

Rafał Glajcar

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

rafal.glajcar@us.edu.pl

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1850-013X>

Parliamentary Opposition in Conditions of a Single-party Majority Government – A Few Remarks on the Basis of Polish Political Experience

Introduction

Regardless of the nature of the political regime, a power struggle unveils at least two parties to the political dispute. It constitutes a natural ground for the crystallization of attitudes, actions, behaviors or opposition structures. They take on forms that are to a lesser or greater degree institutional in nature, and express opposition to various aspects of the functioning of the political system and/or entities that are currently in power¹. Thus, opposition (in a broad sense) occurs in all political systems², and at the same time it is not only characteristic of modern times. After all, the Roman tribune of the Plebs was already considered to be “an organ of officially authorized opposition”³. For a long time, however, opposition remained largely undefined. Only social and political changes that led to the

¹ G. Parry, *Opposition Questions*, “Government and Opposition”, 1997, Vol. 32 (4), p. 459.

² J.J. Linz, *Kryzys, załamanie i powrót do równowagi*, [in:] *Władza i społeczeństwo 2, antologia tekstów z zakresu socjologii polityki*, ed. J. Szczupaczyński, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warszawa 1998, p. 40.

³ K. Loewenstein, *The Governance of Rome*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1973, p. 70.

formation of modern-day democracies, contributed to a specific promotion of the idea of political opposition.

The idea of political opposition was one of the aspects already undertaken by nineteenth-century liberal political thinkers. However, it wasn't until the 1960s that it became the subject of systematic political science research. Robert A. Dahl and his work entitled "Political Oppositions in Western Democracies"⁴ played a key role in creating the basis for scientific research on this phenomenon. It includes studies of ten opposition cases in the highly developed political systems of Europe and North America. On their basis, in the final part of his work, R.A. Dahl made systematizing findings, which constituted a theoretical foundation for the research on the opposition. In principle, this publication is still a point of reference for researchers dealing with this issue.

Since then, relatively few new monographs on the opposition have appeared in English literature. The most famous of these are the following publications: Ghita Ionescu and Isabel De Madariaga⁵, another work by Robert A. Dahl⁶, or collective works by Eva Kolinsky⁷ and Ludger Helms⁸. Many more publications on the said subject have been published as chapters in collective works or articles in scientific journals. Among the latter, the journal "Government and Opposition", which has been appearing since the mid-sixties, deserves mentioning. Many interesting articles have been published therein which have contributed to the development of research on the opposition in contemporary political systems. Among them, of particular importance are the analyses by: Giovanni Sartori⁹, Sylvie Giulj¹⁰, Jean Blondel¹¹, Ludger Helms¹², and Peter Mair¹³. Other journals also published articles that left their mark on opposition

⁴ R.A. Dahl ed., *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1966.

⁵ G. Ionescu, I. De Madariaga, *Opposition: Past and Present of a Political Institution*, The New Thinker Library, London 1968.

⁶ R.A. Dahl ed., *Regimes and Opposition*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1973.

⁷ E. Kolinsky ed., *Opposition in Western Europe*, Routledge, New York 2016.

⁸ L. Helms ed., *Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies*, Routledge, New York 2009.

⁹ G. Sartori, *Opposition and Control. Problems and Prospects*, "Government and Opposition", 1966, Vol. 1 (2), pp. 149–154.

¹⁰ S. Giulj, *Confrontation and Conciliation: The Status of the Opposition in Europe*, "Government and Opposition", 1981, Vol. 16 (4), pp. 476–494.

¹¹ J. Blondel, *Political Opposition in the Contemporary World*, "Government and Opposition", 1997, Vol. 32 (4), pp. 462–486.

¹² L. Helms, *Five Ways of Institutionalizing Political Opposition: Lessons from the Advanced Democracies*, "Government and Opposition", 2004, Vol. 39 (1), pp. 22–54.

¹³ P. Mair, *Political Opposition and the European Union*, "Government and Opposition", 2007, Vol. 42 (1), pp. 1–17.

research, such as Otto Kirchheimer's text¹⁴ on the problem of the waning opposition or Julian L. Garritzmann's study¹⁵, which in 2018 was awarded the Best Paper Prize by the Swiss Political Science Association. All in all, of particular relevance is Eva Kolinski's observation that "opposition has never been in the limelight of political analysis. Its fate could be compared to that of the loser in a cup final: media attention turns to the victorious team and expects everything for the future from those who proved themselves capable of winning. The real test of strength would be a victory next time round and an ascent from opposition to the government"¹⁶.

In this context, the research of Polish political scientists and constitutionalists on the issues of opposition in political systems is relatively broad. It suffices to mention the monographs of Zbigniew Machelski¹⁷, Tomasz Krawczyk¹⁸ and Stanisław Bożyk¹⁹, or the collective works of Eugeniusz Zwierzchowski²⁰ and Krzysztof Łabędź²¹. The issue of the functioning of the political opposition (including the Polish opposition) also appears in scientific journals affiliated with Polish academic centers. In addition, matters pertaining to the relations between the rulers and the opposition are discussed as one of the themes in publications devoted to issues concerning the functioning of the Polish Parliament²² or the Polish political system²³. Almost a decade ago, the Polish publishing market also saw the publication of Michał Kubát's "Political Opposition in Theory and Central

¹⁴ O. Kirchheimer, *The Waning of Opposition in Parliamentary Regimes*, "Social Research", 1957, Vol. 24 (2), pp. 127–156.

¹⁵ J.L. Garritzmann, *How much power do oppositions have? Comparing the opportunity structures of parliamentary oppositions in 21 democracies*, "Journal of Legislative Studies", 2017, Vol. 23 (1), pp. 1–30.

¹⁶ E. Kolinsky, *Introduction* [in:] *Opposition in Western Europe...*, op. cit., pp. 1–7.

¹⁷ Z. Machelski, *Opozycja w systemie demokracji parlamentarnej. Wielka Brytania, Niemcy, Włochy*, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa 2001; *Idem*, *Opozycja polityczna w Europie. Ujęcie porównawcze*, Difin, Warszawa 2016.

¹⁸ T. Krawczyk, *Stosunki między rządem i opozycją w wybranych państwach Europy*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2005.

¹⁹ S. Bożyk, *Prawnowstrojowy status opozycji parlamentarnej w Sejmie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Temida2, Białystok 2006.

²⁰ E. Zwierzchowski, *Opozycja parlamentarna*, Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, Warszawa 2000.

²¹ K. Łabędź, *Opozycja parlamentarna w Polsce w latach 1997–2010*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2012; *Idem* ed., *Rola opozycji w systemach demokratycznych*, Akademia Ignatianum w Krakowie, Wydawnictwo WAM., Kraków 2016.

²² See e.g.: J. Marszałek-Kawa, *The Institutional Position and Functions of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland after the Accession to the European Union*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2016.

²³ See e.g.: A. Antoszewski, *Rządzący a opozycja parlamentarna po 2007 roku* [in:] *Demokracja w Polsce po 2007 roku*, ed. D. Plecka, Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Naukowych, Katowice 2014, pp. 15–34.

European Practice”²⁴. It is an authorial attempt to present the existing views and concepts of political opposition. From the perspective of a researcher of the Polish political system, this publication is valuable insofar that the presented issues are related to the realities of Central Europe.

Terminological disputes over the concept of opposition

The term opposition derives from the Latin word *oppositus*, which means opposition, opposing position. Therefore, it indicates the existence of a difference, tension, a dispute, conflict between at least two entities, ideas, concepts, solutions, etc... In the political sphere, divergences may concern values, interests, ways of achieving goals, etc. It would seem, therefore, that the meaning of the term opposition should not be too difficult to grasp. Meanwhile, in political science literature, the terminological motif appears to be somewhat of a challenge for researchers, especially when it comes to resolving the difference between opposition and political opposition. This issue was described, among others, by Michał Kubát²⁵. In its broadest sense, his study concerns the political opposition. It focuses on activities whose essence lies in the assumption of various forms of opposition to those who govern (political power).

However, the notion of political opposition does not reflect its entire complexity. Therefore, in the literature on the subject, there is a division into political opposition *sensu largo* and *sensu stricto*. The former means any articulated form of opposition to a political regime or to the policies of those in power and / or the policies pursued by them²⁶. On the other hand, political opposition in the strict sense of the word is the realm of formal political organizations criticizing those in power and aiming to take over the power, and, in certain situations, also pursuing to change the political regime²⁷. While political opposition understood in a broad sense (as an opposition of opinion) is present in every political system, political opposition in a narrow sense (institutional opposition) is characteristic only for systems based on real political competition (democratic regimes)²⁸.

The point of reference for the analysis carried out in this article will be the political opposition *sensu stricto*, whose presence in the political system is an

²⁴ M. Kubát, *Political Opposition in Theory and Central European Practice*, Peter Lang International Verlag den Wissenschaften, Frankfurt am Main 2010.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 15–22.

²⁶ G. Ionescu, I. De Madariaga, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁷ L. Schapiro, “Putting the lid on Leninism”: *Opposition and dissent in the communist one-party states*, “Government and Opposition”, 1967, Vol. 2 (2), pp. 182.

²⁸ T. Krawczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

expression of the practical implementation of the principle of political pluralism. Only when there is real freedom of speech, thought and expression, competitive interests and ideas concerning their realization appear. Such conditions are conducive to the emergence of various forms of organization that strive to achieve the goals set in the sphere of politics. In modern democracies, political parties are key actors in the pluralistic space in which there is competition for gaining, maintaining or changing the division of power. Competition between the most trusted parties in society constantly takes place, the aim of which is to fill the main offices of public authority. This provides them with the opportunity to shape and control the political agenda.

The most important of these bodies is the parliament which, depending on the level of cohesion of the electoral system in force and the structure of the existing socio-political divide in a given country, reflects to a lesser or greater degree of accuracy the complex structure of society, with its diversity identified on the basis of demographic factors, as well as the multiplicity of its views, opinions and concepts of political action. The focus of this article will be the activities of the opposition in parliament. It is acknowledged that the notion of parliamentary opposition should be understood as the formal structures in the Sejm and Senate that bring together parliamentarians who, without participating in the formation of government, are critical of its political program and activities or at least do not demonstrate support for them, and formulate their own program and personnel alternatives, while seeking to take over the power at the same time²⁹.

Objective of the article

In the literature on politics and constitutional law, two dominant approaches of conducting research on the political opposition can be identified. The first one includes all attempts to search for comprehensive solutions concerning its functioning. There are relatively few theoretical studies on this subject, and their flagship examples are the publications of Klaus von Beyme³⁰ or Robert A. Dahl³¹ from several decades ago. They continue to be a reference point for many analyses. The second approach to the issues of the opposition is reflected in

²⁹ E. Zwierzchowski, *Opozycja parlamentarna*, [in:] *Opozycja parlamentarna*, ed. E. Zwierzchowski..., *op. cit.*, pp. 9–29; S. Bożyk, *op. cit.*, p. 20; J.L. Garritzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁰ K. von Beyme, *Parliamentary Oppositions in Europe*, [in:] *Opposition in Western Europe...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–48.

³¹ R.A. Dahl, *Patterns of Opposition*, [in:] *Political Opposition in Western Democracies...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–347.

the publications of a descriptive and explanatory character. Their authors attempt to show the specificity of the opposition within the framework of empirical political regimes (case studies and comparative research). This approach to the issue at hand is clearly predominant.

This article is part of the second of these research streams. It is devoted to the relations between the government and the opposition in Poland. The fundamental point of reference will be the situation that arose on the parliamentary arena in this country after the elections in 2015, when a political agreement crystallized that guaranteed one election committee the majority of MPs seats. This resulted in the formation of a one-party majority government. In democratic multi-party systems such situations did happen, but in the case of the Polish political system it was something entirely new. A review of the Polish case is justified by the fact that the activity of the parliamentary opposition is conditioned by a number of factors reflecting the endemicity of institutional, political and cultural conditions³².

The fundamental research problem has been outlined around the question of a parliamentary opposition's effectiveness when facing a homogeneous parliamentary majority. The related research hypothesis assumes that the effectiveness of the actions of the parliamentary opposition in such conditions depends on the strategies adopted by both sides of the political dispute. These strategies in turn are based on the dominating perception of the political opponent.

It is worth noting that the issue of the strategy adopted by the political opposition, based on which it conducts its affairs, has already been discussed in the above-mentioned classic by Robert A. Dahl³³ as one of the six criteria for distinguishing between its different types. On the basis of these findings, this thread is given priority in the article and is further expanded to include the question of the strategy used by those in power. As a consequence, a new typology will be proposed, covering four possible scenarios of mutual relations between those in power and the opposition. Afterwards, by way of reference to examples from Polish parliamentary practice, specific trends in the relations between the opposition and the government will be identified³⁴. This will allow us to determine which of the separate scenarios is most relevant to the situation in Poland after 2015 and how it affects the effectiveness of actions taken by the parliamentary opposition.

³² L. Helms, *Studying Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies: Issues and Perspectives*, [in:] *Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies...*, *op. cit.*, pp. XIII–XXVI.

³³ R.A. Dahl, *Patterns of Opposition...*, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

³⁴ J. Blondel, *op. cit.*, p. 478.

Methodologically, this paper refers to the neo-institutional approach³⁵. It is an opportunity to capture the interaction between two important elements in the study of the political opposition: institutions and the context of people taking action.

Government – opposition dichotomy

In democratic regimes, the existence of a division into those in power and the opposition is usually a given. However, on closer inspection, the issue is not always as clear as it originally appears. This division is determined by many factors. Some of them seem to be easily identifiable, others may be hidden from the outside observer, or their influence on the shaping of the actual government-opposition system may not be fully comprehensible for the observer³⁶. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the coincidence of individual factors may have a significant impact on the actual nature of the relationship between the government and the opposition.

The first factor is the institutional set-up created. Two situations can be identified in this area. Within the first, there exists a far-reaching separation of legislature and the executive, which is exemplified by presidentialism. As shown in the political practice in the United States of America (the only country in which this type of regime has been successfully operating for many years without authoritarian phrases), situations in which the president and the majority in the legislature represent different political groups are not uncommon. In such circumstances, the division into those in power and the opposition becomes blurred³⁷. The second situation concerns the case when there is an organizational, functional and often personal connection between the legislature and the executive. Such circumstances increase the clarity of the government-opposition division, and the key factor determining which actor (or actors) will obtain the status of a governing entity and which will be in opposition is the result of a parliamentary election and/or the effects of coalition bargaining.

The second factor which helps clarify the division into those in power and the opposition is the format of the party system. In a two-party or two-block system, the readability of the division into those in power and the opposition usually does not raise any doubts. On the other hand, a multiparty nature and fragmentation

³⁵ J.G. March, J.P. Olsen, *The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life*, "American Political Science Review", 1984, Vol. 78 (3), pp. 734–749.

³⁶ Z. Machelski, *Opozycja polityczna...*, pp. 48–51.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 257–258.

of the party system often forces political actors to form cabinet coalitions. On the one hand, this may significantly modify the outcome of parliamentary elections in certain. On the other hand, it is possible that entities formally remaining outside the cabinet coalition de facto support the governing system. This is particularly evident at the parliamentary level, when such groups vote on particular matters in the same way as the representatives of the governing groups

Situations in which declared affiliation to the opposition is accompanied by attitudes, behaviors and actions that favor the government are not uncommon³⁸. As a result, however, the government-opposition dichotomy acquires a highly conventional character. Treating the opposition as a continuum may prove to be a solution to this problem. Entities seeking a ruthless seizure of power would be located at one end of the extreme, while the other would include structures which, while remaining outside the formal arrangement of power, would be striving to join it³⁹.

The third factor influencing the division between those in power and the opposition is related to strategies that political actors most frequently apply. From this perspective, two opposing models can be distinguished, the first one being a confrontational model, characterized by the avoidance of political cooperation, and the second one constituting a cooperative model, which seeks to find common ground⁴⁰. The domination of confrontational strategies makes this division more readable than the predominance of cooperative strategies.

In its competition with the opposition, the government should focus on constantly proving that its ideas, programs and activities are appropriate and contribute to the social, political or economic development of the state. On the other hand, the functioning of the parliamentary opposition cannot be identified solely by its criticism of the government, albeit resistance, opposition, disapproval or protest are the essence of the opposition's activity. In the democratic political space, expectations are formulated towards the opposition, in the same way as towards those in power. These expectations are identified as duties. The basic duty linking both sides should be the sense of responsibility for the state and the well-being of its citizens. This means that the proposals put forward by the opposition should be constructive. Criticism of the government is fully justified when the opposition does so within the framework of scrutinizing the government and

³⁸ J.J. Linz, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–41.

³⁹ V. Gel'man, *Political Opposition in Russia: A Dying Species*, "Post-Soviet Affairs", 2005, Vol. 21 (3), pp. 228–229.

⁴⁰ A. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1999, pp. 9–47.

presenting a viable program alternative⁴¹. The aim of a constructive opposition is to seize power in order to carry out its own political agenda, and not to remove those in power for the sole purpose of gaining power⁴². Therefore, it can be concluded that actions aimed at maintaining or taking over power and implementing one's own program agenda must be accompanied by an awareness of responsibility for the actions being undertaken⁴³.

The fourth factor is closely related to the previous one and refers to the issue of political culture of the ruling elite and the opposition elite. Their recourse to confrontational strategies may lead to a situation in which the opposition is focused solely on criticizing government actions, while at the same time treating its role of scrutinizing the latter and creating alternative political agendas as side effects of political competition. Governments, in turn, will consolidate their previously taken positions, ignoring the demands of the opposition or treating them as the voice of a minority that does not have the right to impose its own opinion on the majority. On the other hand, the domination of cooperative strategies may, in an extreme form, lead to a narrowing down of the asymmetry of power competences of the ruling entity in relation to the subordinate entity, while at the same time increasing the opposition's prerogative of counter-symmetry in political power relations⁴⁴. In such a situation, not only do the limits of responsibility of individual entities become obscured, but above all, the division into those in power and the opposition becomes unclear. Therefore, it is optimal that both parties are aware of the fact that they are mutually dependent on each other, pursuing both common and competitive goals. Adoption of such behaviors would attest to the formation of a democratic political culture among the elites.

The four factors mentioned above are not, of course, exhaustive. When analyzing relations in an empirical political regime, one can point to more factors, which determine the shape of relations between those in power and the opposition. Not without significance are factors that could be described, within a broad research perspective, as political marginalities. In certain circumstances,

⁴¹ J.L. Garritzmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 7–8.

⁴² T. Louwerse, S. Otjes, *How Populists Wage Opposition: Parliamentary Opposition Behaviour and Populism in the Netherlands*, "Political Studies", 2019, Vol. 69 (2), p. 481.

⁴³ Imbalances in relations between those in power and the opposition can lead to one of three scenarios: tyranny of the majority, tyranny of a strategically well-placed minority, tyranny of irrational arbitrariness. See: I. Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2003, p. 12.

⁴⁴ K. Pałecki, *Wprowadzenie do dyskusji nad koncepcją opozycji politycznej*, "Polityka i Społeczeństwo", 2016, Vol. 1 (14), pp. 8–9.

however, these factors may turn out to constitute elements which will have a significant influence on the shaping of the government-opposition system within the empirical political regime.

Parliamentary opposition in Poland after 2015

With regard to the ruling government-opposition dichotomy, the 2015 elections created a completely new political situation which poses another challenge for the young Polish democracy. The formation of a single-party majority government led to the creation of a fundamentally new political situation, something that had not occurred after 1989. This signified the end of the era of coalition rule in Poland and the beginning of a one-party government. It was to be expected that such a situation would favor those in power by increasing their ability to take and effectively enforce political decisions. At the same time, it was impossible to ignore the specific approach of the political elites in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, towards state institutions. On many occasions it could be observed that these institutions were being treated by political actors as sources of benefits in various dimensions, albeit in a primarily political one. In light of the above, coalitionism could be interpreted as a specific sort of protection (though certainly imperfect) against the realization of the ruling elite's self-serving agenda⁴⁵. The necessity of making agreements and rational choices in conditions of differing substantive and political opinions existing between the coalition partners required legal instruments, appropriate organizational rules, as well as personal predispositions.

In a situation where the parliament and the government found themselves in the hands of one political force, and this imperfect coalition protection mechanism ceased to work, the role of the parliamentary opposition, which has the extremely important task of controlling those in power, was exposed. In a situation when the latter took over the key institutional veto players, the center of gravity was shifted to party veto players operating within state institutions dominated by the ruling party.

Taking into account the fact that a one-party government was formed, other parliamentary groups should therefore be considered opposition groups. The problem, however, is that here the situation is much more complex. Firstly, the parliamentary opposition cannot be treated as a single political actor. There

⁴⁵ This has often manifested itself in the fact that within the formal coalition structures there have been behaviors and actions that bear opposition features. N. Brack, S. Weinblum, "Political Opposition": *Towards a Renewed Research Agenda*, "Interdisciplinary Political Studies", 2011, Vol. 1 (1), p. 71.

are greater or lesser differences between opposition groups in terms of values, political programs, strategies employed. Oftentimes disputes also concern personalities. The low degree of cohesion of the parliamentary opposition in Poland results in its inclusion in the fragmented rather than integrated model⁴⁶.

Secondly, if one accepts the view that opposition attitudes are born on the basis of dissatisfaction understood in its broad sense⁴⁷, then one can observe in the behavior of part of parliamentary groups many manifestations of support for the political projects of the ruling camp. The problem arises as to whether the MPs associated in these structures constitute a real parliamentary opposition to those in power, or whether they are “suspended” somewhere between the two poles, at the same time revealing the descriptive and explanatory deficit of the government-opposition dichotomy.

Thirdly and finally, it is worth noting that the parliamentary opposition, although internally divided, cannot be considered an element of the ideological bilateral structure. Both the ruling party and some parliamentary groups (or MPs) functioning in the parliamentary arena are located more to the right side of the political scene. This raises questions about the real differences between those in power and the opposition (as to where the border lies between them) whether they concern fundamental issues, i.e., the area of axiology, or program issues. Or maybe the discrepancies concern only the issue of access to power and the possibility of governing, which in consequence results in the self-awareness of the government-opposition division being reduced to phrases such as “we-they”, “good-bad” and “yes-no; no-yes”. Such attitudes are exemplified by both sides’ consolidation of their positions and focusing on the opponent and his behavior. As a result, the action of one side provokes the reaction of the other side, which in all its efforts attempts to discredit its foe. Exhaustion of the usefulness of the right-left paradigm to describe and explain the model of political rivalry in Poland observed in the first two decades of the 21st century, created space for alternative divisions. One of them was defined by the leader of the Civic Platform party, Grzegorz Schetyna, who in an interview said that “if there is total power, total appropriation of freedom, then there is total opposition”⁴⁸. The ruling camp and the media that support it came to understand these words as the credo of

⁴⁶ K. Łabędź, *Opozycja parlamentarna jako przedmiot badań*, [in:] *Opozycja parlamentarna w Polsce...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

⁴⁷ A. Mehta, *The Opposition in the New States*, “Indian Journal of Political Science”, 1959, Vol. 20 (1), p. 9.

⁴⁸ TVP Info, *Schetyna: jeżeli jest totalna władza, to jest totalna opozycja*, <https://www.tvp.info/24990606/schetyna-jezeli-jest-totalna-wladza-to-jest-totalna-opozycja> [accessed: September 30, 2019].

the opposition activity of the Civic Platform party. Going beyond journalistic and media analyses of the CP leader's statement, it is worth noting that he not only defined his party's strategy towards the ruling camp, but also pointed out how the opposition perceives the way in which the ruling camp behaved. The phrases "total power" and "total opposition" can be read not only in the context of operating methods, but also express a sense of growing asymmetry between the ruling party and the opposition, which means that the latter is becoming more and more objectified. As a result, the space for tolerance, which is both the source and confirmation of political pluralism, is being reduced. In extreme situations, this may lead either to anarchy or to the emergence of some form of dictatorship.

Opposition parties (sometimes entities adopting a different organizational formula) have different accents in terms of how to achieve the main goal, which is to take over power. Similarly, those in power may treat the opposition in various ways. This is related to the political goals adopted by both sides⁴⁹ and the strategies implemented⁵⁰, built around the dominant manner of perceiving the political opponent and, consequently, the attitude in relation thereto. Assuming that both parties may behave towards each other in a way that expresses their acceptance or lack of acceptance for the places occupied by the other in the political system and, therefore, acceptance or lack of acceptance for their tasks and roles, as well as for the significance thereof, it can be assumed that the attitude of one party towards the other may be positive or negative. As a result, four possible models of interaction between those in power and the opposition form (Table 1).

When both parties demonstrate a positive attitude towards each other, a basis exists for the development of a relationship in which strategies of cooperation and a broad acceptance of the principles on which the political regime operates will dominate despite the existing differences. It is characteristic that the opposition acts constructively, opposing certain proposals of those in power, but does not focus on paralyzing the actions they undertake. On the other hand, those in power do not ignore the opposition. They build mutual relations based on dialogue, convincing them of their own ideas.

At the opposite pole, a model of bilateral protest exists, which leads to the precipitation of an aporetic situation. In this case, the attitudes of both sides are

⁴⁹ See e.g.: K. Strøm, W.C. Müller, *Political Parties and Hard Choices*, [in:] *Policy, Office, or Votes? How Political parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*, eds. K. Strøm, W.C. Müller, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 5–9.

⁵⁰ A. Antoszewski, *Rządzący a opozycja...*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

based on the mutual negation of each other’s roles in the political system. Such a situation constitutes a significant threat to the sustainability of democratic order.

The third model relates to a situation in which the opposition, while accepting the right of those in power to implement their political agenda, is faced with limitations in the scope of its functioning. In this case, it is an expression of the government’s strategy aimed at objectifying the opposition (depriving it not of its formal but of its real subjectivity).

Finally, the fourth model relates to a situation in which those in power respect the rights of the opposition factually and formally, while the latter in turn concentrates on questioning the legitimacy of the ruling elite. In an extreme case, this may lead to – using Ian Shapiro’s terminology – the tyranny of a strategically placed minority⁵¹.

Table 1. Government-opposition relationship models based on mutual recognition or lack thereof

Relation of those in power to the opposition / Relation of the opposition to those in power	positive	negative
positive	cooperation	objectification of the opposition
negative	questioning the legitimacy of those in power	two-sided contestation

Source: Author’s own work.

The classification of a specific case into one of the four models is obviously difficult (as Robert A. Dahl has already pointed out⁵²), however, the aforementioned concept may serve as a basis for the analysis of the situation in Poland after 2015. It focuses on the relations between the political elites, and therefore concerns a sphere that is more important for shaping a particular political order than the very fact of holding competitive elections. The latter only formally legitimize the right of a particular group to exercise power. However, the aggregated electoral decisions of the citizens do not have such a significant

⁵¹ I. Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁵² R.A. Dahl, *Patterns of Opposition...*, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

influence on the formation of the aforementioned political order as the relations between the elites, especially between those in power and the opposition.

There is no doubt that from a normative point of view, the parliamentary opposition in Poland has a wide range of opportunities to participate in political life. However, it is essential to what extent it is able to effectively exercise its rights. In this respect, much depends on the balance of political forces. In a situation where the ruling camp has the support of a parliamentary majority, and, in addition, shows features characteristic of far-reaching internal cohesion (ideological, programmatic, organizational), then the role of the parliamentary opposition is very limited. On the other hand, the weakness of the ruling camp (lack of support from the parliamentary majority, low internal cohesion) favors an increase in the opposition's potential chances of pushing through its own political projects. Of course, the strength of the opposition itself is also important, and to what extent it is united in action against the policy of the ruling camp⁵³.

The political situation in Poland after the 2015 clearly indicates that the ruling camp shows the highest level of internal cohesion after 1989, while at the same time operating in conditions of a sustained parliamentary majority. In addition, it also controls the office of the president, who has several important veto powers. In such circumstances, the effectiveness of a parliamentary opposition's actions depends to a large extent on the government. The question is to what degree it is willing to involve the opposition in the processes of government and to what extent its actions are aimed at weakening the strength of opposition groups. In practice, the influence of the opposition is very limited. The opposition is deprived of instruments allowing it to exert a real institutional influence on the decision-making process. "Soft" factors influencing the shaping of political phenomena and processes relating to democratic political culture, are therefore of particular importance. The idea is for the asymmetry that has formed between those in power and the opposition to be balanced.

The opposition has not found effective ways to counteract the government's efforts to objectify it. By drawing attention above all to the various difficulties it faces in its parliamentary activity, the opposition strengthens the public's conviction of its relatively poor effectiveness, resulting in a sustained high level of support for the ruling camp⁵⁴.

⁵³ P. Kopecký, M. Spirova, *Parliamentary Opposition in Post-Communist Democracies: Power of the Powerless*, [in:] *Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–136.

⁵⁴ Support for the ruling party between November 2015 and October 2021 oscillated between 30% and 45%, and occasionally even exceeded this upper limit.

If “nondialogicality” had been determining the government-opposition relationship before the change of power in 2015⁵⁵, then the situation had certainly not improved afterwards, making the dominance of confrontational strategies, which both sides of the political dispute utilize, much too obvious. Governments use one of the basic principles on which procedural democracy is based – the majority principle – reducing it to a simple majority. Thereby, through reference to the election results, they assume the role of an entity that represents the majority of society (the People)⁵⁶. This conviction (though unauthorized) leads them to ignore the need to enter into dialogue with the opposition, which, unable to find other ways to compete with the ruling camp that remains indifferent to its demands, reaches for tools that deepen the political and, consequently, social divide. The powerlessness of the opposition in the face of the government’s actions favors the formation of a model of confrontational opposition⁵⁷. This, in turn, strengthens analogous attitudes on the part of the government. Resorting to confrontational strategies by both the government and the opposition draws both sides of the political dispute towards a model of mutual contestation. This is reflected in the fact that conflict situations are no longer a matter of fact, but are becoming the main vehicle for policy making and an arena in which the struggle for domination is fought. Such a situation is particularly undesirable in the long term, as it restricts and, over time, makes it increasingly difficult to reach agreement and engage in cooperation in the future. The behavior of each side can also become a model by which political opponents will act after roles change.

Final remarks

The situation in Poland after 2015 is different from the previous periods in that this time one political party managed to win control over parliament (over the Sejm and the Senat after the 2015 elections and over the Sejm after the 2019 elections). The result has been an extensive deterioration of the

⁵⁵ A. Antoszewski, *Rządzący a opozycja...*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ This is reflected, for example, in the statements of the representatives of the ruling party, who often cite Article 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, which states that “the supreme power in the Republic of Poland belongs to the People”, who exercise this power, among others, “through their representatives”. In their opinion, this gives them, the holders of the majority of seats in parliament, the right to invoke the will of the People. See, among others, an interview with Jarosław Kaczyński. See: *Gość Wiadomości 07.03.2017*, <https://vod.tvp.pl/video/gosc-wiadomosci,07032017,29081763> [accessed: September 30, 2019].

⁵⁷ S. Giulj, *op. cit.*, pp. 486–487.

parliamentary opposition's actual potential to carry out its basic functions. On the one hand, this is a consequence of the election results, which has led to the blocking of the most important institutional veto players. On the other hand, those in power show determination both in terms of reducing the power of veto of an increasingly greater number of institutions, as well as in weakening the role of party veto players by blocking their access to certain positions or in the instrumental treatment of their rights. It should be stressed that the strategy of restricting the role of the opposition was employed by all the ruling circles in the Third Polish Republic (especially those benefiting from the support of the incumbent president). This is a well-established practice, which results from so-called cognitive locks, in which political actors, regardless of their political affiliation, are not guided in their activity by what they consider to be the best for the state, but by what they believe to be the best for the realization of their political interests⁵⁸. Such an approach limits the space of the opposition's subjectivity. At the same time, there is no incentive for those in power to re-evaluate their approach towards their political opponents. What is more, after 2015, the described phenomenon has intensified, which in turn is the effect of an accumulation of control over institutional veto players by one political party.

In such conditions, it is extremely difficult for the parliamentary opposition to take effective action. At the same time, the effectiveness of its actions is very limited. In principle, the only solution is for the opposition to present a clear, credible and critical alternative to the platform of those in power and a method for its implementation. This, however, requires the opposition to be internally coherent. However, in a political system such as the one created in Poland at the end of 2015, this factor has lost its significance. Additionally, it should be emphasized that when the opposition is divided⁵⁹, it is extremely difficult for it to act as a real alternative to those in power. Another issue is that in a situation where the main opposition force consists of a party that has lost power, it is impossible for its program proposals to be internalized as credible over a relatively short period of time in the consciousness of the majority of the society. As a result, the largest opposition force becomes deprived of an important tool – its political platform. Opposition's direct reliance on a platform that has lost with the proposals of its political rivals may prove counterproductive. As a result, it will resort to reactive confrontational strategies aiming to depreciate the individual behaviors, actions and decisions of those in power. The citizen, on the other

⁵⁸ C. Forestiere, Ch.S. Allen, *The formation of cognitive locks in single party dominant regimes*, "International Political Science Review", 2011, Vol. 32 (4), p. 381.

⁵⁹ J. Blondel, *op. cit.*, p. 470.

hand, is flooded with an onslaught of conflicting information. The opposition will talk about the appropriation of the state by those in power, while the latter about the opposition's belligerence. This leads to the development of a model of bilateral contestation. The solution to such a problem lies in overcoming the aforementioned "cognitive locks", which requires changes at the political awareness level.

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Summary: The fundamental research problem has been outlined around the question of a parliamentary opposition's effectiveness when faced with a homogeneous parliamentary majority. The underlying research hypothesis assumes that the effectiveness of the actions of the parliamentary opposition in such conditions depends on the strategies adopted by both sides of the political dispute. These strategies in turn are built around the dominant perception of the political opponent.

Keywords: parliament, parliamentary opposition, party strategies, political rivalry, single-party majority government

Opozycja parlamentarna w warunkach jednopartyjnego rządu większościowego – kilka uwag na podstawie polskich doświadczeń politycznych

Streszczenie: Zasadniczy problem badawczy zarysowany został wokół pytania o efektywność działań opozycji parlamentarnej w sytuacji konkurencji z homogeniczną większością parlamentarną. Odnosząca się do niego hipoteza badawcza zakłada, że skuteczność działań opozycji parlamentarnej w takich warunkach uzależniona jest od strategii stosowanych przez obydwie strony politycznego sporu. Strategie te zbudowane są zaś na dominującym sposobie postrzegania przeciwnika politycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: parlament, opozycja parlamentarna, strategie partyjne, rywalizacja polityczna, jednopartyjny rząd większościowy