

RISING MAJORITARIANISM AS CHALLENGE FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE – TURKEY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction. In many countries, including EU members and their close neighbours, we can observe the so called democratic backsliding in the current decade. Political scientists have been discussing intensively the reasons behind this process. The proposed paper focuses on the rising phenomenon of majoritarianism which seems to contribute to the problems of democratic governance – particularly in the polarised and diverse societies in terms of the world outlook, beliefs and political sympathies – because of the dominance of a particular political and social group or groups in a political system. The aim of the article is to analyse different paths of development of majoritarianism in the 1990s and the 2000s and its impact on the political regime in the current decade. The case of Turkey as one of the “hardest” cases to indicate the phenomenon is compared to some selected states from Central Europe to verify the main hypothesis that the structural factors emerging within the historical process are behind the development of majoritarianism, which has been even strengthened in the current decade, including the pandemic period in 2020.

Methods and materials. The author takes the qualitative approach. He uses the process-tracing method to investigate the development of majoritarianism in selected states and conducts the comparative analysis to identify the similarities and differences between Turkey and two Central European states – Hungary and Poland with reference to the analysed phenomenon.

Results. At the turn of the 1990s and the 2000s a concentration of the party system, producing a decrease in the number of parties in the parliament and a rising party system polarization that strengthened the two largest parties and developed two ideological blocks resulted in the development of majoritarianism in the 2000s – mainly in Turkey and Hungary. It did not lead to the democracy decline at this time. In the second decade of the 21st century single-party governments (or coalition governments with one dominating party) sharing the majoritarian understanding of democracy have consolidated their power at the cost of the weakening of the opposition as well as have strengthened the executive – in relation to the legislature and judiciary. These processes have led to limitations in working of checks and balances system but also political and social pluralism due to increasing dominance of incumbents in political and social life of analyzed countries, particularly during the pandemic period.

Discussion and conclusions. In Hungary and Poland the phenomenon of majoritarianism contributes so far to lowering the quality of democracy – in comparison with the Turkish situation reflecting rather the gradual change of the political regime to less democratic (i.e. a new type of authoritarianism).

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Introduction

The term “majoritarianism” is understood in political science as “the idea that the numerical majority of a population should have the final say in determining the outcome of a decision” [7] and “the view that legitimate political authority expresses the will of the majority of those subject to this authority (also known as the majority principle)” [21]. This majority principle can be treated as the democratic rule but only under certain conditions. A majority should at least take into consideration views of a minority and respect rights of minorities, including the participation in the democratic processes. We can talk about working of the qualified or integrative majoritarianism in this case – depending on the scope of remedies to the exclusionary tendencies of the classical majoritarianism [27. P. 105-139].

The participation in the democratic process means among others that there must be a possibility that other majority will emerge – first of all through the electoral process. If this is not the case, the pejorative understanding of “majoritarianism” appears and can mean the “tyranny of the majority” as Giovanni Sartori or Robert Dahl put it, excluding any pluralism – a key principle of liberal democracy [8; 28]. It means that “the people” building the majority have, at least in theory, the impact on the decision-making process but not necessary citizens [13].

This pejorative understanding of majoritarianism will be the subject of the article. The phenomenon of majoritarianism understood in this way seems to contribute to the problems with keeping the liberal model of democracy and democratic governance in the current decade – particularly in the polarised and diverse societies in terms of the world outlook, beliefs and political sympathies – because of the dominance of a particular political and social group or groups in a political system. This is the aspect which is not often the focus of research on the so called democratic backsliding [6].

The aim of the article is to analyse, using the process-tracing method, the development of majoritarianism at the turn of 1990s and the 2000s and its impact on the political regime in the current decade.

The case of Turkey as one of the “hardest” cases to indicate the phenomenon is compared to some selected states from Central Europe – i.e. Hungary and Poland – to demonstrate that this phenomenon occurs in more than a single region. The article is aimed at verifying the main hypothesis that the structural factors emerging within the historical process are behind the development of majoritarianism, which has been

even strengthened in the current decade. In this period, including the pandemic in 2020, single-party governments (or coalition governments with one dominating party) sharing the majoritarian understanding of democracy have consolidated their power at the cost of the weakening of the opposition as well as have strengthened the executive – in relation to the legislature and judiciary. These processes lead to limitations in working of political and social pluralism due to increasing dominance of incumbents in political and social life of analyzed countries.

Study

Some structural (system) factors can increase the risk of deformation of the majority rule meaning the establishment of the aforementioned “tyranny of majority”. According to Ioannis Grigoriadis, they refer to the formation of single-party governments, dominance of executive power, unicameralism, unitary and centralized government, “flexibly” written or unwritten constitution, insufficient judiciary review of the constitutionality of legislation, party system with parties limited in number and profile as well as elections by plurality [12. P. 2].

Many of these factors emerged as a result of structural political changes in Turkey as well as in Hungary and Poland at the turn of the 1990s and the 2000s [18; 23]. One of them was a concentration of the party system, producing a decrease in the number of parties in the parliament. Actually, this process was present in Turkey already in the 1980s when the Motherland Party (ANAP) dominated the political landscape [2. P. 81; 16]. However, it was a result of a particular political situation – the military coup in 1980 after which all main political parties were dissolved and, moreover, this tendency was not maintained in the 1990s. There were five parties in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey at this time, but only two to three parties which exceeded the electoral threshold in the 2000s (although shortly after 2007 elections the number of parties in the parliament increased) [31. P. 321]. While in the 1990s the number of parties over the threshold for parliamentary representation in Poland fluctuated between five and nine, and in Hungary it was six, this number decreased to four in the 2007-2010 period [24. P. 239]. This had much to do with: 1) elevated electoral thresholds – five per cent for single parties but more for coalitions in the Central European countries, and ten per cent in Turkey, in which also the protest against all old parties limited their number to two in 2002 election, as well as 2) the required number of deputies necessary to form parliamentary

party groups - fifteen in Poland and Hungary (ten from 2007 in the latter case) and twenty in Turkey [24. P. 241-242; 20. P. 139].

This process was accompanied by a rising party system polarization that strengthened the two largest parties and developed two ideological blocks. In Turkey, it was the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Republican People's Party (CHP); in Hungary, it was Fidesz and the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and, since 2007, the Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland [20. P. 143].

The concentration of the party system and bi-polarization resulted in the development of majoritarianism in the 2000s - mainly in Turkey and Hungary (in Poland the party system polarization was lower at this time and the parliament more pluralistic than in Hungary) [25. P. 190]. It meant in terms of executive-parliament relationship the dominance of incumbents in the parliament bodies [2. P. 81; 18. P. 56]. Government deputies used questions or interpellations as a way to publicize government policies. Changes in the internal rules of parliament strengthened the position of the government and the governing party (or parties) in the legislative process at the expense of the parliamentary opposition. An increasing number of government laws were approved while opposition proposals were blocked [40. P. 184-188]. This majoritarianism did not result in democracy decline at this time. For instance, the Hungarian parliamentary system was still called *democratic* majoritarian system [25. P. 190].

The further rise of majoritarianism in Turkey and Hungary as well as its development in Poland took place in the second decade of this century. The favorable condition was a particular political situation - i.e. power being assumed and consolidated by single party governments or governments with a dominating coalition partner. The consolidation has been most noticeable in Turkey since 2007 (when the presidency was taken over by the AKP) and in Hungary since 2010. In both countries, the governing party won subsequent elections, in part through the manipulation of the electoral law to its advantage, and the manipulation of voter decisions through the disproportionate use of media and state financial resources by the incumbents [33]. The landslide victories created an environment for further rising of majoritarianism. It favored legal changes that led to state institutions, including the highest courts and substantial part of media, being taken over by the incumbents [10].

The Hungarian "supermajoritarianism" was present at this time and meant having

Fidesz and its satellite partner (Christian Democratic People's Party, KNDP) holding a two-thirds majority in parliament, thus making it possible to change the constitution or appoint persons to the judiciary, electoral or media bodies without the participation of the opposition [4; 26]. In Turkey the AKP governments did not have such a majority in the parliament. However, the governing party managed to get the acceptance of one opposition party, becoming later the partner in the special alliance, i.e. the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) for the constitutional amendments in the parliament (January 2017). They were approved in April 2017 constitutional referendum. These steps led to a gradual introduction of the presidential system *a la Turca* - with the president as a strong head of government and a weak system of checks and balances [9].

Poland "joined" Turkey and Hungary in 2015 when PiS won the presidential and then the parliamentary elections and formed a government consisted of PiS and two minor parties (all three have been called the United Right). The only difference between Poland and the other two countries is that the leader of the Polish governing party, Jarosław Kaczyński, is not the prime minister or president but rather holds *de facto* power. The Polish government's policy in 2015-2020 resembles the practice of the AKP and Fidesz. People connected with incumbents captured different state political and economic institutions as well as the courts (the Constitutional Tribunal, the Supreme Court, the National Judiciary Council) and the public media. The Polish government is just not always so efficient in this process than the incumbents in Turkey or Hungary, facing some limitations of its activities. It has a lot to do with a lack of developed clientelistic networks and limited capture of business institutions by the Law and Justice. It is e.g. a reason why it could not take over the private media (creating its own instead) [30. P. 198-199].

The pandemic in 2020 even strengthened the aforementioned processes. The model of governance connected with the extraordinary state is usually based on a dominant position of the executive power in the decision making process at the cost of other branches of power. We can observe it also in 2020 in the analyzed countries (no matter if the state of emergency has been formally introduced or not). The President and its administration (Turkey) or members of the central (not local) government - Prime Minister and relevant Ministers such as the Health Minister (Hungary, Poland) issue different regulations to fight against the

COVID-19, strengthening at the same time their position (although in Turkey decrees issued by the President belonged to his competences also before 2020). The most noticeable example could be observed in Hungary. The Hungarian government obtained the right to issue decrees for certain period of time, limiting the power of the legislative. It created also an opportunity to adopt the regulations limiting the power of (oppositional) municipalities [38]. Moreover, this health crisis legislation does not usually go through a sufficient judiciary review in terms of constitutionality – adding another factor which can increase “tyranny of majority”.

The additional favorable condition for the development of majoritarianism is a strictly majoritarian understanding of democracy presented by the governing parties. It was present already in the 2000s (particularly in Turkey and Poland in which Law and Justice ruled already in 2005-2007 period within the minority and coalition governments) but first the working of single-party governments (or coalition governments with one dominating party) and consolidation of power of incumbents in the current decade (in Turkey even a little bit earlier) enabled its full use. The political culture is then the factor contributing also to the rising of majoritarianism in the analyzed countries. According to the AKP, Fidesz or Law and Justice a strong support acquired in the election by the majority of the electorate makes the authorities' activities on behalf of the electorate legitimate. In their opinion the incumbents having such a legitimacy can also impose some solutions (laws, policies, etc.) knowing best what the masses need. They go even beyond this – they feel authorised to promote particular values, worldview or lifestyle. Because of this Jenny White writes with reference to the AKP that “democracy is widely understood as a mandate for the winning party to impose its values” [39. P. 185].

The question is what legitimizes this mandate. According to the incumbents in Turkey, Hungary and Poland they represent the will and interests of the “community.” Here appears a clear reference by incumbents to the identity politics (with a use of mixture of conservatism, nationalism and populism) as well as the communitarian approach to democracy, which, interestingly, resembles the approach of many Asian countries. The AKP, Fidesz and Law and Justice, apart from dividing the society to “we” and “they” (classical populist approach) and polarising it [3; 15], refer and appeal often to the macro-community, i.e. Turkish Sunni Muslims, Hungarian Christians or Polish Catholics respectively who are in a big majority in Turkey,

Hungary and Poland. They are electoral majorities that support the governing party. This gives incumbents a strong democratic legitimacy to act on behalf of “the people” [32. P. 66-67].

The communitarian approach to democracy is promoted in this context. It is based on putting more emphasis on the rights of communities – be it family (micro-community) or the aforementioned nation and religious community (macro-community) than on the freedoms of the individual citizens who have also obligations to the community. The Hungarian Justice Minister László Trócsányi was talking in this context directly about the conservative, not liberal understanding of democracy with the key role of a community [36]. The collective approach is reflected in the Hungarian constitution, in which it is stated that “we hold that individual freedom can only be complete in co-operation with others” [17. P. 2]. According to Law and Justice, without the community and without the nation state democracy and human rights are not possible. Only being a member of the nation state every citizen can use all rights. A similar approach is taken, at least in theory, by the AKP. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, while talking about democracy, mentions both the common good and individual rights [32. P. 64].

The majoritarianism (or sometimes even “supermajoritarianism”) as well as majoritarian and communitarian approach to democracy have generated problems with keeping the liberal model of democracy. The AKP, Fidesz and Law and Justice governments do not represent the will and interest of the whole nation, but the majority of electorate. The majoritarianism and majoritarian understanding of democracy lead to the gradual marginalisation of all “others” or “them” – i.e. all minority groups within elites and society who represent interests or share opinions and worldviews which differ from that of majority. It is here first of all about the opposition as well as various minorities.

The opposition in parliaments in Turkey, Hungary and Poland have been marginalized (although in the Polish Senate – the upper house of the parliament – the oppositional parties and independent politicians have had since 2019 the small majority). The parliament is often sidelined, or it works as a rubber stamp institution as demonstrated in Turkey by so-called omnibus bills – a large number of unrelated laws adopted by the AKP (since 2017 often with support of the MHP which is currently not a real opposition) with no real discussion or careful scrutiny during the late-night emergency sessions. Similarly to Turkey, there are usually no real discussions on drafts of new regulations in

parliamentary bodies and insufficient consultations in the Hungarian and Polish parliament. Many laws are amended quickly – often during late-night sessions. The exception is the Polish Senate since 2019, which consults the draft laws with experts, discusses them carefully and introduce amendments. However, at the end of the day the Polish lower house – Sejm, in which incumbents have the majority, adopts usually the previous version of a law, without the Senate amendments. The laws often have to be changed again – due to low quality. The aforementioned parliaments are becoming bodies serving mainly the interests of the governing party. Whatever the leader of the party proposes is approved by the governing majority [19. P. 163]. The opposition, not having a substantial impact on the final stage of the legislative process (usually its amendments are rejected by the governing majority), attempts extraordinary measures such as blocking the work of the parliament, taking part in or organizing street protests, or building anti-government coalitions, but their role is limited in terms of changing the distribution of power – at least at the national level (big cities in all three countries belong often to the opposition) [29].

The majoritarianism and majoritarian understanding of democracy lead also to the situation that although different types of minorities are generally recognized in Turkey, Hungary and Poland, they are often marginalized as well. It is articulated most clearly by the AKP – Erdoğan as the Prime Minister repeated the Turkish term *çapulcu* which means a marauder or looter, having in mind e.g. ecologist organizations [5]. The discrimination and politics of exclusion of minorities are observable – based on religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, worldview, lifestyle or just opinion which differ from that of majority or incumbents. In Turkey, due to the fact that in practice the majority which AKP speaks about, means the Sunni Turks, the rights and interests of large social groups, e.g. Alevites or to certain extent Kurds, are not taken into account [14. P. 55-67]. People who express the atheistic opinions in the social media can be prosecuted (e.g. well known musician Fazıl Say in the past), the research workshop on the evolution theory cannot receive public grants and the LGBT citizens cannot count on the full respect for their rights (e.g. the freedom of assembly is limited) and their guarantee in the new constitution in the situation when the AKP politicians express the opinion about the homosexuality as about the disease [11; 32. P. 66]. Similar cases can be identified in Poland and Hungary. There are many examples of the

negative attitude of Law and Justice politicians towards the “gender” movement and LGBT community (sometimes associated with pedophiles) and limitation of their rights as citizens (not to mention the right to marriage) as e.g. the freedom of assembly, health care, etc [34]. The cultural and social activities which are not in accordance with “the official” worldview, are not funded or promoted – in comparison to the undertakings of organizations connected with the Catholic Church [1]. Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orbán expresses often its anti-LGBT attitude, e.g. hosting the anti-LGBT American organization in Budapest. The position towards Roma community is also very negative – we can identify such cases as “jokes” about burning the representatives of this group [35; 37].

Conclusion

To conclude, the majoritarianism as a permanent phenomenon emerged in Turkey and the selected Central European countries (much earlier in Hungary than in Poland) mainly as a result of the structural political processes at the turn of the 1990s and the 2000s – such as consolidation of party systems, their polarization and strengthening of the executive power. This phenomenon did not mean at this time the “tyranny of majority” and did not have substantial impact on keeping the liberal model of democracy.

However, the situation has changed in the current decade. The majoritarianism has been strengthened (sometimes having the form of “supermajoritarianism” as in Hungary) after forming the single-party governments (or coalition governments with one dominating party) and consolidation of power by governing parties. This process combined with the use of a particular component of the political culture by incumbents in all analysed states (which could not be fully used beforehand) – i.e. majoritarian and communitarian understanding of democracy has led not only to the weakening of the checks and balances system but also to politics of marginalization or even exclusion and discrimination of both opposition and different minorities. As a result the political and social pluralism – a key component of the liberal model of democracy has been limited to a large extent.

In Hungary and Poland this phenomenon contributes so far to lowering the quality of democracy – in comparison with the Turkish situation reflecting rather the gradual change of the political regime to less democratic (i.e. a new type of authoritarianism). The issue analyzed in this article confirms this general difference

in the democracy decline between Turkey and the Central European countries. The politics of exclusion seems to be more extensive in the latter country than in Hungary and Poland – with more serious problems concerning large groups such as Alevis or Kurds. Nevertheless, the worsening quality of democracy is also problematic in the Central European states – in terms of keeping the liberal model of democracy and democratic governance. It refers at least to two of three categories of the quality of democracy proposed by Leonardo Morlino, i.e. “procedures” – correct working of procedural aspects of representative democracy and “content” – the question if citizens, associations, etc. can use their rights and liberties without substantial constraints [22. P. 194-197].

The aforementioned de-democratization can be even strengthened in the analyzed countries in the nearest future – due to the increasing

dysfunctional impact of majoritarianism on the state of democracy in the period of pandemic in 2020. The special model of governance connected with the additional competences for the executive power in the decision-making process (particularly noticeable in parliamentary systems – in Hungary and Poland), even if temporary, can be reintroduced if incumbents find it necessary. Moreover, the health crisis has substantially limited the rights of citizens in all three countries. Although many of these limitations are being lifted, some of them can be permanent. This concerns particularly the changes included in bigger legislative packages, being loosely linked (or not related) to fight against the coronavirus. They are more to limit different activities, also in Internet, and rights (including freedom of speech) of citizens or groups who are inconvenient for the incumbents [38].

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РАСТУЩИЙ МАЖОРИТАРИЗМ КАК ВЫЗОВ ДЕМОКРАТИЧЕСКОМУ УПРАВЛЕНИЮ – ТУРЦИЯ В СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ

Введение. Во многих странах, включая членов ЕС и их ближайших соседей, за последние десять лет мы можем наблюдать так называемый демократический откат. Политологи активно обсуждают причины этого процесса. Предлагаемая статья посвящена растущему феномену мажоритаризма, который, по-видимому, способствует решению проблем демократического управления – особенно в поляризованных и разнородных обществах с точки зрения мировоззрения, убеждений и политических симпатий в случае доминирования определенной политической и социальной группы или групп в политической системе. Целью статьи является анализ различных путей развития мажоритаризма в 1990-е и 2000-е годы и его влияния на политический режим в текущем десятилетии. Пример Турции, как один из “наиболее трудных” кейсов для изучения этого феномена, сравнивается с некоторыми государствами Центральной Европы для проверки основной гипотезы о том, что структурные факторы, обусловленные исторически, стоят за развитием мажоритаризма, который в последние годы усилился, что проявилось и в период пандемии в 2020 году.

Методы и материалы. Автор использует качественный подход и метод наблюдения для изучения развития мажоритаризма в отдельных государствах, проводит сравнительный анализ для выявления сходств и различий между Турцией и двумя центральноевропейскими государствами – Венгрией и Польшей применительно к исследуемому феномену.

Результаты. На рубеже 1990-х и 2000-х годов концентрация партийной системы,

приведшая к сокращению числа партий в парламенте и поляризации партийной системы, усилила две крупнейшие партии и развила два идеологических блока, что свидетельствует о росте мажоритаризма в 2000-х годах, главным образом в Турции и Венгрии. В то же время это не привело к упадку демократии. Во втором десятилетии XXI века однопартийные правительства (или коалиционные правительства с одной доминирующей партией), разделяющие мажоритарное понимание демократии, консолидировали свою власть ценой ослабления оппозиции, а также укрепили исполнительную власть – по отношению к законодательной и судебной власти. Эти процессы привели к нарушению в работе системы сдержек и противовесов, а также к политическому и социальному плюрализму из-за растущего доминирования должностных лиц в политической и социальной жизни анализируемых стран, особенно в период пандемии.

Обсуждение и выводы. В Венгрии и Польше феномен мажоритаризма в настоящее время способствует снижению качества демократии, в то время как ситуация в Турции отражает скорее постепенную смену политического режима на менее демократический (т. е. новый тип авторитаризма).

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Ключевые слова:

Венгрия, Польша, Турция; авторитаризм, поляризация, концентрация партийной системы, консолидация власти, либеральная демократия, мажоритаризм, мажоритарное понимание демократии, плюрализм

Keywords:

Hungary, Poland, Turkey; authoritarianism, bi-polarisation, concentration of party system, consolidation of power, liberal democracy, majoritarianism, majoritarian understanding of democracy, pluralism