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TECHNOCRATS AND POLITRUKS: POLISH MINISTERS BETWEEN 2001 AND 2020

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Abstract. Who has led Poland in the past 20 years, technocrats or politruks? Were those placed at the top of ministries merely party cadres, or were they experts in the domain of their ministerial activity? To uncover the answer, the present paper surveys 257 ministers spread across 10 governments and 19 years, starting with the 2001 government led by Leszek Miller and ending with the second Mateusz Morawiecki cabinet instated in November 2019. The findings suggest that the share of technocratic ministers – defined minimally as individuals who received formal education in the field of their ministerial activity – varied from 65% in 2001 to 35% in 2006, averaging at 50.19% in the entire period. 129 ministers have been technocrats and 128 politruks, as defined in this paper. The latter, however, have steadily increased their share since 2000. Consequently, half of the Polish ministers were politruks – creations of the political parties, non-experts that headed National Defense, Health, Interior, and other Ministries of paramount importance.

Keywords: post-communism, Poland, elite selection, ministerial selection, cabinet formation, democracy.

Introduction

This is a study of ministerial officeholders in Poland between 2001 and 2019, investigating whether parties appoint ministers according to the competences they have in a certain domain, as certified by them having

been formally educated within it. The article aims to explore the process of elite selection during the democratic transition and consolidation of the most populous Central and Eastern European country. It contributes to the literature on elite theory, elite selection, and democratic transition in the region.

The Covid-19 pandemic, impacting every aspect of human activity in one way or another since its outbreak, brought the political at loggerheads with the technical. Across the democratic world, doctors and specialists in infectious diseases, unelected experts, took hold of the public eye and recommended – in a fashion that could hardly be ignored – unpopular measures meant to slow down the spread of the virus. Elected politicians, entrusted to be decision-makers in the most difficult of situations, took the backseat. Some, like the US president Donald Trump or his Brazilian counterpart Jair Bolsonaro, openly fought the experts and their recommendations with dire consequences. Perhaps more than any other situation, the pandemic shows that democracies do not always value competence. Although it can be said to be obtainable on the job, competence, in the post-industrial world, generally follows formal education. A competent surgeon is one who has been trained as a surgeon. That one might obtain a certain degree of skill after having operated on several unfortunate individuals even though one did not receive the training of a surgeon cannot be reasonably considered a functional way of training surgeons.

But the importance of competence cannot be relegated to singular instances such as a global pandemic. The following paper shows that as cabinets formed in post-communist Poland, electrical engineers were named ministers of the Interior, lawyers headed the Ministry of National Defense, sociologists oversaw the Ministry of Marine Economy and historians manned the Ministry of Environment. These are the politruks, party men placed at the top of the political hierarchy as representatives of the parties that support them despite the fact that they did not receive the training one would consider critical in a given domain. In opposition to them, technocratic ministers reach the same political heights not only through party membership, but also through their educational credentials. That is how lawyers arrive at the Ministry of Justice, how

professors came to lead the Ministry of Education, and how economists were appointed to supervise the Budget or Finance Ministries.

Elite selection is at the core of any political system and it is essential within the process of democratization. It is the "staffing" (Seligman 1964, 612) of political roles within society, the impact of which amounts to a party's success or downfall, societal prosperity or stagnation, and policy development and technocratic decision-making or populist blame-shifting. In a democracy, cabinet members reach the highest echelon of political offices. Cabinet selection is an indicator of institutional coherence, strength, and control. If, as Andeweg (2000) found, only appointment and recall connect a minister to his or her party, the ministerial office is one of real independence and decision-making power. The literature on cabinet selection has previously focused on cabinet reshuffles (Indridason & Kam 2008), policymaking (Dewean & Hortala-Vallve 2011), prime ministerial (Bäck & Persson 2018) or backbencher preferences (Pekkanen, Nyblade & Kraus 2014). Some scholars note the preference for technocrats during economic crises (Hallerberg & Wehner 2013). Principal-agent theory has also been used to explain technocratic or non-party ministers – the principal being elected politicians and technocrat ministers the agent (Fischer, Dowding & Dumont 2012). Other explanations have to do with institutionally weak parties, transition periods, complex tasks or powerful presidents (Poguntke & Webb 2005, 19; Schleiter 2013). Finally, it is crucial to note that in the absence of elections, the difference between professional politicians and technocrats blurs (Lindau 1996) rather than sharpens. Indeed, only in democracy is such a separation even possible.

What remains clear is that technocrats follow a career – for which higher education is essential as well – that separates them from party-centered or legislative activities (Schleiter 2013). Education, as singled out in this paper, is not the only – or even primary – factor in cabinet selection. Gender, seniority, electoral popularity, personal traits, and policy preferences are also measured by party leaders and colleagues (Winter 1991). There is reason to believe that reputation and evolution within the party are paramount to advancement to higher political office, cabinet positions being at the very top (Ignacio 2013). Party hierarchy matters to such an extent that family history in cabinet serves

as "an advantage in cabinet selection" (Smith & Martin 2017, 12). Education, therefore, is arguably one factor among those which normally lead one to become a minister.

Cabinet Selection

To uncover the role of ministers, the entire democratic electoral process must be clarified. In the first stage, a party – or in presidential systems, a candidate – comes before the electorate with promises, what Blondel & Manning (2002, 456) call "broad policy commitments," which are then operationalized and budgeted by each ministry and negotiated with other political and institutional actors before they are turned into reality. In this way pensions are raised or cut; methods of policing change and national parks are either privatized or turned into sanctuaries.

But the political is not limited to policy-making. As part of the government, cabinet ministers "are at the center of the political processes in democratic countries and […] are the most visible 'locus' of political power. It is therefore all too natural for the position of minister to be considered among the highest political positions in a country and for the ambition of politicians to be oriented in this direction" (Cotta 1991, 174). Therefore, the minister can both be seen as "the end product of the processes of political recruitment," embodying "the configuration of representative channels, the distribution of power, influence, and control over resources (both political and non-political) among the relevant actors involved in those processes" (Idem) and as the tool through which campaign promises are fulfilled and representation reaches its goal of enacting specific policies and not others.

In fact, successful policymaking and implementation are intimately connected to the parties' ability to appoint competent and qualified ministers (Huber & Martinez-Gallardo 2008). An incompetent minister, in turn, can and will render any promise made by the governing party to its electorate illusory, prompting popular disappointment and electoral backlash, a combination which has led numerous parties first out of power, then out of existence. Ministers have both the power and the agency to impact their party to this extent through their activity.

Analyzing social welfare policy in 18 countries, Alexiadou (2015, 1078) argues that party men – "loyalists" who are office-hunting, yet devout to party leaders – have less of an impact on policy than party leaders themselves or policy-oriented politicians. It is these latter two categories of politicians, an overall minority when measured up against party men, who bargained effectively and "increased social welfare generosity."

To be competent, "ministers often need technical expertise regarding which policies will yield desired outcomes in a particular portfolio" (Huber & Martinez-Galladro 2015, 169-170). To be able to merely understand a policy commitment, not to mention turn it into reality and navigate the intricate web underneath each ministry, one could argue that the minister, the person at the top of a given ministry, irrespective of the number of experts he or she surrounded themselves with, must have formal training in the domain. Radosław Sikorski, for example, was minister of defense in the Marcinkiewicz and Kaczyński cabinets between 2005 and 2007. Had he been required to devise defense stratagems, appoint commanders to battalions in times of urgent need or decide between two very similar fighter jets to be acquired, one would question his competence, given his BA in philosophy and MA in political sciences and economics. Were the same Sikorski, from his position as minister of Foreign Affairs in the first cabinet of Donald Tusk, to broker relations between his country and other states, the same observer would note that his formal training would come into play. It is the education that one received that drives the categorization of each minister as "technocrat" or "politruk" in the present paper.

At the same time, ministers also need to be politically savvy "to broker compromises with key actors, [...] interact effectively with the press, to defend government policies before parliament, to manage civil servants, to interact with courts and to perform other activities that significantly influence the general success of the government" (Huber & Martinez-Galladro 2015, 170). As a result, "ministers have to be generalists and specialists, politicians and technicians: they cannot be mere technicians; nor can they be exclusively political" (Blondel 1991, 7).

To be a minister is, then, a constant balancing act – one must be competent enough, but not overly so as to overshadow other party members; one must be politically-savvy, but not to the detriment of the

ministerial duties of management. Large, established parties solve the problems posed by cabinet formation through institutionalized intra-party competition and by benefiting from a large pool of qualified candidates. Ministers have to be competent enough to make decisions factoring in elements that are highly complex. Any form of coordination between multiple departments in pursuit of the fulfillment of a certain policy entails such abilities. A minister who appears incompetent naturally damages the credibility of his or her party, and failing to deliver on the promises handed out during any given campaign, not to mention any policy wrongly implemented, can lead to lost votes. Simply put, parties cannot afford too many politruks.

Cabinet ministers are justifiably considered "the most important political appointments made in parliamentary democracies" (Neto & Strøm 2006, 624). Sitting atop the state apparatus, ministers nonetheless maintain an intimate connection with parties – between 1950 and 1997, governments of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) included a meager average of 4% non-partisan ministers. In early-transition Poland, however, half of the Bielecki and Olszewski cabinets were made up of non-partisans (Ibid, 625). Aside from the higher incidence of technocrats in post-communist Poland, Neto and Strøm also establish a link between semi-presidential regimes – such as Poland, following the 1997 constitution – and the presence of non-partisans (i.e. non-party members, therefore technocrats in the even stricter definition), as cabinet appointments can become a reason for conflicts between the Prime Minister and the President.

The reason for which political parties appoint untrained persons into essential, highly demanding cabinet positions is not immediately apparent. According to Katz (2001, 278), political parties form a recruitment pool from which candidates for public office are selected. Indeed, it is the apparent quality of this pool that transforms formless electoral promises that one party may campaign on into credible policy proposals to be enacted by competent professionals. Promises of increased incomes and economic growth may be implemented one way by a graduate of economics and another way by a theologian or journalist. The political messaging also suffers changes in each case. Ministers stand apart from parliamentarians from this standpoint, since

their roles presuppose that their activity will be limited to single domain such as Health or Transportation, whereas MPs can write or sponsor bills that far-reaching, spanning across multiple fields over the course of their legislative activity – hence the reason why MPs must be generalists, and ministers specialists.

But to become minister, it is not sufficient for a candidate to hold the appropriate training. He or she may lack the network and standing within their own party to even be considered for such a top post. Non-experts may very well possess both, and their path toward a Ministry outside of their domain may be made easy despite their lack of technical qualifications. Moreover, these unqualified "politruks" may be representatives of important segments of the electorate of the governing party. Regional interests in terms of development, for example, would drive the leadership of a party to prefer one person at the top of the Ministry of Infrastructure, rather than another. Yet another situation appears when coalition partners of the governing party require certain Ministries to be given over to their representatives.

Non-experts often occupy ministerial offices. One would argue that a politically-savvy individual would avoid putting herself in a potentially compromising position and heading the Interior Ministry as a graduate of Theology, as did Teresa Piotrowska in the Ewa Kopacz government. Marian Czakański, economist and Minister of Health in the second Marek Belka government, would be in an equally strenuous position and so would many other Polish ministers between 2001 and early 2020. The case-study of Poland with regard to the opposition between technocrats and politruks in government will prove instructive and will add flesh to the theoretical bones of this paper. Between 2001 and early 2020, Poland had ten cabinets, starting with the government led by Leszek Miller and ending with the Mateusz Morawiecki cabinet instated in November 2019. Marek Belka was appointed PM and subsequently formed his first cabinet in May 2004, but failed to win the vote of confidence from the parliament. As such, it will not be taken into account. Only the second cabinet of Marek Belka, approved by the Sejm in June of the same year, will be considered.

Technocrats and politruks

Ever since Aristotle, the practice of labeling and categorization has been at the forefront of comparative politics. Any analysis of A, along with the identification of its defining features, leads to a comparative analysis and subsequent categorization of non-A, which can then be labeled as B. In this way, systematized categorization expands one's understanding of the world and its composing parts. To know what a politruk is, therefore, one must know what a technocrat is – and vice-versa. Scholarly definitions of technocrats diverge on whether the person in question can be a member of a political party at all (Cota & Verzichelli 2007) or whether he or she must be a recognized pinnacle of expertise in a certain field, as Meynaud (1969) forcefully claimed in his book *Technocracy*. Collier's definition of a technocrat, which Dargent (2015, 13) also employs – someone who has received "a high level of specialized academic training" (Collier 1980, 403) – comes closest to being the definition required for the present endeavor, needing, however, more precision.

For the purpose of this paper, then, a technocratic minister is minimally-defined as someone who has received formal education in his or her field of ministerial activity. A lawyer working as minister of Justice is a technocrat, and so is an economist serving as minister of Finance. Conversely, the same lawyer or economist appointed to head the Ministry of National Defense is categorically not a technocrat. In this way, party membership will not be used as a separator between technocrats and non-technocrats. Instead, technocratic status is made to be field-centric. Expertise can only be limited in scope, and the technocrat cannot be seen as a renaissance man, a jack of all trades that can retain his expert status at the head of the Ministry of Finance just as well as at the helm of the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Defense.

Conditioning a minister's status as a technocrat to the position he or she occupies in government is not without precedent in the literature. According to Pinto, Cotta & De Alemida (2018, 2), "experts or specialists hold in general, but not always, ministerial portfolios that correspond to their specialized skills and professional training." Blondel (1991, 14) notes that "a minister who spends many years in the same post and never occupies any other in the government is likely to behave as a

specialist," whereas "a minister who moves from post to post […] is likely to view his or her function as principally one of overall political supervision." Keman (1991, 107) further distinguishes between the two kinds of ministers – the specialists and the "generalists," the latter moving from one ministry to another with ease. If one is to see these "specialists" as technocrats, then the "generalists" can only be politruks. As such, the question of cabinet-formation can always be seen as a matter of balancing technical competence and "representative and political skills."

Technical skill has long been praised as a ministerial quality. Robert Putnam (1977, 384) argued that technocrats, whom he defined, borrowing from Meynaud (1969, 31) as being the holders of technical expertise, unlike the "traditional type of politician," are not the danger to democracy that they are generally purported to be. Also citing Bell (1973, 348, 358), he argued that their skills were the base of modern, industrial society. Dargent (2015, 167) believed them to "be more responsive to citizens' demands than are elected politicians," who become lost behind webs of patron-client links, logrolling and the pressures of interest groups, losing touch with the voters to which they are supposed to be accountable. This is especially true, Dargent (2015, 167) continued, where political parties are weak. In such a case, "insulated technocrats" may serve the public interest better than politicians.

In her seminal book *Democracy Disfigured*, Nadia Urbinati (2014, 7) discusses "the most radical and resilient challenge to democracy, even when made in the name of democracy itself" – namely the depoliticization of democracy through the empowering of technocrats and non-political authorities and the prioritization of *episteme* (knowledge) in making decisions. The proponents of such technocratization, Urbinati says, equate democracy with populism and, while attempting to remove partisanship so as to allow impartial *episteme* to take root, disfigure democracy just as much as overpoliticization would. Technocrats are not the guardians that democracy should seek, Urbinati argues. Nor should the votes of the electorate chase epistemic knowledge, since according to her, "we enjoy the right to vote not because this allows us to achieve good or correct outcomes […] but in order to exercise our political freedom and remain free while obeying, even if the outcomes that our

votes contribute to producing are not as good as we had foreseen or as would be desirable" (Urbinati 2014, 17). Democracy is not justified by the outcomes it leads to, in this view, but by its very processes. Democracy, says Urbinati (2014, 24), "is government by opinion"– and that opinion need not be the right one.

Moreover, if truth-seeking were the final goal of democracy and of the political realm, Urbinati (2014, 83) argues, then the "intrinsically inegalitarian" criterion of competence and the enlarging "domain of nonpolitical decisions" would lead to a devaluation of democracy, and finally its disfiguration." In an attempt to remedy the ills of democracy and to limit the spread of populism, a reformer favorable to competent leaders would end up dismantling the very system he or she strove to improve and preserve. For Fischer (1990), the ascent of technocrats is a telling sign of democracy's decline, while for Habermas (1975) the way in which technocrats justify their presence in the political arena, namely through their expertise, is detrimental to the political deliberation required by a democratic setting.

Putnam was perhaps the last of the optimists when it came to technocrats, following Meynaud and Bell. Before they became cold, pencil-pushing bureaucrats, technocrats were the first inhabitants of the modern world, the "new men" that were supposed to make life easier for everyone (Bell 1973), and in this effort their education was essential. In Putnam's (1977, 384) words,

> "[…] one of the most striking and consistent features of contemporary elite transformation in both the capitalist and communist worlds is the increasing importance of advanced educational credentials. In nearly every industrial society in recent decades, educational levels have risen sharply among elected officials, party leaders, administrative elites, and economic managers. Moreover, in many instances it is specifically a degree in a technical field that has become increasingly crucial for making it to the top."

Education is, therefore, the separator between the "traditional politician" i.e., the party man, the politruk, and the technocrat. Rather than vilify technocrats as unresponsive and cold, calculated authoritarians, Târlea and Bailer (2018, 22) also argue that little separates technocratic

governments from their political counterparts, signaling the fact that politicians themselves have developed "a rather unaccountable vision of society's general interest." If contemporary politicians and technocrats have become more like one another, then even party governments have need of competence. Such competence, as argued above, necessarily beings with receiving formal education in a certain domain.

The use of "politruk" in this paper cannot go on without more extensive explanations. The word is a shorthand form of "*politicheskiy rukovoditel*," a rank in the Soviet Red Army designating the political commissars charged by the Party with the political education of the troops. However, it was not the Bolsheviks that created the position, but the Tsarist army during the First World War. In his seminal book *The Russian Revolution*, Richard Pipes (1990, 409) notes that General Aleksei Brusilov, Commander in Chief of the Russian Army in 1917, initiated several reforms of the army and addressed the issue of insubordination by sending commissars charged with raising the soldiers' morale to the front. The role of these commissars was inspired by the French "commissaires aux armées" introduced in 1792, and it was "an innovation of which the Bolsheviks would make extensive use in the Red Army." In the aftermath of the collapse of the Russian Army and of the entire Eastern front during the war, the soldiers of the Petrograd Military District, one of the sparks that would ignite the Russian Revolution, formulated Order No. 1. Addressed to the Kerensky government and to military leaders, the order, among others, subordinated members of the armed forces to the Petrograd Soviet, endowing it with "the authority to countermand orders of the Provisional Government bearing on military matters" (Pipes 1990, 439). The representatives of the uneducated masses of soldiers were thus empowered to countermand the orders of the Russian Army officers, supposedly the top military minds within the state and the recipients of military education fit for Russian officers – Brusilov, for example, had been a student at the St. Petersburg School for Cavalry Officers. The ones who were to impose such a control and to keep in check the "bourgeois" and educated officers had a special status. They were the "politruks," the political commissars created by the same Brusilov within the Tsarist Army, now transformed into Soviet agents. In Soviet Russia henceforth, these politruks were agents of the Communist

Party, unconnected to the military, and yet their authority trounced the "technocratic" Army officers.

Despite its etymological origins, the label of "politruk" does not have to be defined by its historically negative connotations. Terms and concepts are constantly evolving, changing, appropriated by one current or group and rejected by another. There is a multitude of such conceptual reappropriations that have occurred so far. "Ideology" and "activist" were themselves associated with totalitarianism, but have rather recently been won back by the social sciences. At least in the United States, "activist" is now not the Party activist, but the defender of social justice. "Ideology" is now not Marxism-Leninism or Nazism, but a wider concept that is put to work in numerous efforts striving to explain why the world is the way that it is and why people believe what they believe. There is, therefore, no reason why "politruk" should be avoided as a conceptual category. Nor should technocrats benefit from a general belief that the more technically competent, the better the leader one can be. A Manichean understanding of the opposition between the two is, as always, too simplistic, as "technocrat" can carry its own negative connotations. For example, technocracy as a charge is often thrown at the supranational construct that is the European Union (Wallace & Smith 1995). For Habermas, the EU's shortcomings come from the fact that it is technocratic in its connection to the financial, capitalist markets, justifying its own existence not on democratic legitimacy, but on the political and economic results it produces. In this way, Habermas' technocrats are essentially capitalistic, and the EU nothing more than "technocratically self-propelling concert of governments beholden to the markets" (Habermas 2015, 87). In the same book, aptly titled *The Lure of Technocracy*, the esteemed scholar poses a key question – democracy or capitalism? This, in turn, reveals that Habermas views technocrats as difficult allies – if not rivals – to democracy. Democracy must have its defenders, and their identity is readily made clear. Habermas argues that those who stand for democracy are democrats. Again, further identification is required. They are, essentially, party men and party women, professional politicians who have risen through party ranks, holding progressively more important offices in the local or state apparatus, representing progressively more and more people as they

advanced from school boards to city councils, and from local offices to national government.

The tension between democracy as a theoretical governing system and as an actual body made up of institutions, laws, and decision-makers becomes revealed in this opposition between technocratic cores and elected bodies. Such expert cores can be found in all institutions in one way or another, wherever specialized knowledge is required. A given Ministry could not function without its appendage of experts. Despite the obvious importance of administrators, the Ministry of Health would be barren if not for doctors. Finance would be a ghost town without economics. It is clear that a state cannot exist without experts just as much as democracy cannot exist if the democratic choice of who governs is limited to a certain pool of technocrats. Democratic liberty lies in the freedom to elect Donald Trump, a flamboyant non-expert, just as much as in the freedom to elect an expert for any given position. The right to vote, in this way, cannot be correlated with correct outcomes. Democracy presupposes the liberty to make wrong choices – in that, political freedom is confirmed. Following Urbinati (2014, 31), "democracy is government by discussion because it is government by opinion," In her effort to rehabilitate *doxa* (opinion) as the currency of democracy, Urbinati rightly describes the ever-expanding domain of knowledge, a permanently hungry wolf that engulfs more and more of the prerogatives of democratic governance and hands it over to unelected experts, exchanging freedom for order and equality for competence. This opinion, which is like air to democracy, is what politruks embody. In fact, they can only emit opinions, as they are not educated in the field of their ministerial activity. It is not with the help of *episteme* that they guide themselves, but with *doxa*. In that, one can see them as guardians of political freedom and democracy – and not as politically-appointed hacks.

Counter-intuitively, therefore, the existence of the politruk is a confirmation of the political freedom within a given society, of the democratic breathing space given to a hyper-organized and efficiency-driven state organization. Donald Trump could not have happened in the micro-managed and tightly regulated society that is China. The politruk is the common man in terms of competence, and his rise to the

heights of political power is a demonstration of the functioning of democracy. To the relentless cold truth of technocrats, the politruk presents dissent – and "democratic procedures presume dissent always" (Urbinati 2014, 98). Were dissent to be rooted out of democratic politics in favor of truth, liberty and peace would also vanish.

One that is not familiar with democratic theory might be swayed to argue that the efficient, impartial expert is always to be preferred for the highest of offices. The fact is that the real world does not function according to simple rules. The expert in domain A cannot always solve problem B, since the solution requires expertise in domains C and D as well. The diffusion of knowledge among individuals who need to cooperate in order to live together, while putting that knowledge to use, is an inescapable law that defines modern, large states. Simply doing so requires a complex system of governance that juggles with freedom, equality and expertise, not to mention accountability, simultaneously accepting innumerable and diverse inputs and producing actionable and effective outputs. Democracy is that system.

In China and other fast-developing East Asian countries, the political is the Party or the authoritarian leadership, with the technocratic civil service (Fukuyama 2014), providing the basis of state power. In such a setting, the political element has more leeway in its decision-making and it is able to enact far-reaching policies and grand projects without fear of public backlash, press inquiries or demands for meaningful accountability. Dissent and opinion, however, are eliminated, as they have no role in a tightly regulated system. Discussion is wholly booted in favor of implementation. Technocrats are therefore empowered – but only seemingly, as they are a critical element in the modern authoritarian bargain: freedom in exchange for development, stability and order. It is the technocrats who provide the latter.

In a democracy, however, the politruk represents the political, while the technocrat is the non-political. Heading a given Ministry, the democratic politruk, in his or her seeking of re-election or the improving of his or her party's score, ensures accountability to voters. Reversing the question asked above, one could ask why, then, should there be technocratic ministers at all. According to Francis Fukuyama (2014, 534):

> "[…] agents can be completely loyal and motivated to do the right thing and yet fail because they simply do not have the knowledge, competence, or technical ability to carry out the principal's wishes. Modern government, in addition to being very large, is a provider of a wide variety of complex services. […] Many of these activities require high levels of professionalism and education: the staff of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board, for example, consists mostly of Ph.D. economists, while the Centers for Disease Control is run by doctors and biomedical researchers. This need for technocratic competence is the first thing that puts good government on a collision course with democracy."

In his study of technocracy in Latin America, Dargent (2015) draws an opposition between *técnicos* and *politicos*, two classes of decision-makers separated by their grasp over expertise. While the former extract their legitimacy and power from their expertise, the latter "lack the knowledge to successfully address" the complex problems which require such knowledge. As policies grow ever more complex, so much firmer is the technocratic grasp over the state. *Politicos* become redundant in such a late technocratic society, and are weeded out by those holding technical training and expertise, as they are simply unable to keep up with the policies. Such developments are, according to Dargent, sectorial, advancing through informal and formal rules and networks, and do not envelop the whole of the government apparetus. There are, however, limits to technocratization. In countries where new political actors emerged carrying strong popular mandates, it is the *técnicos*, rather than *politicos*, that were forced out of government. This happened in Venezuela and Bolivia, as technical competence lost its importance and experts could be fired with little to no political cost (Ibid., 9). Such countries, however, are far from being models of effective – not to mention democratic – government.

To put it plainly, a politruk is a minister whose formal education does not match with his or her field of ministerial activity. He is the lawyer put in charge of Defense, the engineer heading Health and the philosopher appointed to Finance. It is this sectorial technical expertise that politruks lack, translated into an inability to devise policies or the increased likelihood of mismanaging their ministry. The risk of having such a person at the top of a ministry is that "meaningful policies are

designed and implemented by experts without elected officials fully understanding their content" (Dargent 2015, 166).

For the purpose of this paper, then, the label of "politruk" will be stripped of any relation – aside from the etymological one – to the Soviet term. Bundling the ministers under scrutiny here together with the painful memory of the enforcers of the communist regime, whose force Poland felt fully, is by no means the intention of this paper, as such a malicious effort would not have any connection to the truth and would be thoroughly confusing to the reader. Instead, the politruk is to be seen as the diametrical opposite of the technocrat. He is what is in the literature is called a *loyalist* (Alexiadou 2015), a minister who obeys the party leaders and servers wherever they deem appropriate, be it atop the Ministry of Justice or Ministry of Education. Most importantly, however, he is one without formal education in the field of his ministerial activity.

Research design

The present paper employs a straightforward survey of more than 250 cabinet members in Poland between 2001 and 2019 and divides them into "technocrats" and "politruks" using the formal education that each of them received as criteria for their categorization. A necessary condition of the technocratic status is, as it has been shown, working in one's field of specialization. An economist serving as the minister of Justice, therefore, is not a technocrat. Nor is a chemist appointed at the head of the ministry of Defense. Several additional clarifications regarding the labeling must be made before moving forward.

The paper will only look at cabinet members with a portfolio, since it is only for them that the skills of the occupant and those required by the position can be compared. At the same time, the present paper will limit itself to the cabinet positions that can clearly be connected to an educational background. The Ministries of Labor, Education, Economy, Justice and others will therefore be the bread and butter of the analysis, while Ministries such as those serving the diaspora, those that deal with the relationship between the government and the national parliament,

where such a Ministry exists, or between Poland and the European Union, will necessarily fall between the cracks of the research. For the same reason, prime-ministers themselves will not be taken into account. Furthermore, cabinet members can be switched from one position to another, gaining or losing the mantle of technocrat with every move. An economist serving as minister of Finance will be considered a technocrat, whereas the same person working as minister of National Defense will be a politruk.

Moreover, when a new cabinet position is created or another is modified, and a Ministry either loses part of its attributes or gains new ones, the new Cabinet member assigned at the top of the respective Ministry is treated as another person entirely, just as a person occupying different cabinet positions. Mirosław Sawicki, in the cabinet of Marek Belka, is therefore a technocrat twice over, in his position at the minister of National Education and, later on, at the newly-improved minister of National Education and Sport. Conversely, Andrzej Adamczyk is a politruk twice over in the First Cabinet of Mateusz Morawiecki, as minister of Infrastructure and as minister of Infrastructure and Construction. Ministers without higher education, such as Wojciech Mojzesowicz, minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in Jarosław Kaczyński's 2006 cabinet, will also be considered politruks.

The Ministry of Education presents a special case. University professors charged with the National Education Ministry will be considered technocrats since teaching was part of their doctoral education.

Certain cases of individual ministers also require further explanation regarding their labeling. Such is the case of Elżbieta Rafalska, minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy in the Beata Szydło and the First Mateusz Morawiecki Cabinets. Minister Rafalska is a graduate of the Academy of Physical Education and has a Master's degree in teaching obtained in 1978. She has also completed postgraduate studies in social assistance and social work – 20 years later. The timeline of her studies and the diverging educational paths she took, moving from physical education to teaching and then to social work, provide legitimate grounds to consider her a non-expert in the latter. She will, in conclusion, be considered a politruk.

In Poland, as perhaps is the case in other countries, economists and lawyers seem to rule. The temptation is to give them technocratic credentials wherever they may be placed, for a minister is also a manager, a coordinator of resources and manpower. This paper will resist such a temptation, defining economists as technocrats only when they are assigned to ministries that deal with finance, such as the Ministries of Finance, Budget, Funds or Economy. When an economist finds himself heading the Ministry of Infrastructure, such as Krzysztof Opawski in the second government of Marek Belka, he will be considered a politruk. Similarly, a lawyer serving as minister of Sport and Tourism, like Mirosław Drzewiecki in the First Donald Tusk Cabinet, will also be considered a politruk.

Findings and discussion

At the start of the period taken into consideration, Poland, as well as its neighboring countries, was still fresh out of the Soviet Eastern bloc. Its leadership, educated in the Communist system, bore the scars of a society that had no need for humanities or social sciences. The Polish politicians at the helm of state were products of communist educational regime, which held technical competence in high regard. Lawyers, engineers, economists and doctorate holders by and large filled the Cabinets of Leszek Miller and Marek Belka as a result.

The 2005 parliamentary elections represented a momentous change in terms of the make-up of the Sejm. Wasilewski (2010, 189) notes that 70% of the new parliamentarians had backgrounds in local politics – as such, they were far from being outsiders. They were politicians molded in the context of their local communities, as opposed to creatures of the central party leadership. At the same time, the newcomers were younger and predominantly a "humanities-centered intelligentsia" without technical expertise. They were teachers and journalists, not engineers, nor chemists. To the author, "this suggests a prevalence of ideologues over technocrats among the new Sejm deputies" (Wasilewski 2010, 189). The result is apparent – the Cabinets of Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and Jarosław Kaczyński represented an extreme fall in the percent of

technocrats present in the cabinet. It is important to remember that according to the sectorial definition of technocrats used in this paper, party membership does not exclude technocratic credentials.

Table 1

Technocrats and Politruks in Polish Cabinets 2001-2019

No.	Cabinets	Year	Number of ministers	Technocrats	Politruks	Percent of Technocrats
1	Leszek Miller	2001	29	19	10	65%
2	Marek Belka II	2004	24	15	9	62%
3	Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz	2005	28	11	17	39%
4	Jarosław Kaczyński	2006	31	11	20	35%
5	Donald Tusk I	2007	23	12	10	52%
6	Donald Tusk II	2011	31	15	16	48%
7	Ewa Kopacz	2014	21	10	11	47%
8	Beata Szydło	2015	20	11	9	55%
9	Mateusz Morawiecki I	2017	34	18	16	52%
10	Mateusz Morawiecki II	2019	17	7	10	41%
	Total	2001-2019	257	129	128	50.19%

Source: compiled by the author

How can the below-average proportion of technocrats in the Tusk and Kopacz governments be explained? Wasilewski (2010, 181) again comes to the aid of the observer and notes that in 2007, the newly-established First Cabinet of Donald Tusk had at its foundation a fragile 52% majority in the Sejm. At the same time, it had a strong opponent in the 166-seat Law and Justice Party (PiS) and in president Lech Kaczynski, whose vetoes it could not override.

The First Tusk Cabinet was, therefore, one in which party thinking dominated, in which party men and women had to be given cabinet positions irrespective of their formal training, to preserve party unity

and coherence in front of a sizable political opponent. Importantly, the First Tusk Cabinet had the "highest number of ministers with junior ministerial and local political experience," not unlike the Kaczynski government before it (Semenova 2018, 182). The same principle was followed in the Second Tusk Cabinet and in the Cabinet of Ewa Kopacz, as the Law and Justice party hovered around the 30% mark in the Sejm, threatening the position of the ruling coalition. As a result, fewer and fewer technocrats made it to the Tusk-Kopacz cabinets.

With the Beata Szydlo government of 2015, populism came back in force in Poland, as it did or will soon do in many other countries, including the United States, rolling back judicial independence, censoring the media (Mounk 2018) and limiting individual liberties, such as the right to an abortion. Poland had been considered a consolidating democracy until then, its political development aided by economic success, yet the rollbacks still occurred.

But were Poland's conservative populists the complete antithesis to technocratic competence? The apparent answer would be no. Aside from the Second Cabinet of Mateusz Morawiecki, the other Law and Justice cabinets went over the average percentage of technocrats present in the governments that held office between 2001 and early 2020, despite a high turnover of ministers in the First Cabinet of Mateusz Morawiecki.

Conclusion

The present article contributes to existing research on two major topics, namely cabinet selection and the issue of technocrats in power. It shows that education has been troublingly ignored as a variable within the existing literature on cabinet selection, not to mention technocracy, and strives to remedy the abovementioned gap. Furthermore, the article also contains a reconceptualization of technocrats, as well as the introduction of the repurposed concept of "politruk." If previous works mainly defined technocrats through the lack of a party membership, the present article seeks to identify and categorize them according to the formal education they received and whether or not they are active as ministers in the domain of their training, therefore confirming their status as

specialists in one field. According to the chosen approach, an engineer does not stop being an engineer when he or she signs up for a party.

Making use of this definition, the article surveyed 257 ministers spread across 10 governments in power between 2001 and 2019 in Poland. 129 have been technocrats and 128 politruks, as defined in this paper. The latter, however, have steadily increased their share compared to the early 2000s. Its conclusion contains two aspects, a positive and a negative one. While, on average, half of the ministers in question were indeed specialists, recipients of formal education relevant to their field of ministerial activity and therefore personally competent with regards to policy implementation, the other half were not. While democratic processes do not require ministers to be experts in their field, even parties like the Law and Justice party, for example, found it desirable that ministers should be persons that are educated and well-versed in the domain of their ministerial activity and therefore capable of supervising and implementing complex policies. Parties see benefits in not appointing full-blown politruks to care for the health of the citizens or to head their army. Instead, they favor competence and efficiency. One can posit that this is because democratic legitimacy is tied to votes, and votes can only be won by a ruling party that fosters good government.

Worryingly, however, the percentage of politruks, non-specialist party men and women that are part of Polish cabinets, has been rising for 13 years running. In this way, the moderately high percentage of technocrats in the Beata Szydlo and the first Mateusz Morawiecki governments was cancelled out by the high number of politruks in the Kaczyński government of 2006 and the second Mateusz Morawiecki cabinet. This may suggest that the Polish political system has become increasingly focused on partisan strife, therefore the need to reward party members with cabinet positions despite their obvious lack of suitability for them, rather than improving the quality of government. Next steps in research must include comparative analyses involving the process of cabinet selection in several countries, with education as a main variable.

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