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The Finch Effect: Evolutionary Metaphors and Illiberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe

Cover Page Footnote

This paper and the ideas in it would not have existed without the expert advice I received from Dr. Jason Hansen, a Physiology & Developmental Biology professor at Brigham Young University who also happens to be a close family friend. This paper also would not exist without the keen guidance of Dr. Wade Jacoby, who's mentorship has contributed to my academic growth more than almost anything else.

The Finch Effect: Evolutionary Metaphors and Illiberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, several states in Central and Eastern Europe have seen democratic digression. Such illiberal resurgences came as a surprise to the many political scientists who assumed that the future of these states was democratic. Indeed, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the world largely regarded liberal democracy as the predominant system of government. The future seemed bright, and it was tempting to understand that future in evolutionary terms—just as humans evolved under natural selection to become the dominant species, democracy had survived a similar competition and defeated all other systems of government to become the dominant regime. Yet, if liberal democracy had really beaten the competition back in 1989, why do self-described illiberal democracies stubbornly persist today? To provide a different evolutionary approach, this paper tries to understand illiberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe as the differential result of the 2008 financial crisis, rather than as the uniform result of deep historical trends.

KEYWORDS

illiberal democracy, evolution, populism, financial crisis

“There has been a temptation to assume that the conceptions of biology can be transferred to the facts of society without the need of a critical investigation of their validity in this new sphere... It is so very easy to say Evolution instead of saying History and to use a few Darwinian phrases as keys to unlock all mysteries”

David Ritchie, Darwinism and Politics 1891

“The state that emerges at the end of history is liberal”

Francis Fukuyama, The End of History? 1989

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several countries in Central and Eastern Europe have digressed in an undemocratic manner. Such illiberal resurgences came as a surprise to many who assumed that that future was democratic. Indeed, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the world largely regarded liberal democracy as the predominant system of government. The opinion wasn't that all governments were necessarily democratic, only that they ought to be. Such a notion provided the European Union with a reason for enlargement; the EU ushered in the likes of Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and other previously undemocratic nations into the democratic community (Börzel, 2017). They did so under the assumption that these countries would one day become consolidated democracies, and the West had no reason to believe that this wouldn't be the case. Although some challenged these perceptions (Jowitt, 1992), for most, the future seemed bright. Much evidence suggested that Fukuyama was correct—the fight for freedom and democracy had ended and with it, so had history.

It was tempting to understand this democratic victory in terms of evolution—just as humans evolved under natural selection to become the dominant species, democracy had survived a similar competition and defeated all other systems of government to become the dominant regime. Yet we are currently observing an illiberal resurgence in the very countries the EU presumed to be heading in a liberal direction. In Hungary and Poland, leaders have restricted free speech and radically embraced nationalism. Additionally, countries like the Czech Republic and Slovakia are fostering anti-EU sentiments, and authoritarianism is on the rise. If *liberal* democracy had really beaten the competition back in 1989, why do self-described *illiberal* democracies stubbornly persist today? This is a complex puzzle with many possible explanations, but the best answer comes from an analysis of evolutionary metaphors, particularly from a biological perspective that finds democracy to be a result of these metaphorical processes.

2. EXTENDING AND REFINING PREVIOUS THEORY

Evolution requires a change in the heritable characteristics of populations over successive generations. While it is most famous as a biological phenomenon, it is also a valuable approach to politics. Many other works (Eichengreen, 2018; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Corning, 2008; Krastev, 2012) have used evolution to explain political patterns, including the emergence of political regimes. While these are important works that seek to understand many aspects of democracy across the world, I extend and refine one such important paper—Modelski and Thompson (1999)—to help describe the rise of illiberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in the aftermath of EU enlargement. According to Modelski and Thompson (1999), history is marked by changes and power struggles, which

make it an inherently evolutionary process. They use evolution in a broad sense to denote development. In this respect, they single out four basic evolutionary mechanisms that, over time, result in large scale changes to the global political community. These are: *agenda setting*, *coalition building*, *macrodecisions*, and *execution*.

These terms require some brief definition: *agenda setting* is defined as important events and issues that require action on a worldwide scale, not merely regional. *Coalition building* is the process by which a political system is created to address those events. *Macrodecisions* are the large-scale responses that flow from processes of both agenda setting and coalition building. These usually take the form of war or other conflicts. *Execution* is the resulting global authority or major power (Modelski and Thompson, 1999, p. 125). Modelski and Thompson use this framework to propose an evolutionary cycle of history as seen in the top rows of Table 1:

Table 1: Modelski and Thompson Model

Agenda Setting		Coalition Building		Macrodecisions		Execution	
Industrial Revolution	1740	Trading/Colonialism	1760	Revolutions/Napoleonic Wars	1792	Britain/Germany	1815
Knowledge Revolution	1850	Anglo/American alliance	1878	World Wars I and II	1914	USA	1945
Globalism	1973	Democratic Integration	2000	Peaceful Conflict Resolution	2026	Western Democracy	2050

The table illustrates general evolutionary trends that lead Modelski and Thompson (1999), in the final row, to make predictions about the future. These predictions operate on a baseline assumption that globalism and democratic integration will promote democratic peace and lead the macrodecision mechanism to evolve away from war and physical conflict into solutions based on negotiation (p. 132). In light of this, the authors state that, “the EU is likely to become the focus of a democratic and stable zone that is no longer a source of major conflagrations” and, most importantly, that liberal democracy will flourish and grow in many corners of the world (p. 131-138). Thus, the relatively casual and often implicit form of evolutionary theory made famous by Fukuyama has a counterpart in a more sophisticated and long-run approach to evolution—an approach that also saw the future of liberal democracy as very bright.

As Karl Popper noted in 1961, however, “it is impossible to predict the future course of history.” With hindsight, we might now revise Table 1 in the following way:

Table 2: Reformulated Modelski and Thompson Model

Agenda Setting		Coalition Building		Macrodecisions		Execution	
Industrial Revolution	1740	Trading/Colonialism	1760	Revolutions/Napoleonic Wars	1792	Britain/Germany	1815
Knowledge Revolution	1850	Anglo/American alliance	1878	World Wars I and II	1914	USA	1945
Globalism	1973	Democratic Integration	2000	Illiberal Resurgence	NOW	?	2050

To fill in Modelski and Thompson’s evolutionary model, illiberal resurgence might be a natural choice for the current *macrodecision*. However, democratic integration as a *coalition building* mechanism fails to explain that pattern. While a divergence from war as a *macro-*

decision may still be credible, the conjecture on the dominance of liberal democracy now appears to be incorrect. After all, polity scores suggest democracy has declined globally for twelve consecutive years (Freedom House, 2017).

In this respect, Modelski and Thompson's argument is remarkably similar to Fukuyama's. The former takes a far more complex evolutionary approach based on historical trends, but both come to the conclusion that liberal democracy is the natural political 'winner.' Although Modelski and Thompson's model for change provides an important basis for an evolutionary approach to politics, it requires extension and refinement. Following Ritchie, this paper shares a concern noted in the epigraph about the use of "a few Darwinian phrases as keys to unlock all mysteries" (Ritchie, 1891, p. 119). To provide a different evolutionary approach, this paper tries to understand illiberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe as the *differential result* of economic shocks of 2008, rather than as the *uniform result* of deep historical trends.

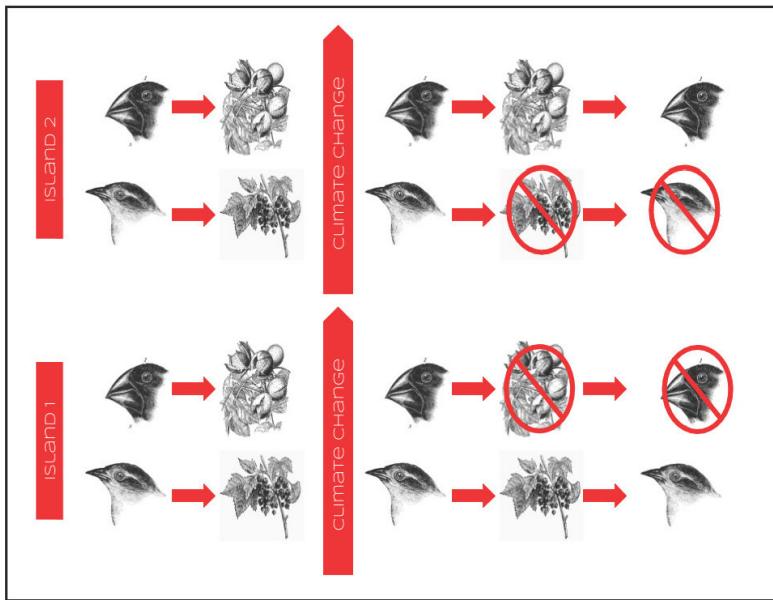
3. POLITICAL EVOLUTION IN TERMS OF BIOLOGY

Foremost, we must correct a misconception: rather than evolution dictating a *single* genetic victor, it produces variation across species. In Darwin's 1835 voyage to the Galapagos Islands, he noticed systematic variation among finch beak sizes based upon their location. Birds lacking a certain polymorphism—physical characteristics that allow for the survival of a species due to a set of changing environmental factors—were selected out of the environment. Darwin determined that a single finch did not dominate over all others, but that finches vary according to selective pressures.

Evolution is a result of these selective pressures and respective polymorphisms. In biology, selective pressures are defined as environmental conditions that place strain on the organisms in a given setting. Polymorphisms are the physical characteristics that certain animals possess or acquire that allow them to thrive in the environment despite, or because of a set of selective pressures. In this sense, natural selection becomes the process by which a particular species with a given set of polymorphism survives whereas those without it die. Considering the Finch example, we can refine these terms in ways that also apply to illiberal democracy.

Suppose that on a certain island in the Galapagos archipelago there are two types of finches; one eats only tree nuts, and the other eats only berries. The finch that eats tree nuts has a large beak, which allows it to crack the shells of the tree nuts they consume, whereas the second finch has a small beak suited for only soft berries. However, due to climate change, berries cease to grow on the island and the only food source left for the finches are tree nuts. As a result, birds with small beaks starve and eventually die out, whereas birds with large beaks continue to thrive and survive. Climate change and the loss of berries as a food source would be considered a selective pressure because it placed environmental strain on the finches. The beak sizes would be considered polymorphisms because they are physical characteristics that allowed for the survival (or not) of a certain finch. Based on the location of the island, the type of finches that survive may differ. This provides the basis for variation and is explained in the diagram below:

Figure 1: The Evolution of Finches on the Galapagos Islands



I use an analogous process to understand change in Central and Eastern Europe. It is possible that like Darwin's finches, certain selective pressures have forced countries in that region to either allow their democracy to evolve or risk extinction. Extinction in this case might refer the collapse of institutions and the reformation of a new state. As Ritchie puts it, "social variation arises from external influences" (Ritchie, 1891, p. 130). These external influences are selective pressures that place stress on regimes. Like climate change, events like the 2008 economic crisis change the political environment and force organisms, or in this case democracies, to evolve. These selective pressures are comparable to what Modelski and Thompson call "agenda setting mechanisms" in the sense that they force the global order to change. However, approaching them in this different and biological sense is valuable because it allows us to consider characteristics or polymorphisms as a function of these pressures or shocks and not as results of history alone.

Political polymorphisms, then, are the characteristics that allow democracy to survive under such external conditions. Like a finch's beak, they are the features and assets a country has that allow them to avoid metaphorical extinction. Political success in this case is the consolidation of a regime and its ability to avoid institutional collapse as in the cases of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and even perhaps in the future, Ukraine. Various polymorphisms give a higher chance of regime survival but may result in 'evolved' democracies that scholars legitimately deem 'illiberal.' Examples of such polymorphisms may include populism, limitations of free speech, harsh immigration laws, and even decreasing democratic commitment.

The latter is especially significant. While countries are experiencing an illiberal resurgence as a result of selective pressures and polymorphisms like populism, it is also possible that they are more predisposed to such a political order than countries that are classically liberal. Returning to the analogy of Darwin's finches, even though the birds with different

beaks may be members of the same species, they are innately and genetically different. It might be beneficial to think of this in terms of the well-known children's story: *The Ugly Duckling*. In the story, a mother duck cares for all the eggs in her nest in the hopes that they will one day hatch into healthy ducklings. However, unbeknownst to her, one of the eggs is not like the others. This fact is largely undetectable to the duck until the eggs begin to hatch. At this point it is clear that the ugly duckling was different all along. Just as in the story, though the duckling was considered ugly by those who were unlike it, it surely would have been appreciated by those who were similar. Though deemed ugly, the reality is that it was merely different.

This analogy is useful to describe the type of variation we see for democracies in Europe. The EU, like the mother duck, patiently nurtured countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the hopes that they might one day grow to be liberal. Yet, like the ugly duckling, now that they have hatched, countries like Poland, Hungary, and even the Czech Republic, are revealing themselves to be composed of an entirely different genetic code. The very things that allow a democracy to survive certain shocks or pressures are often what force them to change in an illiberal manner.

I argue that these countries are manifested variations of democracy specific to location as a result of selective pressures and adaptive political polymorphisms that may result from inherent 'genetic' differences that stem from culture and even history, though neither on its own. These are difficult variables to measure, and as such this paper will not fully explore the ways in which they might influence illiberalism. Regardless, Fukuyama and other democratic theorists like Modelski and Thompson operate under the supposition of evolution as a result of 'survival of the fittest' evolutionary trends. But as George Ritchie points out, "The phrase 'survival of the fittest' is very apt to mislead for it suggests the fittest or best in every sense, whereas in reality it only means the survival of those best fitted to cope with their circumstances" (Ritchie, 1891, p. 12). As such, liberal democracy does not mark the "end of history" and is not a resulting global authority, but merely a variation of democracy as a result of certain selective pressures and polymorphisms.

4. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

A number of recent scholars have described the mysterious illiberal changes in democracy in Central and Eastern Europe as an indication of democratic backsliding. Nancy Bermeo describes this trend as a breakdown of liberal democracies (Bermeo, 2016). As this point suggests, previous arguments paint the situation as black and white. Similarly, Bermeo, Fukuyama, and in some cases Modelski and Thompson rationalize democracy in these terms—either regimes are democratic, or they are not, and if they are not then they have failed or are in the process of doing so. Using evolution as a model for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe offers a different perspective.

When the Czech Republic joined the EU in 2004, it seemed obvious that the country was on a liberal course. Indeed, Czechia became the poster child for EU enlargement and the spread of liberal democracy. This is not so true anymore. Instead, the very features that make a democracy liberal are coming into question. The same can be said of Hungary. In the years leading up to the 2008 financial crisis, Hungary passed what is called the "turnover test." This proverbial evaluation indicates that democracies are stable as a result of the repeated transfer of power from party to party. However, as Viktor Orban retains sovereign authority, this trend is arguably diminishing. As a result, in both the Czech

Republic and Hungary, we observe rising democracy scores. Freedom House uses an ordinal scale from 1 to 7 (1=Most Democratic, 7=Least Democratic) to measure democracy in almost every country. For the past 10 years, the Czech Republic has floated around a 3.00 with a marked increase in 2009 around the time that Mirek Topolánek was appointed as Prime Minister. Comparatively, Hungary increased from a 2.25 in 2008 to a 4.25 in 2017 (Freedom House, 2017). These are puzzling changes that Foa and Mounk might call signs of deconsolidation (Foa & Mounk, 1992).

For this reason, these two countries are ideal case studies that help demonstrate the validity of a different approach to politics from an evolutionary perspective. The increase in democracy scores of Czechia and Hungary largely occurred after the financial crisis of 2008. This makes it an excellent example of a selective pressure that clearly placed extreme strain on both countries. In this respect, I pose the following research question:

What are the various metaphorical polymorphisms that have contributed to the resurgence of illiberal democracy in both in the Czech Republic and Hungary as a result of the pressures introduced by the 2008 financial crisis?

This question is politically significant. Essentially, if this comparative case study yields promising results, it could help form the basis of a new understanding for illiberal democracies everywhere. This approach may have the capacity to set precedence for future questions regarding different countries, selective pressures, and polymorphisms. This model has the potential to be applied anywhere in the world. Selective pressures and consequent polymorphisms exist not only in the democracies of Hungary and the Czech Republic, but also in Brazil, Venezuela, and even the United States.

In all cases, evolution applied to politics could help to explain the reasons behind why certain regimes persist in certain places, under certain circumstances. In this sense, it can help produce a political pattern that veritably measures democracy as the result of evolution. Whether we like it or not, illiberal democracies persist. As such, it is vital we begun to understand the patterns and puzzles that characterize these regimes.

5. MEASUREMENT

The 2008 financial crisis had an undeniably global impact. At the time, scholars argued that Hungary was the hardest hit country in the EU due to post-Soviet debts, foreign currency loans, and its exclusion from the Eurozone (Darvas, 2008). In reality, they were one of the countries in Europe to recover the fastest from the crisis. The same could be said of the Czech Republic. Both currently have unemployment rates below 4%, and yet both have become increasingly illiberal. Could these two things be correlated?

Since the 2008 financial crisis, Europe has seen an increase in populism and a noticeable decrease in commitment to democracy, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. For this reason, they are ideal candidates for metaphorical polymorphisms that have contributed to the resurgence of illiberal democracy in both the Czech Republic and Hungary. I define my variables as:

Independent Variables

Commitment to Democracy

Populism

Dependent Variable

Degree of Illiberal Democracy

How does one measure populism or commitment to democracy? Kirk Hawkins uses survey-based data to rank countries on an incremental populist scale. His data is founded on both the analysis of written government documents and speeches given by various government leaders (Hawkins et al., 2012). According to an article published by The Guardian, “[e]ach leader was given an average populism score, based on the extent to which speeches contained populist ideas. The data pinpoints populist discourse by leaders in all the largest countries in Europe and the Americas, as well as India. Researchers graded their speeches on a 0–2 scale, ranging from not populist to very populist” (Lewis et al., 2019). This type of system for measuring populism has proved to be very effective. It works well within an evolutionary model because it singles out elected leaders as examples of populism. If populism is a characteristic of democracy that has arisen as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, it is possible to assume that a state has become more illiberal in the process of “evolutionary” survival or extinction.

Commitment to democracy is similar in that it is a characteristic predictive of illiberalism and arises in times of external pressures like the 2008 financial crisis. However, like the ugly (or at least different) duckling, it may also be an innate characteristic of each country. In both cases it tends to produce illiberal democracy. Various opinion polls have sampled citizens in Hungary and the Czech Republic in order to measure commitments to democracy in those countries. Using these polls, we will be able to understand how this variable has influenced stability and illiberalism in these countries after the 2008 financial crisis.

Some might say that these two measures are the same, that illiberalism by default suggests that a country will be less committed to democracy or have a propensity towards populism. There are several reasons why these assumptions, though understandable, do not apply. First, academic literature makes the argument that *liberal* democracy naturally results in populism. Consolidated democracies also experience populist movements that threaten many tenets of liberalism and yet, as in the case of the United States, democratic institutions do not collapse, and rights do not disappear. Furthermore, countries that are far from democracy, like China and North Korea, do not experience populism in the same threatening way that many liberal democracies do. In essence, populism can lead to illiberal democracy, but rarely does illiberal democracy lead to populism.

Second, not all countries with low levels of democratic commitment experience illiberal shifts. Citizens of countries can lack democratic commitment, yet the democratic institutions themselves remain in place; a country does not become illiberal only if its people are. However, low institutional commitment to democracy may be synonymous with illiberal democracy. In this case, the government itself ceases to act in a democratic manner and the institutions either evolve or collapse. This is the dependent variable, whereas the factors that contribute to this result are the independent variables which I have defined as public commitment to democracy and populism. For the purposes of this paper, public commitment to democracy will be expressed only as commitment to democracy, and lack of institutional commitment to democracy will be understood only as illiberal democracy. This is an important distinction and provides the foundation for this theoretical approach.

6. THEORETICAL EXPECTATION

The Czech Republic and Hungary are remarkably similar in many ways, which is why they are very good case studies for this project. However, as was previously mentioned, Hungary has a higher democracy score. For this reason, I am anticipating that Hungary is more illiberal and as such has a lower commitment to democracy, and a higher populism score. If this is the case, then these metaphorical polymorphisms may have allowed Hungary to survive but have also left their dedication to liberalism in question. Regardless, the same could be true of the Czech Republic. This variance in levels of populism and commitment to democracy provides the framework for an evolutionary approach to politics. Depending on which variable is strongest in each country, we can make tentative conclusions about the way democracies form using such a model.

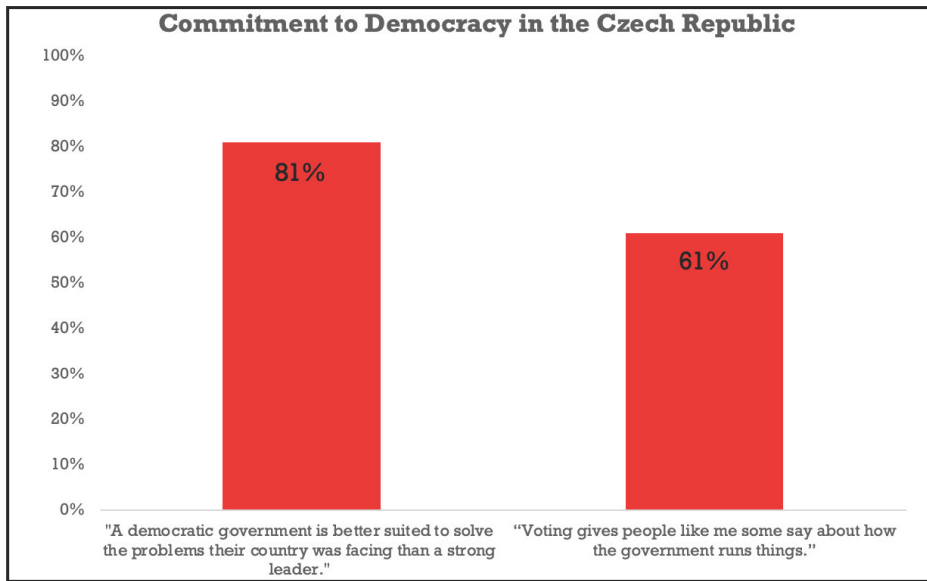
7. FINDINGS

7.1. THE SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC.

At the height of the 2008 financial crisis when markets plummeted across the globe, many countries turned to strong leaders that took on classically populist rhetoric in order to confront the economic issues that were plaguing their country. The Czech Republic was no exception. In 2009 Mirek Topolánek was appointed to the position of prime minister, and the same year, their democracy score jumped from 2.25 to 3. On an ordinal scale from 1 to 7 (1=Most Democratic, 7=Least Democratic), this means that the Czech Republic's institutions became significantly less liberal as their score increased. Perhaps this loss in democratic values can be accounted for by populism and commitment to democracy as characteristics that allowed for survival but forced change in an illiberal direction.

According to the Hawkins' populist measurement, Mirek Topolánek received an average score of 1 for the four years he was in office. This suggests that he sits in between what the research calls 'somewhat populist' and 'populist'. For comparison purposes, Hugo Chavez received nearly a 2 on the same scale, which would suggest that he is 'very populist'. Although Prime Minister Topolánek never reached the same level of populism as Chavez, his score hovered around 1 during his term, which indicates an important populist shift that took place in the years directly following the financial crisis.

These changes did not affect the Czech Republic's commitment to democracy. In 2009, Pew Research Center conducted a survey with the intent to understand attitudes about democracy in various countries in Central and Eastern Europe. They found that 81% of Czechs felt that a democratic government was better suited to solve the problems their country was facing than a strong leader. Furthermore, roughly six-in-ten Czechs (61%) agreed with the statement that "voting gives people like me some say about how the government runs things." Indeed, enthusiasm for the liberally democratic direction politics have taken since 1989 is widespread in the Czech Republic (Pew Research, 2010). A country report published by BTI in 2008 illustrates a similar trend; according to their research, "Most citizens support democratic institutions and no important groups seek to change the Czech political system" (BTI 2008). These findings are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Commitment to Democracy in Czech Republic

Given the rise in democracy scores at the onset of the economic crisis, it is particularly intriguing that the Czech Republic's commitment to democracy did not falter, yet their institutions appeared to become less liberal. Perhaps in the Czech Republic, commitment to democracy was a characteristic that allowed for regime survival, but unlike populism, did not contribute change in an illiberal direction during the years directly following the 2008 financial crisis. To sum it up, Czechia's commitment to democracy remained strong despite economic and political turbulence that may have suggested otherwise. However, recent political changes seem to be shifting the conversation.

The election of President Zeman and appointment of Andrej Babis to the office of Prime Minister have taken the country in an unprecedented illiberal direction. While Hawkins' team of experts has not yet compiled a populism score for either of these leaders, it is clear that they have incited change within the Czech Republic. Babis' party, ANO, stands for "Action of Dissatisfied Citizens," which rings of populist rhetoric. Similarly, he has positioned himself as an anti-politics politician, frequently criticizing older, established parties for alleged corruption and ineptitude while basing his support on a "people's platform" (Smith, 2017). According to BTI, the Czech Republic's commitment to democracy is on the decline (BTI, 2018). This is perplexing because it suggests that commitment to democracy today is weaker than it was 8 years ago at the height of the economic crisis. Perhaps the Czech Republic is being subject to new selective pressures and polymorphisms, which are leading to this change.

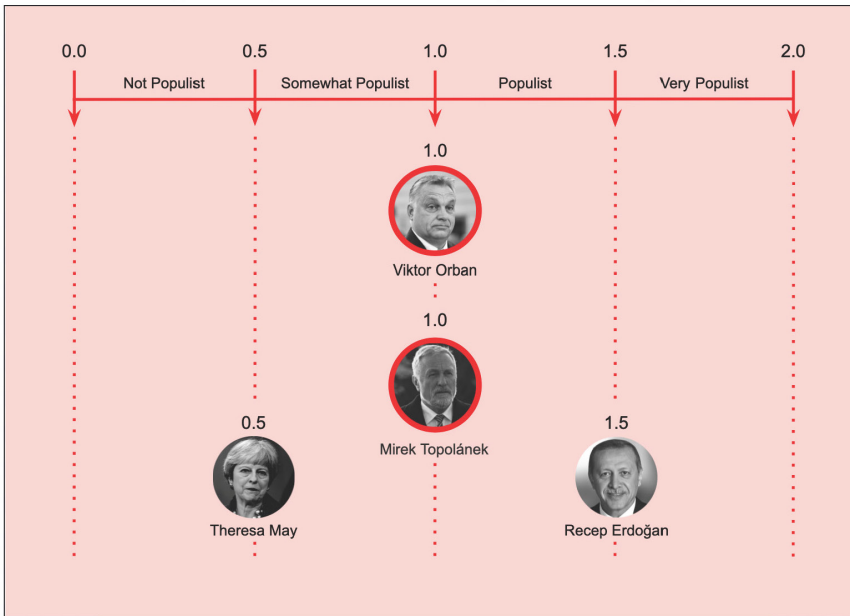
7.2. THE SITUATION IN HUNGARY.

Just as the Czech Republic turned to Mirek Topolánek, Hungary turned to Viktor Orbán. Using populist rhetoric has his ally, Viktor Orbán declared in 2014 that "democracy is not necessarily liberal" (Tóth, 2014). Hungary would be ushering in a new era of illib-

eralism with Viktor Orbán at the forefront. While to some these statements may come as a surprise, the reality lies more within the bounds of evolution.

On Hawkins’ populist scale, Viktor Orbán received close to a 1 during both of his terms as Prime Minister. Like Topolánek, this places him in between ‘somewhat populist’ and ‘populist’. As such, the Czech Republic and Hungary are very similar in this way. Both countries responded to crisis with populism as a means of maintaining survival. However, it is clear that Hungary is far more illiberal, even to the extent that they identify as such. Orbán’s rhetoric responds particularly to immigration and EU policy as issues of sovereignty while also cultivating a close relationship with Russia (Hawkins et al., 2012). These findings are summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Populism in the Czech Republic and Hungary

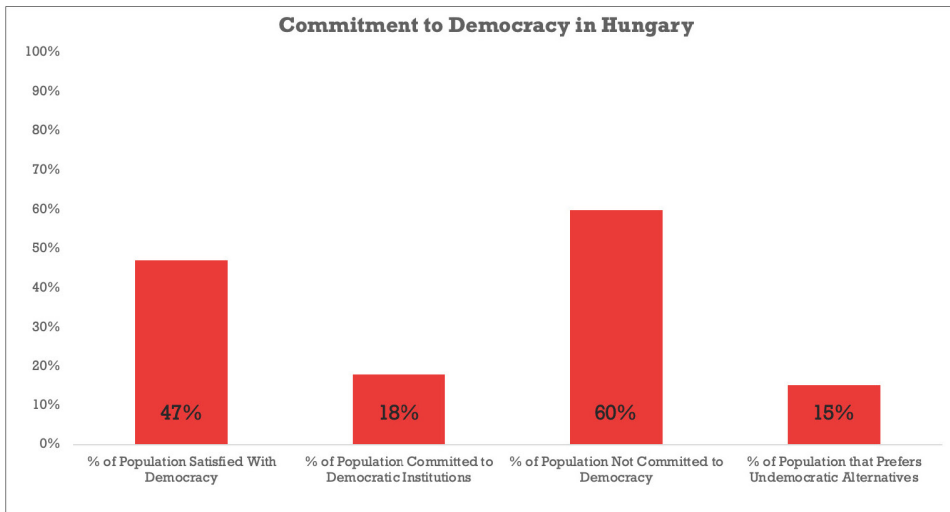


In light of this, it is no surprise that Hungary’s commitment to democracy is significantly lower than that of the Czech Republic. According to another study conducted by Pew Research, 53% of the population in Hungary is unsatisfied with democracy. Similarly, only 18% of citizens in Hungary are committed to democratic institutions. In comparison, 60% are not committed and more than 15% prefer undemocratic governments (Wike et al. 2017). This means that there is almost an equal number of people who are committed to democracy as there are people who prefer undemocratic alternatives. Furthermore, of all the countries in the study, Hungary was the most financially stable with the least commitment to democracy. Its economic counterparts include the likes of South Korea, Canada, and Australia. Yet Hungary’s commitment to democracy remains consistently lower.

This comes as no surprise given the popularity of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz with the people of Hungary. Like the ugly (or at least different) duckling, Hungary is revealing itself to be ‘genetically’ different. Just as the mother duck mistakenly perceived each one

of her ducklings to be the same, perhaps the EU has made a similar error with Hungary: oblivious to its inherent dissimilarity until now. In any case, populism and commitment to democracy appear to be characteristics that have resulted in survival but have also contributed to an illiberal change. These two things help explain why Hungary's democracy score might be higher than the Czech Republic's. These findings are summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Commitment to Democracy in Hungary



8. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF EVOLUTION?

Where populism appears to be consistent in both countries, Hungary's commitment to democracy is strikingly lower than that of Czechia. Though it is clear that the degree of illiberalism is different in these two countries, these measures provide a new explanation.

Just as the bird with a small beak was selected out of the environment on a certain island, liberal democracy was selected out of the environment in Hungary. The findings indicate that this could be because of two things: populism and commitment to democracy. Additionally, just as climate change effected the food source of the birds, the 2008 financial crisis threatened the stability of the country. According to an article published by *The Guardian*, "Hungary was the hardest hit of the central European EU members because so much of its massive government debt was foreign-owned. These foreigners wanted to sell their Hungarian forint-denominated bonds, but no new buyers appeared on the market" (Darvas, 2008). As a result, the economic and political legitimacy of the government was called into question and the future of the regime at the time was uncertain. It is no surprise that only two years later Viktor Orbán was appointed as Prime Minister. Like the beak of the bird, populism and commitment to democracy allowed for Hungary to survive despite that detrimental pressure. Unfortunately, these characteristics also contributed to the resurgence of illiberal democracy as a residual effect.

If this is the case, why hasn't illiberal democracy disappeared now that Hungary's economy is thriving? In this context, it might be because commitment to democracy is a

polymorphism that is not just a result of external pressure like populism is, but also an innate aspect of Hungary's political climate. Just as the ugly duckling was not a duckling to begin with, neither was Hungary ever truly liberal. The type of democracy we see in that country today is a result of this and other metaphorical polymorphisms that arise as a consequence of certain selective pressures.

Comparatively, the Czech Republic has not been affected the same way but is noticeably slipping into illiberal habits (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018). Although Mirek Topolánek's populism score is fairly high, the country is still committed to democracy, though that is noticeably decreasing following Andrej Babiš and his political front known as ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens). This might suggest that commitment to democracy is not a polymorphism that the Czech Republic possesses. Perhaps the Czech Republic is not an ugly duckling but is actually innately liberal in ways that Hungary is not. In this respect, it is likely a characteristic that contributes to survival, but in a liberal manner rather than an illiberal one. Nonetheless, while Czechia may genetically be a duck, they are certainly getting uglier. With the government in the hands of Zeman and Babiš, liberal democracy in the Czech Republic is taking a turn for the worse.

On the other hand, populism is a characteristic that contributes to the survival of the Czech Republic in an illiberal manner. Mirek Topolánek, Miloš Zeman, and Andrej Babiš are leaders that have changed the political climate of the Czech Republic in significantly populist and arguably illiberal ways. After the 2008 financial crisis, like many other countries, Czechia turned to strong populist leaders in order to maintain control. But in the process of doing so, it has become undoubtedly less liberal. Perhaps a similar procedure is taking place today with Zeman and Babiš as a result of immigration or other selective pressures.

If we were to approach these findings in the same way as Modelski and Thompson (1999), we might attribute the resurgence of illiberal democracy as the resulting global authority to various macro-level events like the 2008 financial crisis. However, not all countries have become *illiberal*, and it is becoming increasingly more evident that not all countries are on a path to become *liberal*. In a global world the answer lies not in “survival of the fittest” but in variation. These findings demonstrate that fact and describe the immense variation we observe. In both the case of Hungary and the case of the Czech Republic, an evolutionary model fits the direction that both countries have gone. If this is the case of two countries that are remarkably similar, it might be even more true of countries that are vastly different. Further investigation is warranted.

9. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Evolutionary theories inherently suggest that behavior of any sort is a product of environmental and genetic factors rather than agentic based decisions. As such, this approach could be interpreted as not only reductionistic, but also deterministic. These are dangerous assumptions. Political actors and the choices they make are imperative to any political system. These choices can be made by interest groups, voters, members of the legislature, and even executive authorities. In all cases, the decisions they make produce different outcomes. In Hungary, voters could have chosen not to elect Fidesz as the majority party in parliament (but they did). Parliament could have chosen not to appoint Viktor Orbán as Prime Minister (but it did). Viktor Orbán could have chosen not to lead Hungary in an illiberal direction (but he did). Indeed, in another world, Hungary might have been the Germany of Central

and Eastern Europe. Certainly, the EU wishes it were so.

Choices are significant to say the least, but why do people make the choices that they do? To say that people are free to choose as they wish is equally as wrong as saying that the future is determined by evolution. Both the EU and Fukuyama made the same mistake; choice exists but is limited by circumstance — circumstances that may be classified as both selective pressures and polymorphisms. In essence, just as ducks can never be swans, some democracies may never be liberal. The choices that they make are predicated on this genetic disposition and the external forces that place stress on a certain regime.

10. CONCLUSION

At the onset of the 21st century it seemed like Fukuyama was correct, that the end of history really was liberal. But that was before 9/11, before the 2008 Financial Crisis, before EU Enlargement, before the refugee crisis, and before the election of leaders like Donald Trump to heads of state across the world. The truth is that we can't predict the future, but we can experiment with suggestive analogies that help us think about the future in the context of the past and the present. What this paper demonstrates is the viability of a new approach to understanding the resurgence of illiberal democracies across the world using biological evolution as a model.

Populism and commitment to democracy are just two things that might explain why the Czech Republic and Hungary are experiencing the democratic shift that they are. Though many countries across Central and Eastern Europe share similar origins, their implementation—or lack of—liberal democracy is by no means the same. The key to answering the age-old question, *why?*, lies in the concept, presented in this paper, of evolution. Liberal democracy has, in the case of Hungary, been selected out of the environment as a result of the country's waning commitment to democracy and increased presence of populism. This differs from the Czech Republic, which has also adopted populist ideologies while maintaining a higher level of commitment to democracy. The explanation for variation in liberal democracy for these two countries lies in the conflicting commitment to democracy that each country has.

This analogy takes the form of a finch, but just as the physical world is filled with different species of birds and animals, so is the political world filled with different regimes and democracies. To recall a quote from David Ritchie, “The phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ is very apt to mislead for it suggests the fittest or best in every sense, whereas in reality it only means the survival of those best fitted to cope with their circumstances” (Ritchie 1891, 12). The democracies in the Czech Republic and Hungary have adapted and made choices based on their circumstances, and as a result have evolved in an illiberal manner. The same can be said of countries everywhere. We must understand this in order to make sense of the future, but in no way can we ever predict it.

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