

INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN (THE CASE OF WEIMAR REPUBLIC)*

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The paper aims to examine the institutional causes of the democratic breakdown of the Weimar Republic.

To accomplish that purpose following problems were set: firstly, paper discusses current state of democracy throughout the world, its issues and challenges. Paper also underlines global trend of democratic decline. That discussion is provided to draw parallels and pinpoint relevance of the analysis.

Afterwards, the research examines German political system, democratic roots and development. Moreover, constitutional changes and checks and balances are analyzed as well. The paper particularly scrutinizes evolution of German political parties and specifics of electoral system. Institutional heritage of regime change is also unveiled. The paper underlines pitfalls of Weimar Republic's institutions that led to democratic breakdown. Apart from it, research generally outlines socio-economic background of Weimar Republic.

During the research examination of documents, content analysis, comparative and historical methods were applied.

The paper concludes that regarding to its institutional weakness, that is absence of electoral threshold, fragmentation of parliament and political parties, the abundance of social associations, semi-presidential system and socio-economic situation created ground for an authoritarian takeover of the Weimar Republic.

***Keywords:* electoral system, party system, institutional system, democracy, democratic breakdown, regime change, transitional regime, party fragmentation, form of governance.**

Introduction

Although historic events and institutional shifts described in this paper took place nearly a century ago, with the current state of democracy in the world and the challenges it faces the particular case of Weimar Republic democratic breakdown offers a great interest. Hence this piece suggests fresh perspective to events, institutional and regime changes that led to collapse of Weimar democracy and emergence of one of the most notorious regimes in history. It is also noteworthy that by institutional determinants this paper underlines particularly electoral and party systems in general Weimar constitutional context and socio-economic dynamics as well.

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Current State of Democracy

When discussing current state of democracy throughout the world it is significant to note that in spite of the difference between models and methods that measure democracy there is consensus that democratic performance in recent years declined (Diamond, *Facing up to the Democratic Recession* 147). Moreover, it is noted that the trend concerning democratic decline in authoritarian states is much steeper and evident. Diamond recently concluded (Diamond, *Democratic Regression in Comparative Perspective: Scope, Methods, and Causes* 26) that since 2015 we can see that the trend got much steeper, and in particular democracy has been failing in strategically significant states, such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Turkey, the Philippines, and for the first time in an EU member country – Hungary. As Zakaria argues another major reason in global democratic decline is relatively decreasing role of the US as world hegemon power and emergence of the post-America (Zakaria 98). Isolationist foreign policy especially during the Trump administration can be considered as an example of Zakaria's notion. Researches on this topic shows that internationally, advocacy and promotion of democracy is closing to the bottom score as public's foreign-policy priorities. And that general international perception is that democracy promotion has already receded as an actual priority of U.S. foreign policy (Diamond, *Facing up to the democratic recession* 152).

Historic Review of Democratic Roots in Germany

To understand and revalue current institutional checks and balances as well as pitfalls of their inconsistency we will try to analyze twilight of Weimar Republic from the event happened almost a century ago. In 1933, celebrating newly opened Reichstag after arson, President Hindenburg in company of Chancellor Hitler visited the grave of Frederick II. At that time, it was evident that President and Chancellor agreed on Enabling act, a law that granted Hitler-led government and Hitler personally right to enact laws that can bypass constitution and all without consent of parliament. In scholarly discourse adoption of Enabling act is considered as a momentum of democratic breakdown in Weimar Republic. However, democratic erosion started long before, because of sequence of socio-economic and political events, international affairs and institutional heritage. The latter particularly hints that democratic breakdown was immanent to political system. Hence, for explaining the breakdown it is important to outline afore-mentioned events, institutional and international environments.

The roots of modern democracy in Germany and particularly in Weimar Republic starts with the 1848 revolution, when nearly all German states significantly increased popular participation in government, fearing possible revolutions and revolts (Blackbourn 320). In spite of democratization and modernization democratic regime emergence was strongly mitigated by institutional restrictions. At that time German political and particularly election system was characterized by a three-class voting system, which initially was controlled by Junkers, rich landlords. After the initial period in the 1870s German political system entered to the era of "iron and rye" coalition. During this era cornerstone institutions of democratic regime were heavily restricted. For instance, the Parliament could not appoint ministers or discuss foreign policy, and voting was conducted orally (Gosnell 46). Although after 1870 as a result of suffrage all adult males aged over the twenty-five gained the right to vote, in rural areas voting and political life was strongly influenced by the landlords (Goldstein 218). Abrams (Abrams 10) assesses German political system during that period as despite in theory being constitutional monarchy, in practice German Empire was governed by a Prussian oligarchy.

As Acemoglu and Robinson argue (Acemoglu and Robinson 54) the final emergence of German democracy, the Weimar Republic in 1919, was in response to the

severe threat of social disorder and revolution triggered by the collapse of the German armies on the Western Front in August 1918.

In spite of the collapse of German Empire and emergence of the republic, the flawed Weimar Constitution was in fact a copy of Imperial constitution. Emperor held the right to appoint the Chancellor, as well as the head of government, summon and prorogue parliament, lead the army, with Emperor's assent parliament could be resolved (Imperial Constitution, 1871). Wilhelmine (late 19th century - 1918) era's political life, as it was already mentioned featured somewhat democratic trends. German political system included traditional to every constitutional monarchy centrist conservative and centrist liberal parties, as well as Centre catholic party. At later years of empire leftist social-democratic party started playing a significant role. Those parties in several transformations and configuration continued their presence in Weimar political life. Alongside with political parties that period was marked by the emergence of many civic associations. The abundance of civic associations, thus fragmentation of social life is considered by several scholars as a catalyst factor for Nazi power takeover (Berman 417).

After defeat in First World War Germany was struck by civil conflicts and revolutions. As a result, Kaiser fled the country and the new constitution was adopted by 1919. The bases of new republic were already shattered that pre-determined its collapse. Disasters of war, declined economy, hyperinflation in the initial years, occupied coal-producing center Ruhr due to loss in war, required reparations polarized German society. For the early years social-democrats were somewhat consensus for the society between far-lefts and far-rights. Particularly hyperinflation destroyed the wealth of solid middle class and caused moral and economic disparity (Hill et al. 307). With the weakening of middle class, mediator of reach and poor and guardian of democracy (Aristotle), centrist parties started losing their dominant role. One of the other reasons behind center's decline is inability to consolidate its electorate. For instance, Centre party, with Catholic base, failed to cooperate with Protestant centrist parties (conservatives and liberals). Levitsky and Ziblatt argue (Levitsky and Ziblatt 74) that in contrary to Belgian traditional political parties German political parties failed their important gatekeeping function, which resulted in emergence of far-right Nazi party.

Electoral and Party System Flaws

The roots of inability of German traditional political parties to cooperate goes back to kulturkampf, failed policy suggested by Chancellor Bismarck which aimed to oppose Catholic church and thus created strong disfavor between Catholics and Protestants, though distinct, but not-extremist groups. Moreover, cultivated revanchism and idea of Dolchstoß ("stab in back"), popular conspiracy theory in post-war Germany, according to which lost in a war happened due to treason of Jews and socialists, and also far-left revolts of Spartacists, Bavaria Soviet Republic and their suppression leaned masses towards far-right. Interestingly, at the same time failure of traditional parties caused emergence of fascism in Italy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 136). Constitution and electoral system on the other hand facilitated the ongoing erosion of centre. Although new constitution signaled transition to semi-presidential system, president's institution inherited many leverages from Kaiser, didn't face any significant checks and balances from parliament and was deemed Erzatskaiser (Weimar constitution). Particularly, according to 25, 48, 53 articles president was granted opportunities to dissolve parliament, enact emergency bills without parliament consent and appoint directly Chancellor for special occasions, which weren't specified by constitution. These three articles gave president Kaiseresque authorities and were frequently exercised by Hindenburg in later years of Republic.

Another major institutional flaw was inherent to Weimar proportional representation electoral system. Electoral system was designed in a way that demanded no electoral threshold for political parties to overcome. In a country that needed governmental stability proportional electoral system with no electoral threshold in a mix with semi-presidential system added more fragmentation and turmoil to political system. Moreover, absence of electoral threshold opened doors of the Parliament and provided political platform for extremist and populist political actors. Throughout most of the Weimar history the government relied on various shaky alliances and coalitions. As a result, most of time government lacked vital stability for long-term action and strategic planning.

Situation got relatively stable in the 1923-1929 mainly because of stability on external front and efforts of Minister Stresemann. The agreement on reparations (Dawes plan) and American loans, consequently de-occupation of Ruhr relieved economy. However, even that time unemployment, production deficits and insufficient revenues were major issues (The Weimar Republic 1918-1929). At that time moderate government consisted of centrist and social-democrat political parties. However, initially this political configuration was ideologically opposed by president wartime veteran Hindenburg. First World War hero Hindenburg didn't accept war causes and results, hinted restoration of Emperor (symbolically asked emperor for permission to run for presidency) and stressed the importance of healthy move to the political right (Jones 52).

Socio-Economic Context

Peaceful times ended when global economy was hit by economic recession. Because of Great Depression in 1929 American aid, initially intended by new Young plan was stopped, and austerity measures were undertaken. World economic crisis hit extremely still shaky German economy. After parliamentary coalition governments failed policies president exercised its constitutional right to form so called presidential governments, which is hard to deem more successful. For two years budget was accepted without parliament agreement. Sidelined parliament failed any gatekeeping function and soon become rudimentary in political system. In parliamentary elections NSDAP gained significant number of seats, which made Hindenburg and his faction seriously consider Hitler's political role. Schleicher, once close to Hindenburg and Chancellor of a failed government, attempted to consolidate power for himself. He requested the benefits of Enabling Act from president, however was rejected. With government still ill-functioning and Hitler being arguably the most popular political figure, it was decided to put him as Chancellor, hoping that within two months he'll squeal due to crisis (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). It didn't happen and eventually Germany ended up with totalitarian regime led by Hitler.

Many scholars consider 1933 as an end for Weimar democracy, however if we apply Levitsky and Ziblatt's (2018) four indicators of authoritarian behavior: rejection and weak commitment to democratic rules, denial of legitimacy of opponents, toleration of violence, readiness to curtail civil liberties we can state that Hindenburg and his clique at least since 1929 adopted authoritarian behavior, which was supported by institutions, economic hardships and social polarization. Interestingly, by invoking authoritarian 48 article Preußenschlag, takeover of Prussian democratic regime, happened in 1932, before Hitler chancellorship. Some argue that semi-presidentialism and PR system contributed or were a major reason for democratic breakdown.

Conclusion

To conclude, although I firmly believe that with high electoral threshold, appropriate formula, robust checks and balances rapid government changes could be avoided and relative stability achieved, I support the idea (Kershaw 2000) that given the economic

situation, external shocks and post-war extremism were deadly enough for democracy regardless constitutional design and electoral system. Hence, with the possibility of change the latter two, authoritarianism in Germany would still prosper either with Hitler regime or without. But it is important that overpassing the afore-mentioned checks and balances would cost more resources for any emerging authoritarian regime.

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ԺՈՂՈՎՐԴԱՎԱՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՆԿՍԱՆ ԻՆՍՏԻՏՈՒՑԻՈՆԱԼ ՊԱՏՃԱՌՆԵՐԸ (ՎԵՅՍԱՐՅԱՆ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՕՐԻՆԱԿՈՎ)

ՏԻԳՐԱՆ ՍՈՒՂՆԵՑՅԱԼ

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության

Պետական կառավարման ակադեմիայի քաղաքական կառավարման և
հանրային քաղաքականության ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ,
ք. Երևան, Հայաստանի Հանրապետություն

Սույն հոդվածի նպատակն է վեր հանել Վեյմարյան Հանրապետության ժողովրդավարական անկման ինստիտուցիոնալ պատճառները:

Այդ նպատակն իրագործելու համար սահմանվել են հետևյալ խնդիրները և օգտագործվել են փաստաթղթերի ուսումնասիրության, կոնտենտ վերլուծության ու

պատմահամեմատական մեթոդները: Նախևառաջ աշխատանքում ուրվագծվում է աշխարհում ժողովրդավարության ներկայիս վիճակը, ինդիքներն ու մարտահրավերները: Ընդգծվում են ժողովրդավարության նվազման տենդենցները: Այդ ամենը արվում է աշխատանքի արդիականությունը ցույց տալու և ներկա իրավիճակի հետ զուգահեռներ անցկացնելու նպատակով:

Այնուհետև աշխատանքում մանրամասնորեն քննարկվում են Գերմանիայի քաղաքական համակարգը, համակարգում ժողովրդավարության ակունքներն ու դրա զարգացումը: Վերլուծության են ենթարկվում սահմանադրական անցումներն ու զսպումների ու հակակշիռների մեխանիզմները: Առանձին ուշադրություն է դարձվում քաղաքական կուսակցությունների էվոլյուցիայի վրա, ինչպես նաև ընտրական համակարգի առանձնահատկություններին: Ցույց է տրվում ինստիտուցիոնալ կապը Գերմանիայում վարչակարգի փոփոխության հետ: Ընդգծվում է Վեյմարյան Յանրապետության քաղաքական ինստիտուտների թերությունները ժողովրդավարության անկման համատեքստում: Աշխատանքում բացի քաղաքական ինստիտուտների դիտարկումից, ընդհանուր ակնարկ է արվում Վեյմարյան Յանրապետության սոցիալ-տնտեսական իրավիճակի մասին:

Արդյունքում հոդվածի եզրակացությունն այն է, որ պայմանավորված ինստիտուցիոնալ թերություններով՝ ընտրական համակարգում անցողիկ շեմի բացակայությունը, խորհրդարանի և քաղաքական կուսակցությունների ֆրագմենտացիան, սոցիալական միավորումների առատությունը, կիսանախագահական համակարգը և սոցիալ-տնտեսական վիճակը Վեյմարյան Յանրապետությունում նպաստելի միջավայր էր ավտորիտար ռեժիմի համար:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ ընտրական համակարգ, կուսակցական համակարգ, ինստիտուցիոնալ համակարգ, ժողովրդավարություն, ժողովրդավարության անկում, վարչակարգի փոփոխություն, կուսակցությունների ֆրագմենտացիա, կառավարման ճև:

ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ПРИЧИНЫ ДЕМОКРАТИЧЕСКОГО УПАДКА (ПРИМЕР ВЕЙМАРСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ)

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Целью данной статьи является исследование институциональных предпосылок упадка демократии в Веймарской Республике.

Для достижения этой цели были поставлены соответствующие задачи и применена методология контент - анализа, изучения документов, историко-сравнительные методы. Изначально в работе обсуждается нынешнее состояние демократии, проблемы и вызовы, обозначатся глобальная тенденция утраты интереса к демократии, на основании чего проводятся параллели и выявляется актуальность работы.

В статье детально обсуждаются политическая система Германии, развитие и корни германской демократии. Кроме того, анализируются конституционные изменения и система сдержек и противовесов. Отдельно описывается эволюция политических партий, а также избирательная система. Выделяется институциональная связь смены политического режима. две важные категории:

механистическое и психологическое голосование, как основные факторы, которые влияют на партийную систему. В контексте упадка демократии обсуждаются институциональные изъяны Веймарской Республики. Кроме того, даётся общее социально-экономическое описание.

В итоге мы выдвигаем предположение, что, учитывая такие институциональные недостатки, как отсутствие избирательного порога, фрагментация парламента и политических партий, множество социальных ассоциаций, полупрезидентское правление, а также социально-экономическая ситуация в Веймарской Республике существовала почва для зарождения авторитаризма.

Ключевые слова: *избирательная система, партийная система, институциональная система, демократия, упадок демократии, смена режима, фрагментация партий, форма правления.*