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Seminar: *Electoral Politics in new European Democracies*
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Elite Settlement as a precondition to decent political competition?

1. Points of departure:

1.1. Regime changes do not emerge in step with changing economic conditions, mass protests, political struggles but only in the phase of consolidation;
1.2. There is a strong correlation between regimes, crises and elites. Political regimes are deeply imprinted by the crises and elite confrontation in which they are born (crises as „birth certificates" of regimes) (Dogan/Higley, 1998).

2. Concepts:

2.1. Elite: "holders of strategic positions in the government, powerful organizations and movements, movements, including dissident ones, who are able to affect national political outcomes regularly and significantly" (Burton/Higley).

2.1.1. Type of elites

Table 1

type of elite		origin	political behaviour	duration
"united"	ideologically	arise in violent actions through destroying most of its rivals, monopolisation of power	end up dictating conforming to its doctrine, lack of substantial opposition or conditions for channelling a protest	tend to lead to long-lived regimes (often totalitarian)
	consensually	originate in compromises negotiated by leaders of opposing camps (settlement)	affiliated with different beliefs and movements but there is a common consensus being shared about rules and codes of political competition	tend to lead to stable regimes (often democratic)
"disunited"		irregular rotation of opposing elites which arises through power seizure	marked by distrust and fear, different codes of political conduct, competition seen as "winner-takes-it-all" mode	tend to lead to short-lived regimes (often authoritarian ones interrupted by unstable democracies)

source: own illustration according to Dogan/Higley, 1998

2.1.2. Circulation of elites

- judged upon similarities and differences between former and following regimes: "within-type" vs. "out-of-type";
- judged upon first- and second-rank positions: horizontal vs. vertical replacement;
- judged upon accommodation to new principles: conversion vs. ideological faith.

2.2. Crisis: "abrupt and brutal challenge to the survival of a political regime. A crisis (…) consists of a short chain of events that destroy or drastically weaken a regime's equilibrium and effectiveness", (Dogan, Higley, 1998). Crises have far-reaching implications and threaten to involve large part of elites and even society in violent actions. Crises should not be confused with classical cleavages.

2.2.1. Nature of crises

- not all crises lead to elite and regime changes. Some regime changes originated in circumstances that cannot be described as crises, when a negotiated transfer of power from military to civilian elites take place;
- crises have far-reaching implications and threaten to involve large part of elites and even society, in violent actions;
- crises should not be confused with classical cleavages.

2.2.2. Typology of crises

- achievement of national independence;
- defeat in warfare (inclusive colonial wars);
- revolution;
- withdrawal of foreign support for the ruling elites (a case of East Central Europe)
- political implosions (weakening of the central administration, fragmented elites, but the power is not "in the streets" as it is during revolutions – vertical cleavages (ethnicity) rather than horizontal ones (social class);
- economic disasters;
- sudden breakdown of unstable regimes (state power is not effective any more)

3. Mechanism:

In moments of crises elites posses certain autonomy and latitude for action. The choices they make at such moments are frequently decisive for the outcomes of the crises and, consequently, for the shape of the regimes that follow.

Elite settlement occurs in phases of democratisation and liberalisation and then, if successful, leads to consolidation. Stable democracies only occur after elites settle and undergo consolidation (Higley/Burton).

Table 2

Causality →					
	settlement circumstances		**settlement process**		**consolidation process**
phase	triggering crisis	elite alignments	concerted actions	negotiations/ compromises	power-sharing agreements and further stabilizing developments
critical juncture / issues	new arising movements taking stance against established regimes	aggregation of elites into distinct and antagonistic camps with well-articulated agenda	initiated by small circle of leaders, usually confidential and free from mass pressures	the core of settlement aiming at agreement about power-sharing and stabilising mechanisms	power-sharing being cemented; effective ways of handling new crises being adopted; (this involves formerly opposed elites standing together +facing further challenges resulting from perception that the balance of pay-offs and costs is unsatisfactory)

source: own illustration according to Burton/Higley, 1998

Prior to settlements, former regime elites and opposition elites disagree about government institutions, engage in fights for dominance, and view politics in *winner-take-all* terms. After settlements, elites continue to be affiliated with conflicting parties, movements and beliefs, but they share a consensus about government institutions and the codes and rules of political competitions.

Elite settlement "tames" politics: leads to compromises among political leaders, generates shared practices among competing political elites and defines sanctions for violating that.
"Politics no longer kills, is no longer a warlike affair, (…) affirms itself as the standard *modus operandi* of a polity" (Sartori, 1995).

Democratisation can occur without settlement. But only a settlement leads to a stable democracy.

4. Comparative perspective on elite settlement – Poland and Czech Republic

Table 3

Causality →						
	settlement circumstances		**settlement process**		**consolidation process**	
phase	triggering crisis	elite alignments	concerted actions	negotiations/ compromises	power-sharing agreements	consolidation effect today
Poland	withdrawal of SU support & introduction of martial law in 1981; strike waves	significant anti-communist camps: KOR & Solidarność	secret talks between gov. and Wałęsa, agreeing roundtable negotiations between gov., Solidarność & Church leaders	roundtable negotiations: gradual regime opening, legalisation of Solidarność, political reforms including open elections with some seats reserved for communists, deal to re-elect communist president but with Solidarność-dominated cabinet	Solidarność-led coalition in government, Wałęsa elected president in 1990, reforms, election of ex-communists in 1993, Kwaśniewski elected as a post-communist president in 1995	elite settlement from after 1989 has today become a cleavage itself, ruling parties perceive former power-sharing agreement as strongly unequal, real regime changed is being denied, means aimed at undermining the post-communist influence on today's politics (wild "lustration") are being undertaken, new institutions-shaping is being proposed; 1. type: elites remain polarised with tendency to disunity; 2. circulation: rather top-level elites were replaced only.
Czech Republic	withdrawal of SU support, Prague demonstrations 1989 + 'domino effect due to wind of change from Poland	strong opposing camp made up from dissidents, to some extent also 'reform communists'	no elite settlement!!!, peaceful Velvet Revolution or rather '*refolution*', those involved in upheavals became part of the new political elite. Its institutional decisions shaped significantly the future course of events – the timing and rules for the first free elections, transformation of parliament into active decision-making body, legalisation of opposition parties, dismantling secret police. President's Havel staff made mostly of former dissidents and some 'reform communists'.		constitutional changes eliminating the leading role of Communists who still occupied a number of important posts (incl. prime minister)-legislation on 'decommunisation' was introduced in Czech Republic despite presidential veto in 1993; few changes in the composition of the Czech cabinet between 1992-1996	because of lack of reflection on communism post-communist parties come again into power, still in new institutions deprived of authoritarian influence democracy could thrive successfully leading to consolidation of regime 1. type: fragmented but consensually united elites; 2. circulation: communist elite continuity has been stopped.

source: own illustration according to Burton/Higley, 1998 and Baylis, 1998

5. Theses:

5.1. composition of political elites and their behaviour is the most important determinant for the type of regime (Dogan/Higley, 1998);

5.2. democratisation can occur without elite settlement, but stable democracies occur only after elites settle in the first place and undergo consolidation afterwards (Burton/Higley,1998);

5.3. revolution-type regime change led to a more consolidated democracy in Czech Republic than elite settlement in Poland.

6. Criticism:

6.1. Elite settlement is not a compromise made for once and for all:

6.1.1. elite negotiations can be perceived as unrepresentative for democracy (legitimacy of representation) and face distrust (conspiracy among sworn enemies);

6.1.2. elite settlement can be unsuccessful (producing elite cartels and excluded, who cannot accept the negotiations outcomes + democracy emerge only in places where democrats enjoy a power advantage).

6.2. Elite Settlement is not the only one and not necessarily the best solution (as in CZ). There is at least one more way to tame politics, i.e.

replacement of the old regime elites through revolution;
successive conversion of the elites towards restrained competition;
moderation of the hostile stances of former elites and joining democratic competition for votes.

But: presupposes that transition countries can immediately accommodate mechanisms of electoral democracy.

6.3. the concept is elite-oriented, neglecting masses. The original role in triggering a crisis is not elaborated, thought it is masses that press for politics change and mass support that is needed be elites.

6.4. consensus of elites should not be judged alone – it depends on a general political situation, economic performance etc.

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