

Maciej Skrzypek

Changes in the Functions of the Opposition in the Political Systems of Selected Central and Eastern European States (2008-2019)

The dissertation deals with the trajectory of opposition duration in unconsolidated democracies. Opposition has been a subject of interest to political scientists for more than 70 years. The state of the art suggest that the type of political system is crucial in determining the functions this institution performs. Given the research gap about functions of the opposition in unconsolidated democracies, it is necessary to determine the characteristics of this political institution in political systems between democracies and autocracies.

The study aims to determine the relationship between the inclusion of eligible voters in political decision-making, conditions of voters' agitation and mobilization, mainstream media control by those in power, elite co-optation, repression against political opposition (explanatory variables), and changes in opposition function (an explained variable). It allows to identify necessary conditions and complementary factors among these variables for shifts in opposition function within three scenarios. In the first case, the opposition adopted essential features in hybrid regime (limited possibilities to carried their function). The second scenario is as follows: opposition carried out the functions in accordance with autocracy (lack of possibilities to perform their function). The last scenario include maintaining by the opposition the function according to democratic models (autonomy and freedom to carry out their functions).

The research problem addresses changes in the following opposition functions: concerning control over rulers, providing an alternative, and seeking power alternation via elections. Case studies focus on post-communist states: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. They all experienced undergoing systemic transition during the third wave of democratization and EU accession, preceding the third wave of autocratization. These states experienced democratic consolidation breakdowns, transitioning to autocracy. Excluding post-Yugoslav states based on the different dynamics of democratic consolidation there, attributed to internal conflicts and the prevalence of ethno-nationalism in political culture, among other factors. Consequently, the level of stability of political institutions and the consolidation of democratic rules of competition was lower compared to the states of Central and Eastern Europe.

The research period encompasses the third wave of autocratization. The initial caesura is the 2008 economic recession in Europe, when occurred a rise in the popularity of populists and an intensification of the use of anti-democratic means (restrictions on freedom of speech

and the press, the right of assembly and association) to suppress those contesting the austerity policies. The final point is 2019, the last moment the COVID-19 pandemic, when familiar means were justified by the need to protect public health.

The study delivered a middle-range theory on opposition functioning during autocratization in Central and Eastern Europe, attributing changes to reduced voter inclusion, unequal mobilization conditions, media control, repression, and elite co-optation. The dissertation draws on the comparative method and process tracking method. The first facilitates generalization conclusions through comparative case study results, while the latter answers why and how opposition function changed, establishing causal structures, necessary conditions, complementary factors, and intervening variables. The study empirically contributes to the field by testing the utility of the hybrid regimes category. In turn, the theoretical contribution includes creating a catalog of essential features of opposition in a hybrid regime. Verifying measures for voter preference consistency, exclusion of social groups from decision-making, and repression against opposition, constitute the study's methodological contribution.