ideology driven vs. ideology utilizing) do not, in the meantime, exclude the possibility of the **common ideological frames** they use being closely related:

- they define their administrations not as changes of government, but as changes of regime;
- accordingly, they distance themselves from the regime change of a quarter century ago, and interpret the history of the peaceful, negotiated

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ian. Its ideological “coherence” is not achieved by the representation of a definite value system. Its ideological “consistency” is ensured through its use of ideological frames that fit with the patterns of enacted power tied to the patriarchal head of the family. Naturally, it follows that **the liberal value system built on the autonomy of the individual is considered an enemy**. But it only picks and chooses from the leftwing-collectivist values with caution. When necessary, it relies on the frames of social populism. It pragmatically uses conservative, collectivist values (“God, fatherland, family”), which can be attached to a **centralized chain of command built on a patron-client network of vasalage** (for example, respect for the sanctity of private property—which could be considered conservative—is alien to it.)

- Under the guise of breaking with the communist legacy, they actually want to do away with the values of liberal democracy.

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change of regimes as a deal between elites, concluded over the heads of society at large. Moreover, they attempt to use this to legitimize the necessity for the actual regime change they represent;

- the new constitutive legislation also serves to distance their new autocratic regimes, on a symbolic level, from the repudiated legacy of the regime change. This is true of Poland even though the country had formally ratified a new constitution in 1997;
- by “nation” they mean a community of people committed to an ideology rather than autonomous citizens, a concept which they use to create a basis of legitimacy and an argument for excluding citizens critical of their regime from the nation, painting them as representatives of alien interests;
- they share a particular form of Euro-skepticism, and continue a “national freedom struggle against the Brussels dictatorship” on the basis of historicized grievance politics, while continuing to expect EU resources. This behavior is no less than the realization of a rent-seeking policy on an international scale, without moral qualms;
- fear and suspicion of refugees, migrants and aliens is exceptionally high in both countries, which populist politics easily transforms into active xenophobia.

The similarities between these ideological frames only demonstrate that they are equally adaptable to the needs of two different types of autocratic regimes.

- **The actual decision-making remains centered within the framework of formal institutions** in Poland. Kaczyński occupies the peak of the power pyramid as the president of the PiS. The prime minister, the ministers of defense, and the secret services are the vice-presidents of the party. The leaders of the Sejm and the Senate, as well as other ministers, are members of the presi-
- **Real political and economic decision making is removed from the world of legally defined, formalized organizations and social control.** Important decisions are not made within the formalized, legitimate framework of parties, government, parliament, or fora of mutual consultation. These institutions are merely the transmission belts of decisions made outside them, trans-

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dency of the party. The PiS is a **centralized** party, serving as a center of power. Anyone with real power must, first and foremost, be found an appropriate position in the party hierarchy, and fill a function in public office through this position. This form of organization is focused on the concentration of power, applied using the classical instruments of autocratic systems. A twenty-four member government, made up by ministers with real competencies, operates this system, unlike in the Hungarian case, where governance is concentrated in a few top ministries.

- Relationships in the power structure—unlike in the clan-like mafia state, with its ruling structure stretched beyond the formal offices of public authority—are not consecrated as “family” or “blood” ties. **Party political nepotism** means the distribution of state-political, and state-commercial, media positions and sinecures among the party’s own cadres. To facilitate this, they have lowered the professional requirements to fill certain positions. Meanwhile, there are no oligarchs, stooges, or advisors around Kaczyński who have significant influence on the decisions of the party president. Even demands coming from the Church (for instance, the complete ban on abortions) are not

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ferring them into the sphere of legality. The transformation of Fidesz as a party went through the following shifts: alternative movement, Western-oriented party, centralized party (excluding representatives of rival trajectories within the party), vassal party (the party president has the legally arraigned prerogative to appoint candidates for membership of parliament and mayoral seats), and finally **transmission belt party** (filling up the leading bodies with insignificant stooges, while they cease to be actual decision-making fora).

- The decision-making “organ” of the informally exercised power is the **adopted political family**, or rather its topmost reaches composed of a score of members. This cannot be compared either to the former Soviet nomenclature, the “politburo,” or the formalized, transparent, accountable institutional system of modern democracies. The members of the “chief patron’s court” are the ministers attached to the pater familias/prime minister (Antal Rogán, János Lázár), the minister of the interior, the oligarchs or stooges, and advisors. This narrow center of power broadens in concentric circles, with the inclusion of formal public offices of authority, positions in the private sector of the economy, and

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necessarily unconditionally supported by PiS.

- **State dirigist control** is being established: a sweeping away of the Civic Platform is underway, meaning the purge-like replacement of those appointed by the previous government to positions in administration, public services and the state corporate sector. However, the regime is not able to spread beyond the spheres of state administration, state institutions, and state corporations. There are areas of social autonomy that, for the moment, it cannot reach.
- Kaczyński's anti-corruption stance is not motivated by any intent to centrally expropriate corruption. **The war on corruption lies behind the party name, Law and Justice, as well.** Lech Kaczyński, the now deceased brother of the current party president, had been minister of justice in the Buzek government when he was confronted with the extent of corruption and vast role of the old-type secret service networks. This was what gave the twins the impetus to form the PiS after the fall of the Buzek administration.
- **In its first term (2005–2007) the PiS moved towards combatting corruption**, introducing a new lustration law in 2006, establishing an Anti-Corruption Bureau, and disbanding the Military Intelligence

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individuals whose position is difficult to ascertain.

- With the eradication of individual and institutional autonomies based on equality before the law, **a system of patron-client relations** is being built: shaping civilians into clients dependent on individual political decisions. This is not accomplished with the homogeneously repressive instruments of classical dictatorship, but a wealth of forms suitable to the requirements of “democratic legitimation.”
- The Orbán regime does not fight corruption, but monopolizes it through centralization. In its case, we are not speaking about state capture, but the capture of the oligarchs. Corruption does not work against the state, but **the state itself works as a criminal organization.** The mafia state is simply the privatized form of the parasite state.
- **Politically selective law enforcement**, as practiced in the mafia state, ensures loyalty to the adopted political family. The Governmental Control Office, the State Audit Office, the tax authorities and the Prosecutor's Office are not neutral, impartial institutions taking action against illegal activity, but actors

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Agency. At the time, these acts were also supported by the Civil Platform, and with the exception of the 2006 lustration law, they are still effective today. Kaczyński even used the Anti-Corruption Bureau against his own coalition partners, exposing his coalition ally, Andrzej Leppert. Paradoxically his own government fell as a result.

- To date, there is no evidence that the PiS would seek to replace the economic elite, to expropriate, redistribute, and channel private property into its own fields of interest. Yet the unification of the posts of minister of justice and chief prosecutor is not an encouraging sign, since this measure will make prosecutions more readily subject to political orders. Nonetheless, there is no sign in Poland that law enforcement authorities might act as protectors of economic interests close to the regime.
- PiS is preparing to withdraw the public education reform that was introduced at the end of the nineties (the shift, in particular, from an 8+4-year educational system to a 6+3+3-year system has resulted in East-Central Europe's only lasting educational success, through extending the period in which basic competencies are taught). Its goal, it would seem, is boosting the position of the Church colleges in comparison

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integrated into the criminal organization in government. They operate not under the law, but under the political and economic interests of Viktor Orbán: when required, they are part of the Fidesz campaign machine, or the concealers of economic crimes committed by central command.

- The regime not only occupies positions of public authority, and manipulates the sphere of politics, but acquires family wealth through the replacement of the leading economic elite and its methodical stripping of properties. The essence of the mafia state is that **the adopted political family accumulates wealth through the bloodless instruments of state coercion.** This centrally directed activity as a criminal organization involves the concerted operation of Parliament, government, the tax authorities, the Governmental Control Office, the Prosecutor's Office, and the police. Traditional corruption is suppressed: it is not state officials who are offered bribes, but the state criminal organization that takes protection money. The fortunes of the political family are piled up by the stooges and oligarchs belonging to the internal circle, laundering it through means supported by the



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to the secularized schools of public education.

- Loyal members of the power pyramid are **rewarded with office, not wealth**. Kaczyński lives alone in a rented apartment in Warsaw in extremely **austere** conditions. His wealth declaration shows that he had to borrow money from a friend in order to adapt his home to meet his ailing mother's medical needs, and then to create a small memorial to her after her death. Since its formation, the PiS has campaigned under the slogan of "the inexpensive state," and to date, no costly prestige investments can be tied to it. The president of the party is, in any case, weary of public appearances, and rarely appears in the media.

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state, and the introduction of off-shore companies.

- **The new elite brandishes its wealth** unabashedly. The godfather/prime minister builds a football stadium in the neighborhood of his country house, transferring billions into his football foundation, while his family piles up land and fortunes through stooges, buying palaces and country mansions. He will soon move into the royal castle in Buda. The visible wealth of the stooges and oligarchs who can be tied to him is in excess of 110 billion forints (350 million euro). The amounts siphoned off to members of the political family are on the scale of millions–billions, and the public revelation of such acts is an unremarkable, everyday occurrence.

### The difference between the two autocratic experiments' foreign policy

- Kaczyński's **relationship with Germany is ambivalent**. During the PiS's first term in government, he fostered good relations with Angela Merkel; these relations developed further during the governance of the Civil Platform. Merkel's support was likely necessary for Donald Tusk to become the President of the European Council. On the other hand, many historical grievances
- **Orbán is not fighting Germany, he is fighting Merkel**, and he looks for allies in this struggle even among members of her party. The slogan "Give Hungarians respect," used in a major billboard campaign, expresses how offended he was at not being shown the respect he believes he deserves in the Western world. His critique is not ideologically based; it is merely revenge for the lack of

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are deeply engrained in Kaczyński (his father fought in the Warsaw Uprising, and he was born in 1949 in a city leveled to the ground by the Germans). In his opinion, German capital should play a larger role in the revival of Poland. Once in a while, the politicians of the PiS bring up these historical debts they believe the Germans owe.

- **Kaczyński is unflinching in his commitment to the Atlantic Alliance.** He considers the USA and NATO the chief guarantors of Polish independence and sovereignty. The country's first PiS foreign minister, Witold Waszczykowski, is an American university educated individual who had worked in Geneva and at the Brussels office of NATO. His successor, Jacek Czaputowicz, has a similar orientation. It is one of the main aims of the PiS to allow NATO to establish permanent bases in Poland, achieved partially at the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw. In addition, he continues to work on Poland being added to the NATO Nuclear Sharing program, thereby further increasing the security of the country.
- One of the cornerstones of Polish foreign policy—irrespective of the government—is that Russia is a threat to Poland at all times. The Polish people believe that **dependence on Russian energy has a political**

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respect demonstrated towards the godfather, and is a means to position himself, rather than his country. Meanwhile, he acknowledges that Germany is Hungary's number one economic partner, with which it cannot engage in an economic battle.

- Orbán has **ejected all politicians and diplomats committed to the Atlantic Alliance** from his foreign affairs team. There is no Atlantic commitment, only bargains with the USA and NATO. With regard to Hungary's NATO obligations, they are met at the lowest possible level, merely to prevent the USA taking a stronger line against the autocratic regime in Hungary. This, of course, does not stop government propaganda from publicizing all sorts of anti-Hungarian conspiracy theories, among them stories of secret societies controlling the world, international banking offensives, sabotage by George Soros—adding to all of this a splash of anti-Semitism for good measure.
- The program of **Eastern Opening** in Hungarian foreign policy aims to secure socially unchecked, freely expendable resources for the adopted political family through its connections to Putin and other autocrats.

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**cost**, and so every effort must be made to avoid it. Poland carries on expansive commercial activities with the countries of the Far East, but business does not signify political legitimacy for any anti-democratic regime. The current PiS government takes up the cause of any country or people fighting against Russia (Ukraine, Chechnya, Georgia), and supports maintaining the sovereignty of the Baltic states by every means it has at its disposal, as well as Ukraine's intent to distance itself from Russia. Accordingly, Warsaw usually criticizes the West for not fully backing these causes.

- Kaczyński's **opposition to Brussels is motivated by a repositioning of Poland's status within the EU**. But this does not mean Warsaw has any intent to leave the EU. Quite the opposite: Poland would like to have more of a say in matters, **and wishes to be in the mainstream of the EU**. Naturally, it needs allies to achieve this, and Warsaw has recognized that the **Visegrád Four (V4)** are not strong enough for it to achieve its aims. This is why it has resurrected Piłsudski's concept of the Intermarium introduced between the two World Wars, which would have joined the countries of the East-Central European region, stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic and the Black Sea.

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This, it must be added, is not classical commerce, for the chief merchandise is Hungary's disloyalty to the EU, for which the adopted political family gains financial favors. Russian gas-diplomacy, the renovation of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant, and other similar deals put Hungary in an obliged, dependent position in exchange for private benefit. It is not the countries and nations, but the autocrats between whom the Eastern Opening serves to create an intimate, familial atmosphere. Fidesz tries to present its position of staying within the EU while opening towards the East as bridging East and West. In reality, however, its position mostly involves doing "family" business with the East, while black-mailing the West.

- To strengthen its position against Brussels, Orbán seeks allies in the framework of the **Visegrád Four**. With a collective stance opposed to Brussels' strategy for dealing with the refugee crisis in the form of compulsory relocation quotas, he also tries at the same time to turn it into a stronger community with a stronger bargaining position. Such a group would offer protection and support to the other participants in cases where, citing a democracy deficit, Brussels wished to take measures against moves toward autoc-

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Kaczyński would not envisage such an alliance to win protection and support against Brussels' claims of a democratic deficit, but rather to have its status as a regional middle power within the EU recognized. It was no coincidence that Poland took a middling, wavering position on the compulsory quota system for the placement of asylum seekers, since it did not want to antagonize Brussels and Berlin in this matter.

- Various organizations within the EU reacted strongly—even threatening to activate Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty—to those political changes orchestrated by Kaczyński, which were aimed at a concentration of power and violated the constitution. This surprised the government, and compelled it to partial retreat. The amplification of the nationalist ideological strain is not part of a larger strategy, but a spontaneous reaction to the criticism aimed at his government.

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racy within the EU. In the case of the V4, Orbán insists on a role as leader: if not for Hungary, then for himself. His personal ambition reaches beyond the intent to bring about this regional community of shared interests: he wants to be the provider of a model and a program opposed to the community of values that comprises the EU. At the same time, Hungarian foreign policy is either wholly “deaf” to the Polish initiatives—mainly because they also have an anti-Russian component—or simply cherry-picks those elements that could be useful for its propaganda.

- Orbán's “**Europe of Nations**” program is simply a demand for a new relationship with the EU: to make sure that the EU maintains the transfer of convergence funds, while at the same time securing the autonomy necessary for the building up of “national democracies,” that is, autocracies.

### Chances of a restoration of liberal democracy: party structure

- **Polish party structure has been in constant motion since the regime change:** some parties disappeared, while other new organizations formed. PiS, which won the 2015 elections, had only formed in 2001.
- After the electoral victory of Fidesz in the 2010 elections, the **party structure that had been stable since the regime change**—even rigid, in a certain sense—**collapsed**. The two large parties emerging from the re-

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This does not, however, mean that a large number of new faces made it into the political mainstream. Jarosław Kaczyński is one of the longest currently active politicians, already being actively involved in the opposition movement in the seventies. Typically, though parties may have failed or been discredited, this has been less true of their politicians. Only the leftist successor party seems to be disappearing from the political stage, both in organizational and personal terms. Clearly, however, new arrivals are taking their place.

- **In spite of constant change, Polish political life can basically be divided into two sides:** the Christian-nationalist and the liberal-conservative sides. In the last fifteen years, this has meant a division between PiS and PO. The former usually call the latter leftists, or “communists”—without foundation. The third side could be the disappearing old left, and the new left now in formation. Characteristically, however, neither the **PiS**, nor the **PO**, occupies the **central arena of power**, despite the fact that for a long while it seemed like the PO would be able to do so. **The PiS**—though it holds itself the only ideologically legitimate representative of the nation—is not

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gime change, the national conservative MDF and liberal SZDSZ, disintegrated. The socialist party split into two: the legal successor MSZP, an eclectic party with its politics grounded in inherited relationships rather than common principles, and the social-liberal Democratic Coalition (DK), led by the former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány. However, both parties held on to the discredited personal makeup of the party’s figureheads. A new left-wing green party, LMP (Politics Can be Different), was elected to parliament, but also later split in two, producing PM (Dialogue for Hungary). They now compete, along with another minor party formed after 2010, Együtt, for the votes of the left-wing electorate who won’t vote for MSZP or DK.

- **A three-party system** replaces the two-party system that preceded 2010. Fidesz managed to occupy what Orbán has termed a “**central arena of power**” (*centrális erőtér*), referring to its dominance in the political arena, rather than its position on the political spectrum. Jobbik, an ideology-driven, extreme-right radical party is positioned to its right, while the divided socialist and liberal parties are to its left. This party alignment rather resembles the situation under the Horthy regime, where the

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holding the center ground, but is positioned on the extreme right. **Even organizationally it integrates the extreme right-radical formations,** individuals and voters.

- The PiS does not dominate the right-wing political field, since the PO is still a major party of the liberal-conservative **right**. Moreover, not only did Nowoczesna, a **new liberal party** make it into parliament in 2015, but its support has grown a great deal since. The forces of the civil middle-ground, therefore, have a serious, institutionalized power and base in Poland. Besides them, another stable presence is the Polish People's Party (PSL), which gains its main support among the strata of provincial officials and civil servants.
- The **electoral list system** does not exclude the possibility of defeating PiS even without a united opposition. Since PiS is considered unsuitable for coalition by most of the political parties, if it is unable to secure more than half of the mandate alone, it will conceivably lose its chance to form a government.
- In Poland, the governing party cannot bring opposition parties into a position where they depend on the

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government party in the center also constantly saturated **elements of extreme-right ideology** in order to hold the right-wing camp together. **While Fidesz** largely absorbs the ideological frames and language of the radical right in order to keep its support base, **it does not integrate the voters of the extreme right.**

- Since 2010 there has been **neither a moderate center right party, nor a liberal party that could be taken seriously** in Hungary. Therefore, voters disillusioned by Fidesz, which commands most of the right, do not have a natural party environment where they could find representation on the right of the political ground without the mafia state elements. Therefore, their break with Fidesz would also have to mean a break with their right-wing values. This, however, is not a viable option for them, since it would mean much more than simply changing party preferences.
- The one-round, **disproportional election system** would only allow for the replacement of Fidesz through elections if the multitude of opposition parties—which justly see each other as unsuitable, and exclude one-another based on values and voter base—would form an electoral alliance. This is what ensures Fidesz its stability in power, although its popularity rises and falls.

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governing party, and either openly or latently become its vassals. If a political party is discredited, another is immediately formed in its place.

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- In the mafia state, politicians are stigmatized and criminalized, **while opposition parties are marginalized or domesticated.**

### The municipal hinterland for the protection of liberal democracy

- Since 2015, not only the capital and the major cities, but even the majority of rural municipalities in Poland are under the leadership of opposition forces. As such, it is impossible to administratively limit the influence of the parties, or to take away the financial independence of its followers; there are significant obstacles to forcing them into positions dependent on the government.

Due to Poland's size and heterogeneity, there is an extraordinarily strong regional consciousness, which manifests itself in political choices as well. In the northern, western, and Silesian metropolises of the country, a majority of the electorate supports the liberal-conservative camp, and the plebeian-populist PiS finds it very hard to address them. The clerks of the rural towns in the east also prefer to vote for the PSL. Moreover, the next municipal elections will only be in 2018, which means the PiS is forced to govern

- In contrast to Fidesz's 1998–2002 term in government, by 2010 practically the whole of the municipal sector had come under the influence of Fidesz. This made it impossible for the municipalities to form a sort of hinterland, or base, for the parties of the democratic opposition. Fidesz openly socializes the electorate to expect that if they do not elect a leadership loyal to the government, they will be divesting themselves of all central and EU development resources. Moreover, municipalities also depend on the central budget for a decisive majority of their current revenue. Meanwhile, the vassal status of mayors dependent on Orbán has made it possible for the municipalities to be stripped of their education and healthcare institutions without opposition, even as their free handling of their budgets has been curtailed. As a result, the municipalities have become essentially custodians, extensions of the power of government. Political and

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against the strong tide of oppositional municipal governments.

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cultural life is heavily centered on Budapest, and the few cities numbering between one to two hundred thousand have never played an independent role of political consequence for the whole country.

### The chances of an independent media

- The PiS had made efforts to bring public media under party control as early as the end of 2005. With minor amendments, the same law was in effect while the PO was in government. As such, the public media, though not a government mouthpiece, nevertheless tailored its broadcasts according to the values of the PO.
- In line with the Hungarian model, the PiS set its sights on the creation of a one-party media authority, so it is to be expected that they will try to redistribute radio frequency concessions as well.
- According to the government program of the PiS, the next step will be to establish a centralized organ through merging the former National Radio and Television Committee, the Office of Electronic Communications, and the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection.
- The two largest Polish commercial TV broadcasters (TVN and Polsat)
- With the Media Act passed in 2010, the media, which had been under multi-party control until then, was placed under the jurisdiction of one party, meaning that public radio, television, and the central news agency essentially became unchecked propaganda tools of Fidesz.
- In redistributing frequencies, the one-party media authority serves frequency owners loyal to the government, and throws owners of frequencies who are not committed to the government out of the media market.
- With the establishment of the National Office of Communications, the communications tasks of the public sector and the public procurement of state advertisement were centralized, allowing the state to fundamentally limit the freedom of the media market.
- Fidesz has made attempts to gather two major commercial television channels (RTL Klub and TV2) into its own circle of clients using the



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are in the hands of committed liberal democrats. The TVN Agency belongs to the international TVN Group, which is currently the largest advertising company in Poland. Until now there has been no attempt to force them out of the market.

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tools of state coercion. In the case of TV2, its efforts were successful: the acquisition by one of Orbán's stooges was made possible through a state loan, and the repayment of the loan is assisted by the provision of state advertisements.

### Civil resistance and the political parties

- Civil movements challenging the anti-democratic actions of the PiS-led government manifest themselves in regular demonstrations, bringing tens of thousands, or occasionally over a hundred thousand, protesters out on the streets. Their moves to protect liberal democracy and the constitution are fundamentally of a **political and system-critical nature**, since they are usually organized by the urban middle class and intellectuals. Actions to protect collective interests usually belong to the sphere of labor unions in Poland. But since the union with the largest membership and a reach across sectors, Solidarity, is bound closely to the PiS both politically and ideologically, it is unlikely to be willing to continue the hard line it took in the protection of collective interests under earlier administrations. Nevertheless, it is possible that the good economic results of earlier years may
- Most of the civil demonstrations called against the actions of the Fidesz government were about **protecting collective interests**, or of a **government-critical** nature, and altogether failed to culminate in a nationwide political movement that would formulate a general critique of the system itself. Generally, the protests concerned harm to personal material interests: the withdrawal of early retirement pensions, the nationalization of private pension funds, the situation of people with foreign currency loans, the nationalization of tobacco shops, the redistribution of state land leases, or the losses caused by the brokerage scandals. A partial exception to this rule were the mass actions in response to the elimination of autonomy in public and higher education; nonetheless, these movements also remained within the paradigm of government criticism. Two govern-

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allow the government to turn to the politics of distribution.

- During the renewed waves of demonstration, the **KOD (Committee for the Defense of Democracy)** was formed, evoking the traditions of the organization formed by dissident intellectuals in the mid-seventies, the KOR (Workers' Defense Committee). On the part of the current opposition movements, this **signifies an open commitment to the regime-changing traditions** of the past, and places current actions against the government in this positive historical tradition. KOD was the announcer and organizer of the latest mass demonstrations; it tries to function not only as an umbrella organization, but also focuses on building an extensive, largely rural network.
- The huge demonstration by democratic forces in June was already supported by **three former presidents of the republic** (Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Bronisław Komorowski). Komorowski established his own institute after he left office, with its chief aim being the preservation and support of the achievements won after the change of regime.

At the same time, KOD **invited the Polish opposition parties** to ally with it, cooperating to protect democracy.

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ment initiatives with an impact on middle-class lifestyle and consumer habits were withdrawn in the face of massive popular opposition. The ban on shops opening on Sundays lasted little over a year, while the planned introduction of an internet tax was dropped altogether after mass demonstrations.

The flash-mob demonstrations bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets were not brought into existence by old civil organizations or political parties, and the spontaneous mobilizations were not able to institutionalize or produce leading opposition figures.

- The majority of the demonstrations were critical of the entire postcommunist period, and **did not reach back to the regime-changing traditions of the anti-communist dissident movement**. In paradoxical unison with the government ideology, they considered the 1989 regime change itself a deal concluded by the elites, bypassing society at large. This may of course be a consequence of the fact that the Hungarian anti-communist dissident movement—unlike the Polish example—continued in the liberal party (SZDSZ), both in terms of the individual actors and its institutionalized form. With its loss of credibility and ultimate disappearance, it virtually

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Most opposition parties joined this call, though the PO has kept its distance thus far. KOD was also supported in its call for an alliance of the opposition by the fact that although the right-of-center PO lost the elections, it was not discredited, while other opposition parties, such as the liberal *Nowoczesna*, are growing in popularity.

- The institutionalization of the civil movement and its promising cooperation with the political parties of the opposition is extending the resistance movement and its institutional base, countering the PiS with a dynamism that shows no sign of slowing.

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blocked any route of return to the traditions of democratic opposition.

- **László Sólyom**, the Fidesz-supported president of the republic between 2005 and 2010, and one of the leading legislators of the constitutive establishment of the change of regimes, **remained detached from movements critical of the government**, aside from a few small gestures.
- As the left-wing parties of the democratic opposition had largely been discredited, and its new, green parties were insignificant, a trap formed for the new civil movements. Cooperation with these parties would place them into a quarantine with no perspective, while a refusal to cooperate isolates them from the base of minimal, but extant, active, system-critical voters. At the same time, the civil resistance mobilized from time to time is also unable to constitute a new party, because their aims are always focused on a single issue, rather than against the system as a whole.
- The wavering, self-extinguishing futurelessness of the movements after 2010 resulted neither in the institutionalization and stabilization of civil movements as political forces of consequence, nor the renewal of the parties in democratic opposition.

## In summary

- The chances of the **conservative Polish attempt at building an autocracy** being defeated are strong even under the current democratic institutional framework. This is ensured by a number of factors: the proportional electoral system, which constitutionally prevents excessive power concentration; the social traditions of resistance to authority; the civil movement building on these traditions; the existence of moderate right and liberal parties constituting the main part of the opposition forces; PiS being forced onto the extreme right of the political spectrum; the political diversity offered by municipal governments; and the strong media platforms for freedom of expression. At the same time, the possibility of a Hungarian scenario unfolding in Poland is also prevented by the very character of the PiS, its personal composition, principles, and program, as well as the tradition and actuality of the Polish right. In its current form, the PiS is not capable of following the Hungarian model; that is, many circumstances and components are missing for it to do so.
- Conversely, the chances of overcoming the **Hungarian mafia state** within the framework of the given institutional system are far more limited. Factors preventing the supplanting of the mafia state include: the disproportional and manipulative electoral system that makes election fraud a real possibility; a lack of social traditions of resistance to authority; the historical culture of individual, detached bargaining with the regimes in power; the lack of a moderate right-wing or liberal party for any voters abandoning Fidesz; the central position of Fidesz in the tripartite political field; the uniformity of the political-institutional map, since the municipalities have integrated into the ruling system; as well as the elimination or ghettoization of spaces for freedom of expression. All of this will likely result in a continued decline in the chances of a change of government through free elections and the re-establishment of liberal democracy in Hungary. Hungary is on a calamitous track towards the course of development undergone by former Soviet republics after the end of communism, reaching the point of no-return, where electoral possibilities for change have been exhausted, and only vibrant revolutions following rigged elections made it possible for the reigning regimes to fall.

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