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Potential effects of power delegitimation: the attempt of methodological revision

Abstract: The article presents a methodological attempt to identify the forms of power delegitimation and the accompanying consequences in terms of the political decision-making. By employing such analytical categories as legitimacy and political networks this paper aims to determine the conditions under which the delegitimation may transform into its extreme form, i. e. a legitimacy rupture, and the repercussions, which will follow it.

Keywords: legitimacy, delegitimation, power, political decisions, political networks.

Nowadays one can witness a serious challenge for the modern forms of governance that include disengagement between citizens and political authorities, erosion of representative democratic mechanisms and dilution of political parties, the shifting of decision-making to the supranational level and significantly increased role of non-state actors in domestic political affairs. Even provided fully functional democratic mechanisms – electivity and accountability of the governing bodies – their applications are seriously limited and citizens significantly lose their influence on shaping the political course, which results in growing frequency of political crises. The established democracies and those, whose political systems are undergoing democratic transformation, have faced a partial or a total crisis of legitimacy of their regimes over the recent years. The phenomenon of the power legitimacy decrease remains topical in contemporary political studies. Still, there is a lack of comprehensive vision of correlation between the conditional and consequent aspects of power delegitimation.

In individual studies the power delegitimation has been classified as a particular category of ‘stereotyping and prejudice’ towards ethnic or religious groups [1]; as ‘legitimacy crises’, which is according

to Habermas rests on inconsistency between the motives declared by the state, on the one hand, and the motivations of the socio-cultural system, on the other hand [2]; and as a state of ‘legitimacy deficit’ that is generally identified with ‘democracy deficit’ [3]. Delegitimation as a ‘legitimacy gap’ mostly studied in the theoretical framework of public affairs management as the inconsistency of business conduct and social adjustments [4]. In terms of the threefold legitimacy concept, Beetham provides three types of power delegitimation: a ‘failure of government performance, compounding a normative inadequacy of the constitutional rules’, an ‘act of disobedience, withdrawal of consent’, which is a result of the government’s inability to represent the common interests of society, or a ‘basic disagreement within society over the spatial organization of the state’ [5, 211–212].

In the present work, power delegitimation is considered in terms of the political decision-making. I proceed from the assumption that the low level or even the lack of legitimacy of political decisions, especially in periods of social crisis, may be a powerful factor that may lead to a legitimacy rupture, which is the irreversible power delegitimation. Thus, the purpose of the article is to identify the conditions under

which the delegitimation may transform into its extreme form, i. e. a legitimacy rupture, and the repercussions, which will follow it.

The collected theoretical and empirical materials concerning the essence of legitimacy and the practice of legitimation procedures form the prerequisites for a more comprehensive presentation of those processes in the chosen area of political science. Starting from Weber's approach [6] of distinguishing three types of legitimate authority: traditional, legal-rational and charismatic, and up to the analysis of economic, social, cultural factors that influence power legitimation, the known definitions of legitimacy are mostly interpreted in categories of confidence or public opinion, convictions, irrespective of whether it is analyzed in a system-functional (Lipset, Easton, Berger and Luckmann, Luhmann), value-symbolic (Almond and Verba, Bourdieu) or procedural dimension (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti). Thus, legitimacy of the power is prevailing voluntariness of its acceptance by the society as best meeting the requirements and challenges of the social and political reality. In this context, Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti [7] proved the need to form, on a trust basis, some social capital for building informal horizontal (connecting people of the same status and influence) and formal vertical (connecting people of unequal status, with asymmetric connections of hierarchy and dependency) connections among the members of a particular social group or the whole society. When both types of the connections are stimulated in a harmonious and responsible manner, the society generates powerful social capital, which helps to develop and improve the system. Otherwise, if the trust relations among the equal game players are broken, but strong dependency connections remain, that society automatically steps towards a deep authoritarianism. If otherwise, there ensues absence of clear rules of hierarchical submission, but the strong horizontal interaction between citizens and society is moving towards anarchy. Thus, the legitimation of political decisions is the core element of power exercising and has to be present in the

horizontal dimension (between the participants of a particular political network), and in the vertical one (between the power holders and the citizens). Since the next stage of decision-making happens in the horizontal format, it seems reasonable to turn to the methodological principles of policy network analysis.

Legitimacy networking

There is an idea with rising popularity in political science, that we are witnessing the shift of the political and managerial order 'from organizations/hierarchies (and markets/anarchies) toward networks' [8, 503]. Many current political administrations already have little in common with the traditional concepts of hierarchy or the neoconservative idea of providing state services through private markets. And despite the fact that the state policy by definition is under the supervision of the state power and aimed at ensuring 'social welfare', the public policy areas have been recently turned into a certain type of hybrid formations that are essentially private or public institutions. Moreover, the political decision-making mechanisms do not narrow down to merely formal administrative activity, because they include the activity of the other actors, which, being non-governmental, participate in the process of political decision-making.

The concept of political networks offers acceptable methodological tools for differentiating and describing public and private actors (organizations, individuals) involved in the process of political agenda setting. According to Borzel [9, 254], a policy network is 'a set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue these shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals'. Heywood [10, 103] points out the 'common interests of the network participants' and defines the political networks as 'a more or less integral formations tying together political actors adhering to similar political positions and convictions'. What the above-cited definitions have in common is

that the structural peculiarities of the networks influence the players' characteristics and activity. The membership and the central positions inside the network are in the focus of constant negotiation and fighting for between the actual and potential participants. The exchange of resources between the formal and informal network players is limited and structured by the institutional rules.

The category of recruitment to the political networks allows to determine the degree of openness (and therefore, transparency) of the decision-making process. The democratic regimes kindred to the pluralistic model are characterized by the open type of the networking decision-making format that enables individuals to be engaged in the policy-making processes through public organizations or via the crowd sourcing. In the corporatist models of government the networking forms of decision-making are partially open for involvement of certain groups of interests, lobbying organizations or field-specific associations. The closed format of decision-making is typical of client-patron networks.

It is important that the decision made in the network is primarily legitimized by the network participants. The decisions made in open political networks accessed by public representatives have a higher degree of legitimacy. In case of the closed network format, i. e. client-patron or clannish, characteristic of autocracies and underdeveloped democracies, there is a risk of decision capsulation, and as a result, of a low degree of their legitimacy in society. Surely, such a model is common not only to autocratic regimes. The tendencies in operation of the existing developed democracies are revealing more and more narrowed political networks and the elitist nature of decision making, which consequently leads to a reduction of the perceived legitimacy of

the government actions and causes the spreading of legitimacy crises. In which circumstances can a legitimacy crisis be positively resolved? Under which factors will it become irreversible and ends up as a legitimacy rupture?

In the frame of the present research, i. e. networking legitimation of political decision-making as the core of power exercising, I state that the process of power delegitimation may possibly have two outcomes. One is legal-normative — rebooting of the authority (for example, by voluntary resignation of the government/head of the state and announcement of elections to be conducted), with the elite in power giving it up in favor of the counter-elite while preserving its internal legitimacy and integrity of its network, and ensuring a chance to eventually return to governance. The other one, more radical, is legitimacy rupture, an act of irreversible delegitimation accompanied by spontaneous social protests, revolutions, non-conventional practices of the government overthrow. It is worth pointing out that this scenario is characterized by legitimacy ruptures inside the ruling elite circles conditioned by the inter-network conflict about the decisions made. In other words, a legitimacy rupture as an irreversible form of political power delegitimation occurs when the crisis of horizontal legitimation of political decisions (elites vs. elites) overlaps the crisis of vertical forms of legitimation (society vs. elites).

It can be summarized, that due to the changes in social order and political governance the approaches to power legitimacy study should be thoroughly revised. It also seems expedient to refer to the network analysis when studying legitimation/delegitimation of political decision-making in order to reveal values and mutual interests that condition the formation of political networks (elite, corporate, client-patron, civil, etc.).

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