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Book Review Essay: Dorothea Keudel-Kaiser, *Government Formation in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Minority Governments* (Opladen, Germany: Budrich UniPress Limited, 2014), 291 pages, and Péter Krasztev and Jon Van Til, eds., *The Hungarian Patient: Social Opposition to an Illiberal Democracy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 389 pages.

Minority versus Monolithic Governments in Central and Eastern Europe

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When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the event signaled—figuratively and literally—the end of the Eastern bloc. Gone were the days of communist party apparatuses that micromanaged centrally planned economies and suspiciously monitored civil society activities. In their place were newly emerging governments built on democratic principles, open to market reforms, and committed to liberal norms. Anchoring these changes were the political institutions that allowed for multiple parties to contest regularized elections, which for some countries was a historic first. The two books considered in this review essay examine and evaluate how these democratic institutions have performed.

Government Formation in Central and Eastern Europe and *The Hungarian Patient* are natural complements of each other and should be read together. First and foremost, there is a mathematical number-anchoring phenomenon: one book is about the frequent occurrence of governments that have the electoral backing of less than 50 percent of the population; the other is about the emergence, up to this point, of a monolithic party with a two-thirds majority in the parliament. Second, the two books also balance each other based on their empirical approaches. Keudel-Kaiser's book is about breadth: she looks at the larger regional trend; the book employs cross-national comparisons to identify common themes to explain the formation of minority government. In contrast, the edited Krasztev and Van Til book is about depth: the contributors are interested in the details of one single case—the emergence and evolution of Fidesz, a major national conservative party in Hungary.

Minority Governments

In *Government Formation in Central and Eastern Europe*, Keudel-Kaiser

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focuses on minority governments. While theoretically a puzzling government arrangement, this type empirically exists. Minority governments are traditionally associated with Scandinavian politics. Yet, as Keudel-Kaiser contends, such governments are also a common occurrence in Central and Eastern Europe. In fact, about one of every three governments in the region has come to power with minority support. Moreover, there seems to be no spatial (i.e., country-specific) or temporal pattern to these formations. This begs the important question: What explains the formation—and the prevalence—of minority governments emerging in Central and Eastern Europe?

The book starts by systematically dismissing existing theories about the formations of minority governments. Many of these theories have their origins in Western Europe and have very limited—if any—application in Central and Eastern Europe. For instance, institutional rules are important in government formation. In Sweden, negative investiture rules mean that the government needs only to be tolerated—and thus, this is why minority governments occur so frequently there. However, as Keudal-Kaiser points out, all the countries in Central and Eastern Europe have positive investiture rules, meaning that the party or coalition must win a vote of investiture in order to even assume office. Another explanation concerns the stability and strength of the party system. When such systems exist, parties make tradeoffs between office and policy incentives, recognizing that short-term incumbency actually can prove damaging to a party's long-term electoral success. A third explanation is centered on consensual democracy. When there are mechanisms for consensus-building, it is not necessarily important whether a party is in the government coalition. Instead, what is important is that the policy is considered satisfactory by all parties involved. Yet, such norms of inclusivity are generally absent in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keudal-Kaiser argues minority government formation is the product of party system factors. To identify which specific factors matter, she employs Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)—a method that requires substantial qualitative coding of a large number of cases. To this end, Keudal-Kaiser impressively categorizes thirty-nine elections across eight countries—all members of the European Union: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Of these thirty-nine, she finds thirteen instances of a minority government: Bulgaria 1991, Bulgaria 2009, Czech Republic 1996, Czech Republic 1998, Czech Republic 2006, Latvia 1993, Latvia 1998, Lithuania 2000, Poland 1991, Poland 2005, Romania 1992, Romania 2000, and Romania 2004.

The QCA results indeed suggest the importance of explanations of party systems. One of the most significant considerations is the polarization of the party system. When the split is extreme, it makes cooperation between the two large parties on either side of the divide nearly impossible. In Central and Eastern Europe, the early divisions were between those who had fought against the communist party from the outset and the reformed communist (successor)

parties. Later, the divisions in many countries shifted between those with a Western orientation (i.e., North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union) and those with a more Eastern tendency (i.e., nationalist or Russian). The bifurcation challenge is rendered even worse when intertwined with two other factors. The first is the presence of what Keudal-Kaiser calls "non-coalitional parties." Varying in success both across countries and over elections, these parties were often either too far left (e.g., Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in the Czech Republic, Labor Party in Lithuania, and Socialist Party of Labor in Romania), or too far right (e.g., National Union Attack—Ataka—in Bulgaria, People's Movement for Latvia, and Great Romanian Party). The second complicating factor is the absence of a general cohesive policy. This is not wholly surprising: disagreements over market reforms—regarding both their speed and direction—were common, and, in some cases, the ease to form new parties simply incentivized party defections.

Here, it is perhaps a pity that Keudel-Kaiser missed an important opportunity to demonstrate the frequency of minority governments. She repeatedly emphasizes how often minority governments have occurred in Central and Eastern Europe—citing the number thirteen whenever appropriate. But because of the regional focus, she never fully considers Western Europe. Whatever engagement exists is strictly about the limited application of present theories. There also is a passing mention about minority governments hitherto having been a Scandinavian phenomenon. It is unfortunate that Keudel-Kaiser did not nail home how "often" minority governments actually have occurred in Northern Europe and compare this number to that of Central and Eastern Europe. Even if the number for Central and Eastern Europe is much smaller, the relative context would have helped.

For sure, the empirical focus is impressive. Yet, somewhat perplexing is the omission of several countries from the analysis. First, there is no mention whatsoever of Croatia. Croatia joined the European Union in 2013—and prior to that, it witnessed systematic party competition and regularized elections. Croatia, in fact, is one of the case studies in Bunce and Wojcik's *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*.[1] Second, there is little discussion of Hungary. Hungary is too quickly dismissed because its "electoral system with special characteristics of the party system" (page 40) meant "the formation of minority governments was very unlikely" (page 41). Related, Slovenia is excluded from the study because of the "almost permanent parliamentary system of a party ideologically situated in the middle of the party system" (page 41). These characteristics may be country-specific. But even if minority governments are empirically rare—if not absent—in these countries, they are not theoretically implausible. As such, per Mahoney and Goertz's

[1] Valerie Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

possibility principle,[2] they should be included in the analysis. Doing so would have allowed the reader to see how these rules (in the case of Hungary) and ideological positions (in the case of Slovenia) actually moderated the party system such that all other relevant factors (e.g., the presence of a noncoalitional partner and the absence of policy cohesion) are rendered moot for explaining minority governments.

The book's focus on minority governments raises an important distinction between government size (i.e., minority, minimal winning, and surplus) and government composition (singular and coalition). It seems that all governments with less than 50 percent of the seats are coded as minority—regardless of whether the formateur party is governing alone or collectively. Yet, surely the politics of governance are different. Why would a small formateur party welcome additional parties into a ruling coalition if the outcome still would be a minority government? Put differently, why would this party not enlarge the coalition into one that could win a minimal majority? And if the factors of a party system did not allow such larger coalitions to be formed, why would the formateur party share any rents at all? By aggregating all minority government compositions together, Keudal-Kaiser cannot answer these questions. More importantly, she misses a critical empirical pattern. Of the thirteen minority governments, five are singular party governments. Of these five, four are in Bulgaria and Romania. This pattern cannot be a coincidence. Politics do not happen in a historical vacuum. Public opinion toward communism today is evidence. Bulgaria's and Romania's historical legacies are quite distinct from those of their neighbors. During communist times, while there was some semblance of a party politburo, both governments were effectively personalist in character. The cult of personality surrounding Todor Zhivkov and Nicolae Ceaușescu had a profound effect on how the party system was established and subsequently evolved. Here, it is important to note that Hungary had the largest collective leadership leading up to the postcommunist transition; fittingly, it is also one of the cases with no minority governments, and dropped from the book.

Related, there is no systematic discussion of the theoretical difference between a minimal winning government and a surplus government. Intuition would suggest that the former is sufficiently large so that the formateur party is able to gain its preferences, while paying minimal costs in policy positions and portfolio allocations. In contrast, the latter is overly large, reflecting excess parties in the coalition; their absence would not shake the formateur party's agenda-setting power. What determines whether a government is *ex ante* considered sufficiently or excessively large? Is it the number of seats or the number of parties? Keudal-Kaiser's coding is not consistent in this regard.

[2] James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, "The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 4 (2004): 653-669.

For instance, Estonia's 2003 Party government and Romania's 2008 Bloc government are both considered minimal-winning. Yet, the former had two other coalition partners with 60 percent of the seats, and the latter, one other partner and 69 percent of the seats. Similarly, both Latvia's 2006 Klavitis government and Slovakia's 1998 Dzurinda government are considered surplus. But again, the former had three other coalition partners with 59 percent of the seats, and the latter, two other partners with 61 percent of the seats. This distinction is important because, again, politics do not happen in a historical vacuum. It seems that, with one exception, every surplus government has been followed by a minority government. It appears gridlock politics are an important factor that needs to be considered in explaining the formation of a minority government.

The Monolithic Government

The Hungarian Patient is an edited volume examining in great detail the gradual deterioration of democratic institutions in Hungary since 2010. That year, Orbán and his Fidesz party won the election with an absolute majority (53 percent of the vote). More importantly, given the electoral rules, the vote share translated into a two-thirds majority in parliamentary seats. It marked the first time a party in Hungary crossed—either alone or collectively—the qualified majority line. This is important for, as Bozóki clearly elucidates in chapter 1, the Hungarian founding fathers adopted a qualified majority vote in an effort to build stability and consensus. The subsequent two decades, indeed, were characterized by stability—as evidenced by all coalition governments completing their four-year terms. But this stability was by no means the product of some broad consensus. On the contrary, it was the result of a government being "straitjacketed" (page 6) and unable to push through its policies. And so with two-thirds of the parliamentary seats, Fidesz has been able to adopt policies—many of them fundamentally illiberal—through democratic channels, yet with democratic principles largely absent.

The book is divided into four sections. The first part—what the editors call the "Diagnosis"— looks at how the political terrain in Hungary was fertile for the emergence of Fidesz, its ability to govern as a monolithic government, and the characteristics of the subsequent Orbán regime. For Bozóki, Orbánism has been characterized by the centralization of power, intense rhetoric of nationalism, the wholesale change in the administrative elites, the absence of any ideology, and the perception of Fidesz's electoral victory as "revolutionary." The resulting policies from these conceptual underpinnings have changed the political, economic, and societal culture. They also have led to the "disabling" of the constitution (page 37). In chapter 2, Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppele trace how Fidesz has been able to use the constitution—which previously had been too deeply entrenched and too difficult to change—to justify its policies. But with a two-thirds majority, it was relatively easy for Fidesz to adjust and

retrofit the constitution to suit its needs. In fact, in the first twelve months, Fidesz "amended the old constitution twelve times, changing more than fifty separate provisions along the way" (page 38)! These changes would have implications for the capacity of the Constitutional Court, the National Election Commission, the National Media and Infocommunications Authority, and the Office of the President. With the opposition limited, Fidesz, unchallenged, was able to create a new constitution. This new constitution is no small matter. As Szabó notes in chapter 3, Hungary's old constitution was not the product of the democratic transition. In fact, its origins dated back to 1949.

The second part—the "Symptoms"—examines how the country's illiberal democracy has "beleaguered" (page xiv) Hungarian society from the perspective of five different groups. In chapter 4, Bajomi-Lázár focuses on the relationship between the state and the media. He argues that Fidesz, while not necessarily capturing the media, most certainly has colonized it. The purpose of this colonization is not simply to suppress critical voices and gain favorable coverage. Instead, it is about using the media to reach out to constituencies in areas that the parties cannot directly access; deploying new resources for indirect party funding; offering rents to party supporters in exchange for past and future services; and suppressing political rivals by denying them opportunity and visibility. In chapter 5, Kövér examines the roles of civil society and the church. Although following the transition Hungary's civil society was vibrant, contrary to the perceptions of Western "democracy makers," limited resources have weakened it tremendously. Now, in its place, are Fidesz-appointed groups as well as the church, which has shown "increasingly monopolizing effect of the traditional values of the repressive Catholic mindset" (page 85). In chapter 6, Kóczé directs the reader's attention to the Roma population. Despite initial optimism of a vibrant, diverse Roma political movement following the transition, the reality has been a far cry from this. The government has framed the Romani as responsible for their own plight—a narrative that is often accepted by the larger population. Moreover, despite the presence of minority self-governments, they exist merely as puppets of the Fidesz regime. All this has rendered the Roma population politically derailed, economically marginalized, and socially dismissed. In chapter 7, Köver looks at the discourse toward women. She finds that, while it is generally acceptable to talk about women and gender in daily life, there are limits. Questioning the rights of women—from legally permitted rape, to domestic violence, to abortion—is highly contested, especially when viewed from a feminist lens. In chapter 8, Tóth and Grajczjár study the rise of the Jobbik party. While right-wing parties—what Keudal-Kaiser calls "non-coalitional parties"—are by no means Hungary-specific, Jobbik's electoral success warrants attention. The party has been popular among Hungarians who have been discouraged by the country's economic state and consequently find the party's radical ideology and program appealing.

The next six chapters follow the evolution of different oppositional

movements, with most of them ending in failure. Krasztev, in chapter 9, opens the third section—“Immune Reaction”—by asking whether these waves of social movements—not just in Hungary but globally—are symptomatic of political decay or evidence of impending changes. In chapter 10, Boris and Vári write about the Hungarian Solidarity Movement. At its height, the movement organized a demonstration of thirty thousand people in front of the parliament. Given its success, Solidarity would later go nationwide and enter an alliance with the Together 2014 party. The alliance would prove to be a disappointment, both in terms of influencing policy and securing electoral seats. The story is echoed in chapter 11. Petõcz traces the One Million for the Freedom of the Press in Hungary (Milla). Milla’s strength was evident in its ability to demonstrate repeatedly en mass. In January 2011, the first protest numbered 10,000. By October 23, the number had grown to 70,000—with over 120,000 connected on Facebook. But as the organizational leadership shifted from the ideals of a civic movement toward political considerations—with ultimately an alliance with the Together 2014 party—Milla lost its momentum. In chapter 12, Tóth shows a similar pattern for the *Lehet Más a Politika* (Politics Can Be Different, or LMP)—an ecological movement turned green party. LMP’s popularity allowed it to secure sixteen seats in the 2010 election. Yet, the party would prove unable to capitalize on its popularity as the viable alternative to Fidesz, the reformed communist successor party and the right-wing party. Ironically, its insistence on being in the middle ideologically and being above politics was seen by many as noncommittal. As a result, the party ended up splitting into two groups. In chapter 13, Zontea examines a student social movement—the Student Network (HaHa)—and the circumstances surrounding its occupation of the Humanities Faculty at Eötvös Loránd University. She concludes that HaHa was successful in reshaping Hungary’s repertoire of contention. And, in chapter 14, Nagy writes about the emerging new wave of cultural protest within the arts. The ability and autonomy of these protests to continue is under question, with the emergence of the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA). As a shadow ministry, it exists in name to challenge the burgeoning art section within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. But as an academy, the MMA is eligible to receive generous government subsidies and coveted real-estate leases.

The last section, “Life Perspectives,” is a collection of broader articles about Hungary. Chapter 15, written by Jarábik, is a comparative analysis of Hungary with Belarus. While intuition—and perhaps even Hungarian pride—would suggest the two countries are not the same, further analysis shows a few areas in which the two are surprisingly similar: frustrations with capitalism; reliance on a traditional support base from the countryside; play within the letter but not the spirit of the law; growing state management; and dependencies on foreign subsidies. In chapter 16, Juhász reviews two studies written about Orbán. One depicts him as the father of the Hungarian state, the other, a mafia boss. In chapter 17, Van Til concludes by addressing the future of Hungary. To

get past the current bleakness, the opposition—as movements and as parties—must be awakened and civil society needs to be reclaimed.

Krasztev and Van Til's comparison of the deteriorating democratic situation in Hungary to a sick patient is both clever and appropriate. The breakdown of the sections of the volume is clear and systematic. Recognizing that the book is an edited compilation, I nonetheless found myself wanting a more extensive discussion about the politics of Fidesz—the virus, if continuing along this medical analogy. The book, as it stands, has a section about how the body contracted the virus (section one), and the symptoms of having said virus (section two). But with the exception of the Bozóki chapter, there is no systematic section—or even a discussion—about how the virus has acted. There is little discussion about Fidesz party politics, broadly, or Orbán's political network, specifically. There also are a number of unanswered questions about the electoral commission (which received only a passing mention in chapter 2), the national bank, and the relationship of Fidesz with the mayors, as well as with the police and security forces.

Whereas Keudal-Kaiser missed an opportunity to highlight how common minority governments are in Central and Eastern Europe, Krasztev and Van Til should have taken the chance to emphasize the uniqueness of Fidesz 2010. Relegating it to the last pages of the last chapter did not do it justice. Fidesz's success was the first time a singular party had controlled that many legislative seats, not just in Hungary, but in the entire region. In fact, per Keudal-Kaiser, no single party has governed singularly with *any* majority! In short, Fidesz's dominance is (was) unprecedented. What makes the phenomenon even more interesting is that the events leading up to Fidesz's 2010 electoral victory were democratic. The book is not just about Hungary's electoral backslide, but also the democratic emergence of an illiberal party. While some factors may be Hungary-specific (e.g., qualified majority vote), most of them are not. For example, economic frustration after the political transition and the economic crisis in 2008 were challenges other countries in the region experienced as well.

In contrast to the breadth of Keudal-Kaiser's book, the strength of Krasztev and Van Til's edited volume is its depth, with one exception: the contributors are interested in the details of one single case—Hungary. An exception is the chapter by Jarábik about Belarus. It is interesting that Jarábik even begins apologetically by noting that, when he first presented the comparison, people responded with great offense. Yet, while this comparison is welcomed, it seems to have been selected because the two countries have the "same" outcome—an illiberal government operating within a hollowed-out democratic structure. What would have strengthened the Hungarian discussion would have been a comparison to another country's developments. And here, having ex-post hindsight, a chapter written in 2013-2014 comparing Hungary to Poland would have been very interesting. Another appropriate comparison would have addressed the social movements. While Krasztev writes about the theoretical

differences between a colored revolution and a social movement, it was a missed opportunity in the "Immune Reaction" section not to have compared how Solidarity, Milla, and HaHa differed from the colored revolutions throughout the region.

Minority versus Monolithic Governments

Since the two books focus on the structure of government, this naturally raises a normative question: Which government type—minority or monolithic—is a greater threat to democracy? If democracy is about the process—a government "by the people and of the people"—it seems the bigger threat is actually a minority government. Such governments—with less than 50 percent of the votes and/or seats—mathematically cannot represent the majority. Note that theoretically it can represent the median voter: imagine a party that is moderate in size and moderate in ideology—sandwiched between two extreme parties—governing alone. In contrast, a government with a majority of votes and a super-qualified majority of legislative seats mathematically *and* theoretically represents the majority and the median voter. But if democracy is about the product—a government "for the people"—then both government types can be equally dangerous. At one extreme, there is the possibility of a tyranny of the minority; at the other extreme, there is threat of a tyranny of the majority.

In the aftermath of 1989, the regions of Central and Eastern Europe offered social scientists a whole battery of new countries to include in their analyses to explain some phenomena of interest. Yet a common finding—even in passing as a significant coefficient on a regional dummy—across these works is that, in spite of having adopted democratic institutions, there is still something that renders the countries in the Central and Eastern Europe regions slightly different from their counterparts farther to the west. It seems the political institutions in these regions still lack a reservoir of goodwill; market reforms have provided multiple avenues for corruption to manifest; incentives to join the "West" have forced governments to de jure recognize minority languages without necessarily de facto providing the necessary resources; and the church still influences discussions when it pertains to women's rights and gay rights. In this regard, the two books fall into this vein: they both highlight how the governments in the regions—while built on democratic institutions and liberal principles—are (have become) different.