

Article

Contingency and political action. The role of leadership in endogenously created crises

András Körösényi^{1,*}, Gábor Illés² and Rudolf Metz³

¹ Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30., 1014, Hungary; E-Mail: korosenyi.andras@tk.mta.hu; Tel: + 36 1 224 6700 / 460

² Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30., 1014, Hungary; E-Mail: illes.gabor@tk.mta.hu; + 36 1 224 6700 / 354

³ Institute for Political Science, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30., 1014, Hungary; E-Mail: metz.rudolf@tk.mta.hu; + 36 1 224 6700 / 321

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Crises and exceptional situations are usually described as exogenous challenges for political leadership. Leaders are reactive to their political environment (structure), which strongly shapes their activity as situational and contingency theories of leadership emphasize it. In contrast, this paper claims that crises and exceptional situations might be engendered endogenously, by political agency. Relying on Kari Palonen's differentiation between two types of contingency (Machiavellian and Weberian) it tries to set up a two-dimensional framework for analyzing political situations and types of political action. The paper provides various empirical examples (including George W. Bush's leadership after 9/11 and Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán's unorthodox crisis-management from 2010 onwards) to illustrate the usefulness of this framework.

Keywords

Bush; contingency; crisis; leadership; Machiavelli; Orbán; Weber

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1 Introduction

Great leaders need crisis situations to gain power to (re)act (Rossiter, 1948; Genovese, 1979), but crisis situations need great leaders in order to be solved as well (Tucker, 1968, p. 745; Tucker, 1995). Generally, a crisis is seen as a pressure and an urgent threat, which leaders must survive as they adapt to the new situation. Leadership always seems to be reactive: leaders must make sense of the crisis, give it meaning, harness and shape it through their responses, give an account after a crisis and even learn lessons from it (Ansell et al., 2014; Boin et al., 2005; Boin et al., 2008; Buller & James, 2015; Genovese, 1986; Heifetz, 1998). However, from a different ontological basis constructionist/constructivist authors give more space to form the conceptions of a situation endogenously (Grint, 2005; Widmaier et al., 2007). But what if these are just different types of relations between leaders and crisis situations? In this sense, there are two extreme ways to perceive and conceptualize extraordinary situations and to deal with them. On the one hand, a crisis could be seen as an exogenously given situation for leaders to manage in a technocratic or conventional way; on the other, it can be seen as a situation generated endogenously by leaders acting in an innovative way. While researchers usually explore leaders' responses to *exogenous* crises, such as industrial accidents, natural catastrophes, terrorist attacks or responses to economic or international financial crises (e.g. Boin et al., 2005; Boin et al., 2008), our focus is on *endogenously* generated and / or shaped crises. The goal of this paper is to emphasize the role of political agency in crisis generation and to attempt a re-definition of it, something that is very much neglected by approaches focusing on structural determinants.

18 The problem arises from the structure–agency debate. A fundamental problem for political leadership studies is how
19 the relationship between the political actors and the environment in which they find themselves is managed. Calls
20 for research into the dilemma of the structure–agency problem in leadership studies are not new (Hargrove, 2004;
21 Jones, 1989; Masciulli et al., 2009; 't Hart & Rhodes, 2014). Three different approaches can be distinguished in this
22 debate: a structure-oriented (structuralist or determinist) approach, an agency-oriented (intentionalist or
23 voluntarist) one, and a literature that aims to transcend this dualism. “Agency” is understood as a capacity to act
24 upon situations, as a property of actors to be able to formulate and implement decisions. On the other hand,
25 “structure” means the situation, context and political environment. It refers to the conditions within which actors
26 operate and seize the opportunities, and which constrain their actions. Essentially, structure and agency are two
27 sides of the same coin, as they coexist in a political process.

28 In a crisis situation, where leadership differs from leadership in routine times, this dualism is more problematic. In
29 this paper we aim to contribute to this debate on the conceptual level. Relying heavily on the works of Kari Palonen
30 (1998; 2001), we describe contingency as the nature of relations between structure and agency. Contingency can
31 serve both as a constraint on political action (as in *The Prince* of Machiavelli) as well as a chance or means for such
32 action (as in the works of Max Weber) . We take crisis, as a situation with an extraordinarily high level of
33 contingency, to highlight this “dual nature” of contingency for political agency. (This concept, in our view, is suitable
34 to attenuate the rigidity of the structure-agency dualism). In this paper we focus on incumbent leaders, who control
35 crisis governments (Rossiter, 1948, p. 3; Corwin, 1978, p. 78; Kellerman, 1984, p. 71; Edinger, 1967, p. 15; Edinger,
36 1975, p. 257); and who make things happen that would not happen otherwise (Blondel, 1987, p. 3; McFarland, 1969,
37 p. 155; Cronin, 1980, p. 372). Based on this conceptual framework, our paper provides a general typology of
38 contingency, i.e. the relationship between political agency (leadership) and structure/structural change (crisis), and
39 sets out empirical examples within it.

40 The paper is structured as follows. First, we define the concept of crisis and give a conceptual differentiation related
41 to contingency. Second, we analyse the possible relationships between contingency and political action and
42 differentiate between two types of contingency, drawing on Palonen’s comparison of the Machiavellian and the
43 Weberian Moments. Third, we develop a fourfold typology of the relationship between political agency and
44 different states of affairs: normalcy and three different types of crisis. Each type will be highlighted through
45 empirical examples. Finally, we draw a few conclusions.

46 **2. Crisis and contingency**

47 First of all, we need to clarify what we mean by crisis. One of the recent papers on crisis and leadership defined the
48 former with three criteria: threat, uncertainty, and urgency (Boin et al., 2005). By threat we mean high-stake politics,
49 which characterizes crises, vis-a-vis low-stake politics in normal times. Urgency here means a commanding necessity
50 of action in the case of crisis, which is absent in the case of normality, when the pressure for urgent action is not
51 present or low. In this paper, we focus mainly on the second component, uncertainty, identifying it as a subtype of a
52 broader concept, contingency. Contingency can mean indeterminacy (“It could be different”), or uncertainty (“We
53 cannot know”) (Schedler, 2007). We assume that contingency is present both in states of the normal functioning of
54 politics and in times of crisis. But while in the former it is usually indeterminacy, in crisis situations it can rather be
55 characterized as uncertainty . The factor that distinguishes the two is the presence (in case of indeterminacy) of
56 rules, conventions and authorities that reduce the spectrum of possible choices. The formulation of Michael
57 Oakeshott properly describes indeterminacy in the normal state of affairs:

58
59 “But in stipulating general conditions for choosing less incidental than the choices themselves, in
60 establishing relationships more durable than those which emerge and melt away in transactions to
61 satisfy a succession of contingent wants, and in articulating rules and duties which are indifferent
62 to the outcome of the actions they govern, it may be said to endow human conduct with a
63 formality in which its contingency is somewhat abated.” (Oakeshott, 1990, p. 74)

64

65 In a crisis situation it is precisely these “rules and duties” (and conventions, authorities) that become dubious,
 66 thereby making the political situation uncertain.¹

67
 68 The difference in the nature of uncertainty from that of indeterminacy can also be highlighted by the Knightian
 69 conceptual differentiation between risk and uncertainty familiar from economics. While risk is measurable and
 70 calculable (because conditions are known, as in the case of roulette or chess, or generally in the game theory),
 71 uncertainty is not (because conditions are not known, and we cannot make predictions). Therefore, it is not only the
 72 higher intensity, but the different nature of contingency that differentiates crisis situations from normal states. It is
 73 not only a higher level of contingency, but a different type of contingency that characterizes crises. Uncertainty,
 74 rather than risk, characterizes crisis and extraordinary situations.

75
 76 To summarize: we have attempted to differentiate between a “softer” and a “harder” form of contingency (see
 77 Table 1) in order to distinguish the normal state of affairs from extraordinary situations. In the next section, we will
 78 try to relate the concept of contingency to that of agency.

79
 80 **Table 1.** Conceptual differentiations related to contingency

contingency	normal state of affairs	indeterminacy	risk
	crisis situation	uncertainty	uncertainty

81
 82 **3. Palonen’s antithesis: background vs. operative contingency²**

83 To establish a connection between contingency and political agency, we attempt to use a work by Kari Palonen
 84 (Palonen, 1998) as a point of departure. Palonen differentiates between the “Machiavellian Moment” (cf. Pocock,
 85 1975) and what he calls the “Weberian Moment”. His main argument, roughly summarized, is that while in the
 86 former contingency is mainly an external challenge for political action, in the latter it becomes its constitutive
 87 element. Here we try to summarize briefly the differences between these two “Moments” (see Table 2). These
 88 considerations will serve as the foundation of our typology concerning the relationship between political agency and
 89 crises.

90
 91 (1) The background of political action in the Machiavellian Moment is uncertain. The main problem of *The Prince* is
 92 the retention of principalities newly acquired through the arms of others and through good fortune. As Machiavelli
 93 emphasizes, these cases are when the situation of the rulers is the most difficult, because they cannot rely on
 94 traditional legitimacy, only on the “two most inconstant and unstable things”. The factors that would nudge
 95 uncertainty into indeterminacy are apparently missing. Contrary to that, the historical context of Weber’s work is a
 96 marked by bureaucratization, which forms a stable background to political action, abating contingency by its rules
 97 and standard procedures.

¹ This difference can be exemplified by two different uses of the same metaphor. In Michael Oakeshott’s famous formulation, politicians “sail a boundless and bottomless sea” where the “enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel” (Oakeshott, 1991, p. 60). This can be taken as the general characterization of political activity that also applies in the normal state of politics. The other use can be taken as a paradigm of crisis: politicians in crisis resemble “river oarsmen who [...] suddenly find themselves called upon to navigate their boat in mid-ocean” (Tocqueville, 1896, p. 106).

² Our reading here relies heavily on Kari Palonen’s distinction between Machiavelli and Weber, a distinction to be made clear at the end of this section. His reading, in our view, has great analytical merits, but *The Prince* can also be interpreted in a different way, i.e. as a work that supposes a more complex relationship between *fortuna* and *virtú* (see e.g. Pocock, 1975, pp. 156-182), or one that lays a greater emphasis on agency and character, and therefore rather stresses the similarities between the views of Machiavelli and Weber (see e.g. Philp, 2007, pp. 37-96). However, here our point of interest lies not in conceptual historical accuracy, but in analytical usefulness.

99 (2) For Machiavelli, the main threat that political action must face is the desolation of *fortuna*, which is compared by
 100 him to “raging rivers” in Chapter 25 of *The Prince*. For Weber, the main problem consists not in taming the forces of
 101 *fortuna*, but in avoiding the “petrification” of bureaucratic structures. Put differently: his main concern is with the
 102 possibility of politics, not with that of order (Palonen, 2001). The difference between the two authors is aptly
 103 expressed by their uses of metaphors: while Machiavelli’s prince has to erect “defences and barriers, in such a
 104 manner that, rising again, the waters may pass away by canal, and their force be neither so unrestrained nor so
 105 dangerous” (Machiavelli, 2008, Chapter 25), Weber describes politics as a “strong and slow boring of hard boards”
 106 (Weber, 2001, p. 128). The latter in Palonen’s interpretation means the opening up of new horizons for political
 107 action.

108
 109 (3) The first, vital task for leaders follows from the above-mentioned features. For Machiavelli’s prince, it is
 110 *mantenere lo stato*, that is, to maintain his power and the present form of government. There is undeniably an
 111 element of innovation in the Machiavellian view: his image of the fox (Machiavelli, 2008, Chapter 18) implies that
 112 *fortuna* can not only be contained, but also utilized to a certain degree, but – at least in Palonen’s interpretation –
 113 this is a secondary feature; the main concern is still with the exposedness to and the preponderance of *fortuna*. For
 114 Weber, the first task of a political leader is to create room for manoeuvre among bureaucratic constraints.

115
 116 (4) It is worth mentioning that both views of political action can take pathological forms. For Machiavelli, *mantenere*
 117 *lo stato* without some higher aims that bring glory to the prince and benefit to his subjects is detestable (cf. Skinner,
 118 2002, pp. 143-144). In the same vein, Weber is no advocate of adventurous politics that takes risks for their own
 119 sake. Although he is worried about the growth of bureaucratic influence, at the same time he also admits its
 120 importance as a stable background as far as the possibility of politics can be guaranteed.

121
 122 (5) As we mentioned before, the main thesis of Palonen’s book concerns the position switch of contingency. While in
 123 the Machiavellian Moment it is principally (despite the presence of the figure of the fox) external to political action,
 124 a challenge that has to be overcome, in the Weberian Moment it becomes an element of political action itself.
 125 Where the foremost danger is seen in the ravaging power of *fortuna* (a symbol of contingency), politics is logically
 126 directed *against* contingency. But in a bureaucratized world contingency is linked with freedom from the
 127 bureaucratic structure. Therefore, politicians act not against, but *through* contingency.

128
 129 (6) As the last point implicates, contingency changes from a background condition (*fortuna*) into an operative
 130 element. This distinction between background and operative contingency will form the basis of our analytical
 131 typology of the relationship between political action and crisis presented in the next part.

132
 133 **Table 2.** Comparison of the Machiavellian and the Weberian Moment

	Machiavellian Moment	Weberian Moment
background of political action	uncertain (newly acquired rule)	stable (age of bureaucratization)
main threat	external shocks (<i>fortuna</i>)	stagnation, “petrification” of bureaucratic structures
main task of the leader	assure security and order (metaphor: erecting “defences and barriers”)	create room for manoeuvre (metaphor: “boring of hard boards”)
pathological form	mere defence of the status quo	constant subversion, irresponsible action that endangers the state
connection between action and contingency	acting against contingency (politics = <i>Spiel gegen die Kontingenz</i>)	acting through contingency (politics = <i>Spiel durch die Kontingenz</i>)
types of contingency	background contingency (<i>Kontingenz des Handelns</i>)	operative contingency (<i>Kontingenz im Handeln</i>)

134 **4. An analytical matrix and empirical examples**

135 Up to this point, we have claimed that (1) a crisis situation is marked by the presence of a subtype of contingency:
 136 uncertainty; and (2) that contingency can be both the background condition and a constitutive element of political
 137 agency. In this section, first, we will set up an analytical typology of the relationship between political agency and
 138 crisis, thereby interrelating the two above-mentioned conceptual distinctions. Second, we will give empirical
 139 examples to make our typology more plausible. Our focus will be on the working of operative contingency through
 140 re-interpretation of a hitherto exogenous understanding of crisis (quadrant C) and through *endogenous* crisis-
 141 generation by creative political agency (quadrant D). Although there are no clear cases, we hope our examples will
 142 help to clarify the difference between operative and background contingency.

143
 144 The conceptual analysis of contingency by Palonen provides an appropriate starting point to construct an analytical
 145 typology of the relationship between political agency and crisis. The two types of contingency form the two
 146 dimensions of the matrix in table 3. As mentioned before, we assume – following Oakeshott – that there is
 147 contingency in *every* political situation. However, where both types of contingency are low, we can speak of a
 148 normal state of affairs (quadrant A). Here conventions (using the term in the broadest sense, including the usual
 149 procedures, behavioural patterns of politicians, the legal order etc.) are challenged neither by an exogenous shock
 150 nor by political agents. In the three other quadrants, the sum of the two types of contingency are higher; therefore
 151 in these cases we can speak of crisis situations.

152
 153 A high level of *background contingency* is present in quadrants B and C. By background contingency we mean events
 154 that cast doubt on conventions and which are exogenous from the point of view of the political agent.³ The best
 155 examples of exogenous shocks are a global economic crisis, a natural catastrophe, or a declaration of war by another
 156 country.

157
 158 Sense- and meaning-making in crisis situations always have an important role. But when rules and norms are in
 159 doubt, the interpretation of the situation by political leaders gains extraordinary importance (cf. Hall, 1993; Boin et
 160 al., 2005; Boin et al., 2008), which enhances the role of leadership and political agency. When there is a crisis,
 161 leadership always has a choice, in an analytical sense, between attempting to read events within the frame of the
 162 existing paradigm, thus trying to reduce contingency immediately, and challenging them and presenting a new
 163 paradigm that offers a new meaning of what is going on. Therefore, quadrants B and C can be seen as two different
 164 strategies for “crisis exploitation” (Boin et al., 2008), articulated at the level of political theory. The main difference
 165 between our approach and previously cited literature on crisis management is that we take into account the
 166 possibility of political actors deliberately increasing the stakes (threat), contingency (uncertainty), and the state of
 167 emergency (urgency) in a crisis situation, for example through political actions or interpretation. We assume that the
 168 type of crisis mostly depends on interpretation, meaning-making, therefore a crisis triggered by an exogenous factor
 169 might be brought either into quadrant B or into quadrant C by political agency (redefinition). Endogenous crisis
 170 generation in quadrant D, however, is a case in which crisis is not just interpreted or re-defined, but invented.⁴

171
 172 **Table 3.** Typology of the relationship between political agency and crisis
 173

³ Here, we stick once again to Palonen, adopting the viewpoint of “politics-as-activity” instead of “politics-as-sphere” (Palonen, 2003; Palonen, 2014). Acts of other political actors and consequences of their acts are exogenous to a concrete political actor in an activity-view, while they would be endogenous within the “sphere of politics”.

⁴ Our approach can be considered as a constructivist viewpoint, which while not ruling out differences between types of crises concerning their interpretability, assumes that all of them can be shaped by interpretation to a certain degree.

		<i>low</i>	level of background contingency	<i>high</i>
level of operative contingency	<i>low</i>	A - normal state of affairs 1. no shock / crisis 2. contingency mainly indeterminacy 3. no exceptional time-stress for decisions and actions 4. no threat to norms, institutions, conventions 5. innovation is not needed 6. main goal of actors: to follow their aims within the given institutional framework		B - crisis as exogenous shock 1. crisis situation: exogenous shock 2. contingency mainly uncertainty 3. exceptional time-stress for decisions and actions 4. institutions are threatened, but they are defended through adjustment 5. innovation is not needed, conventional crisis management is applied 6. main goal of the actor: to immediately reduce the level of contingency, overcome exogenous shock
	<i>high</i>	D - endogenously generated crisis 1. crisis situation: endogenously generated crisis, no external shock 2. contingency mainly uncertainty, increased to a high level through agency 3. exceptional time-stress generated by deliberate actions 4. institutions are rebuilt or exchanged for new ones 5. innovation: questioning of conventions and conventional authorities 6. main goal of the actor: to widen her/his room for manoeuvre through increasing the level of contingency		C - crisis re-defined 1. crisis situation: exogenous shock and endogenous crisis-generation through reinterpretation 2. contingency mainly uncertainty 3. exceptional time-stress for decisions and actions 4. institutions are threatened, and they are restructured through deliberate action 5. innovative crisis-management: questioning of conventions and conventional authorities 6. main goal of the actor: to increase or maintain the level of contingency at a level manageable by herself/himself

174 Unlike quadrants A and B, an elevated level of *operative contingency* is present in quadrants C and D. We speak of
 175 operative contingency when the political actor *deliberately* acts or speaks in such a way as to heighten the level of
 176 uncertainty, e.g. by questioning conventions or conventional authorities, the existing legal order, etc. The latter
 177 often entails a paradigm change (Hall, 1993; cf. Blyth, 2013)⁵, i.e. a dramatic change in policy-making, comparing to
 178 policy adjustment (change of settings) or policy reforms (change of instruments, institutions).
 179

180 In what follows, each type of relationship between political agency and crisis will be explored and a few examples
 181 will be provided to highlight the main features thereof.

182 *4.1. Quadrant A: normal state of affairs*

183 Quadrant A represents the normal state of affairs, when both background and operative contingency is low, or
 184 “normal”. No shock or crisis happens, there is no threat to institutions or conventions, and there is no exceptional
 185 time-pressure for decisions and actions in the political process. Government policies typically change only slowly and
 186 incrementally through adjustment to the policy line of the incumbents or as reactions to the changing circumstances
 187 of the given policy area. The changes in the political process are usually not evenly distributed, therefore even the
 188 “normal” level of contingency is not a constant, but a fluctuating phenomenon. For example, the democratic

⁵ Drawing on Hall, by paradigm we mean an interpretative framework of policymaking. “Policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing”, states Hall (1993, p. 279.). Policy-paradigm is a *lense for perceiving problems*, a way of cognition of the world and an attitude to the potential modes of dealing with it. Hence, by paradigm change we mean the change of the hierarchy of overarching goals guiding policy.

189 succession of rulers usually increases the level of contingency, because early, and even regular elections cause
 190 indeterminacy in domestic politics. However, it is within the “normal” level of contingency which prevails in the
 191 parliamentary form of government. In other words, “rules and duties”, norms and convention are not usually under
 192 threat in these cases. Uncertainty is limited to the composition of the next parliament or government. Although
 193 there may be changes in public policies, so contingency may rise to a higher level compared to the periods between
 194 two elections, this is expected and accepted as “normal” and falls within the boundaries of the predictable way of
 195 policy change in parliamentary regimes. One example of the remarkable presence of contingency in the normal state
 196 of affairs is the French Fourth Republic up to the 1958 crisis.⁶ In one of the most penetrating recent French histories
 197 Marcel Merle (1999, pp. 975–976.) argues that under this regime

198 “governmental instability did not always result in political instability [...] Governmental instabilities
 199 were mainly part of a relative continuity, almost making governmental crises into a means of
 200 governing”.

201 In his account, the collapse of the Fourth Republic was due not to the frequent governmental changes, but to the
 202 regime’s inability to decide in colonial issues.

203 *4.2. Quadrant B: crisis as exogenous shock*

204 In quadrant B of our crisis typology, the exogenous shock that seems to question standard practices and policies is
 205 managed by the conventional means of crisis management. The political aim is to reduce contingency immediately.
 206 This could seem paradoxical, though only at first sight: although exogenous shocks always seem to cast doubt on
 207 conventional authorities and/or standard policy-lines, the nature and the gravity of the crisis is not self-evident, but
 208 open to debate and contestation. Crisis managers in quadrant B interpret the crisis as an anomaly rather than a
 209 systemic problem, which justifies their reliance on conventional means of crisis management.

210 Exogenous shocks, disasters and terrorist attacks all demand that leaders act immediately. We provide examples of
 211 prime ministers who had to face an economic crisis, a terrorist attack, and a natural catastrophe, respectively.

212 The best example of the strategy of technocratic or “crisis-managing” governments (McDonnell & Valbruzzi, 2014) is
 213 that of Mario Monti in Italy. Monti was asked to form a new government after Berlusconi’s resignation on 12
 214 November 2011. The ultimate purpose of Monti’s technocratic government was to manage the Eurozone debt crisis
 215 in Italy. The main political parties in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies approved Monti’s emergency austerity
 216 measures (increased taxes, labour market and pension reform) to steer Italy out of worsening economic conditions
 217 and to restore market confidence and financial stability. Although he promised to step down after the passing of the
 218 2012 Budget, he launched a centrist and liberal party called Civic Choice to run for election.

219 Spanish Prime Minister Jose María Aznar and his ruling Popular Party (PP) were challenged immediately before
 220 national elections (14 March 2004) by a series of bomb explosions on four trains heading to one of Madrid’s main
 221 stations which killed 192 people and wounded 1,430. Until 11 March the governing party had held a comfortable 5
 222 percent lead in the polls over rivals. Although the response of government was quick enough, the government
 223 misinterpreted the crisis situation and lost the “meaning-making race”. The ruling party blamed the Basque
 224 separatist movement, ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna) for the terrorist attacks and, instead of facing the facts, doggedly
 225 kept to this narrative to the very end. The left-wing opposition Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) easily
 226 managed to replace the official storyline with its own version, in which the bomb attacks were regarded a
 227 “punishment” by Al-Qaeda for military involvement in the Iraq war (even though the troops were sent on only a
 228 peacekeeping mission). After mass demonstrations with 11 million people (out of a population of 42 million) the PP
 229 lost the election (Olmeda, 2008).

230 By contrast, in a similar situation German social democrat Chancellor Gerhard Schröder faced the “flood of a
 231 century” which cost 9 billion euros and more than 128,000 helpers got involved. Six weeks before the federal
 232 election

⁶ The First Republic in Italy (1948–1992) can be a similar example for contingency as normal state of affairs.

236 election and right before the flash flood in eastern Germany the polls gave the center-right opposition (CDU) a lead
 237 and a marginal majority for the red–green coalition. The Elbe flash flood changed the picture and resulted in the re-
 238 election of Schröder. At very early stage of the disaster the federal government reacted effectively and provided
 239 financial aid for the Lands hit by the catastrophe. Moreover it eased the pressure on incumbents to manage the
 240 existing high budget deficit. (Bytzek, 2008) Due to positional asymmetry Edmund Stoiber supported by CSU/CDU was
 241 unable to keep up with Schröder or to bid high enough, and Schröder was re-elected

242 4.3. Quadrant C: crisis re-defined

243 In quadrant C, the levels of both the background contingency and the operational contingency are high. That means:
 244 the political actor responds to an external shock not by applying conventional countermeasures, but instead the
 245 incumbent may “raise the stakes”, interpreting the current circumstances not as an anomaly but as a systemic
 246 failure. It is important to note that this means not merely the rhetorical device of emphasizing or exaggerating the
 247 gravity of the crisis. That approach is always followed by the reassurance that we know the way out of crisis – which
 248 means: the situation is a serious one, but still just an anomaly, which can be cured by the application of the
 249 appropriate, routine familiar medicine. Instead of this strategy, our politician in quadrant C (1) dramatizes the crisis
 250 in a more systematic way, and (2) couples this dramatization with the questioning of the prevailing *policy-paradigm*
 251 (Hall, 1993) or dominant *public philosophy* (Mehta, 2011) as well as the conventional authorities. To adopt a
 252 metaphor used earlier: while the politician in quadrant B resembles a captain of a ship trying to escape the stormy
 253 conditions as quickly as possible, those in quadrants C and D consider the possibility that a storm is not necessarily a
 254 bad condition from the viewpoint of the captain. In cases C and D leaders aim to create and/or maintain a high level
 255 of contingency, which can be mastered only by themselves (cf. Schabert, 1989).
 256

257 We have three examples below for quadrant C: the change in course of British foreign policy strategy from Neville
 258 Chamberlain to Winston Churchill between 1938–40; the change of the American foreign- and security policy
 259 doctrine triggered by the 9/11 crisis by President G. W. Bush; and the unorthodox economic crisis-management of
 260 the extravagant Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán.
 261

262 Our first example is a contra-factual one. Winston Churchill fought – unsuccessfully – for a new British foreign policy-
 263 paradigm vis-a-vis Neville Chamberlain during the time of the Munich agreement in 1938. Unlike Chamberlain,
 264 Churchill realized years before that the conventional British foreign policy approach did not work in the case of Adolf
 265 Hitler. In his speech in the House of Commons 5 October 1938 Churchill dramatized the Czechoslovak crisis and
 266 questioned the prevailing British foreign policy.⁷ He claimed that it was not possible to preserve peace in Europe by
 267 giving concessions to the Nazi leader, such as sacrificing Czechoslovakia. Instead of appeasement to Hitler, i.e. the
 268 immediate reduction of background contingency, Churchill intended a pro-active and determined British foreign
 269 policy, such as taking a clear stand for the independence of Czechoslovakia, building a new alliance in Europe against
 270 Hitler, and the rearmament of Britain, even if it increased uncertainty and worried the British public. Churchill opted
 271 for raising operative contingency, because he realized that conflict or war against Nazi Germany was not about
 272 gaining or losing certain territories or losing influence in a specific part of Europe, but had a much higher stake: it
 273 was about freedom and the way of life cherished by the British people and the West. The real paradigm-shift in
 274 British policy, however, happened only two years later, when Churchill replaced Chamberlain as prime minister.
 275

276 The second example for quadrant C is the 9/11 attack, which shook the American nation and created a crisis
 277 atmosphere for years. The rally round the flag effect provided unprecedented support for G. W. Bush in his new, war
 278 president role (Eichenberg et al., 2006; Hetherington & Nelson, 2003): he became temporarily charismatic
 279 (Greenstein, 2008). President Bush gave a determined policy-answer, by setting up new authorities and agencies
 280 (Department of Homeland Security) as well as by passing through new legislation (US Patriot Act) and by using

⁷ Churchill’s Speeches: The Munich Agreement. October 5, 1938. House of Commons.
<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1930-1938-the-wilderness/the-munich-agreement>
 (10.06.2015)

281 Presidential War Power, based on Constitutional tradition but also legitimized by Congressional authorization acts.
 282 The 9/11 attack was conventionally interpreted as an exogenous challenge which caused a so-called
 283 “incomprehensible crisis” (Boin et al., 2008, p. 19.), and which provided the incumbent with a relatively wide space
 284 for political interpretation and framing. The “War on Terror”, and the “Axis of evil” were original frames for the Bush
 285 Doctrine, which turned out to be a new policy-paradigm – it introduced a new era in the American foreign- and
 286 security policy and in international relations. The new policy included the concept of pre-emptive strikes,
 287 unilateralism and democratic regime change, which has some antecedents in American exceptionalism (Nagan &
 288 Hammer 2004). Bush transformed and extended his role as war president and turned it into an extensive executive
 289 unilateralism, using for example presidential signing statements extensively to suspend the application of
 290 Congressional laws in public administration (Galvin, 2009). The global “War on Terror” aimed to reduce background
 291 contingency. But the preventive military actions against terrorist suspects, the surveillance and detainment, the
 292 invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the replacement of a multilateral policy in international relations with unilateral US
 293 dominance (which caused a dissensus even within NATO) meant the increase of operative contingency in world
 294 politics. Bush continuously raised the stakes, but by 2005–06 he lost support within Congress, was challenged by the
 295 Supreme Court, and for the last years of his presidency he became a lame duck.
 296

297 Our third example is the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán’s unorthodox financial policy from 2010 onwards.
 298 In contrast to the conventional crisis-management of his predecessor, Gordon Bajnai, Orbán provided an
 299 unorthodox policy to stabilize the budget and to finance the sovereign debt. After his party Fidesz achieved a
 300 landslide victory, gaining 53 % of the votes and more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats in the 2010 general
 301 elections, Orbán used the opportunity to radically re-interpret both the nature of crisis and the suitable crisis-
 302 management. He framed his parliamentary “supermajority” in a quasi-revolutionary context (“revolution in the
 303 polling-booths”) and relying on it he launched a new regime. As newly elected Prime Minister, first he introduced a
 304 dramatic crisis narrative (e.g. he compared Hungary to Greece) and applied new, innovative instruments to respond
 305 to the crisis. Although Orbán kept the budget deficit below 3 % of GDP, which was a requirement of the European
 306 Union, he challenged a few conventional policy measures and questioned conventional authorities. In one
 307 parliamentary speech he announced:

308 “There is no one to copy, no example to follow. At this moment, there are no ready and useful
 309 textbooks, at best their contours are being sketched. The new recipes have to be invented by us,
 310 during our everyday struggles. It’s a sweaty job.”⁸

311 Orbán inserted the problem of budget deficit and indebtedness into a broader crisis narrative in an innovative way.
 312 In this narrative he combined first, the international financial crisis of 2008, second, the domestic political crisis
 313 triggered by the former socialist Prime Minister, Gyurcsány’s Ószöd “lying speech” in 2006 (which was accompanied
 314 with enduring anti-government demonstrations and street violence), and third, the transformation in the world
 315 economy (globalized financial capitalism) and the decline of the European Union in a global context. Reframing the
 316 financial crisis from an exogenous to endogenous phenomenon, Orbán was able to instrumentalize the crisis to
 317 blame the left, the liberals, and international organizations like the IMF, and successfully legitimized the
 318 revolutionary measures he implemented after getting into power. Through his “freedom fight” Orbán refused to
 319 take new parts of the IMF credit line, and refused to accept the IMF and the EU advice on what fiscal and economic
 320 policy should be followed. Instead of reducing contingency through implementing the advised adjustment and
 321 policy-reforms accompanied by a new IMF loan, Orbán adopted a more risk-taking policy in financing sovereign
 322 debt. But this way, being freed from the control of international financial authorities (the IMF), Orbán gained a wider
 323 room for manoeuvre in domestic politics.⁹ Orbán framed his endeavours to reclaim Hungary’s sovereignty vis-a-vis

⁸ Speech for Urgent and Topical Issues Debate, 24 October 2011.

http://parlament.hu/internet/plsql/ogy_naplo.naplo_fadat?p_kcl=39&p_uln=122&p_felsz=10&p_szoveg=v%E1ls%E1g&p_felszig=10 (10.06.2015)

⁹ His revolutionary measures included crisis taxes on sectors like banking, telecommunication, or commercial industry, or reducing utility prices, but also a massive state intervention even in market and property relations, changing the relation between state and society and drafting and voting on a constitution.

324 multinational firms, international financial institutions and banks as well as institutions such as the IMF and the EU.
 325 Conflicts with such actors increased uncertainty further, and this was exacerbated by the opening to the East and to
 326 Russia, which was detrimental to relations with the USA, though it ensured political support from Hungarians with
 327 strong national feelings. However, deepening conflicts and increasing contingency by political agency was a
 328 *stratagem* to create advantages in domestic politics. Therefore instead of bringing back the *normalcy* of the pre-
 329 crisis era, Orbán applied extraordinary measures on a permanent base. Instead of applying pure policy-adjustment
 330 to restore the situation *ex ante*, he developed new policies but also a wider political paradigm¹⁰ and successfully
 331 mobilized people to support it among the electorate. By and large, Orbán can be regarded an example of a politician
 332 who played not only against (background) contingency, but through (operative) contingency at the same time. In his
 333 2014 Tusványos speech Orbán revealed his attitude towards contingency (as evidence for his view, he both
 334 mentions external shocks and policy measures of his government):

335 “we are living in a world in which anything can happen. [...] it is practically impossible to forecast
 336 events precisely or within an insignificant margin of error.”¹¹

337 *4.4. Quadrant D: endogenously generated crisis*

338 In quadrant D there is no exogenous shock; the crisis is generated endogenously by political actors to broaden their
 339 room for manoeuvre. The endogenous crisis is not as obvious or tangible, so we will provide four examples to
 340 highlight the main features of it.

341
 342 As an extreme case, the arson attack on the Reichstag building in Berlin on 27 February 1933 was used by NSDAP to
 343 broaden the space for manoeuvre. The fire served as justification for passing an emergency decree (Article 48 of the
 344 Weimar Constitution, Enabling Act) curtailing civil liberties and arresting members of the rival Communist Party.
 345 These were the first steps in constructing a new political settlement.

346
 347 In his seminal work Stephen Skowronek (1997) formulated the conception of *reconstructive* leaders, who come to
 348 power in an unexpected break from a long-established political order, and each introduces new political interests,
 349 almost a new system of governmental control.¹² One of Skowronek’s (1997, pp. 130-154) examples is Andrew
 350 Jackson. After the chaos of the presidential election of 1824, Jackson gained a sweeping victory in 1828 and
 351 launched a new era in US politics. His legacy was not just the founding of the modern electoral mechanism of the
 352 Democratic Party and thus the galvanizing of the two-party system; he also he also redefined the nature of
 353 government, weakened legislative supremacy, recreated the political foundations of the executive office and recast
 354 the system of bureaucracy. Our third example is the “constitutional game” played by French president Charles de
 355 Gaulle in 1962 (Gaffney, 2010, pp. 40–44.). By this year he had solved the Algerian question (though with a policy
 356 switch, rather than the way he promised), and the rebellion of the army was also not an issue anymore. In terms of
 357 our categories: the elevated level of background contingency that brought de Gaulle to power in 1958 was gone, the
 358 normal state of affairs seemed to be returning. In this political environment, he began to “stir up the calm waters”
 359 around himself. Firstly, he alienated his pro-European political allies (the Christian democratic MRP party) with his

¹⁰ Instead of policy-paradigm (Hall, 1993), which refers to a specific policy field, we can speak about an ideological or general *political* paradigm in Orbán’s case, which includes the change in political thinking and philosophy of government in a more general sense.

¹¹ Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp> (19.07.2015.)

¹² In his typology, two main dimensions of variables are set up. Firstly, the previous regime’s established commitments could be vulnerable or resilient. Secondly, president’s political identity could be either opposed or affiliated to the pre-established regime. “The leadership project of the opposition leader is to challenge the received agenda, perhaps to displace it completely with another; the leadership project of the affiliated leader is to continue, perhaps to complete, the work on that agenda.” (1997, 76)

360 provocative anti-European speech on 15 May. His motives were clear: de Gaulle had a different vision of the republic
 361 to both his allies and his opposition. As Gaffney puts it: “1962 was a dramatic showdown between de Gaulle wanting
 362 to reinforce personality politics and almost everyone else trying to dedramatize the republic” (Gaffney, 2010, pp.
 363 42). His strategy was to “move away from some forms of support, to move towards new policy positions” (Gaffney,
 364 2010, p. 41). The second step in this process was the announcement of a referendum on the direct election of the
 365 president. After every party apart from his own united and overturned de Gaulle’s prime minister, he dissolved the
 366 National Assembly, and scheduled the new elections after the referendum. He approached the people in an
 367 unconstitutional manner: “There was no basis in his own constitution for what he was doing; what he was doing was
 368 asserting the centrality of his own action” (Gaffney, 2010, p. 42).¹³ At the end, he clearly won his self-arranged
 369 showdown, triumphing both at the referendum and at the following elections. He successfully used operative
 370 contingency to ram through and solidify his political vision.

372 The fourth example for quadrant D is Viktor Orbán’s constitution-making and constitutional policy in Hungary
 373 between 2010 and 2014, which is an illuminating case for *endogenous* crisis-generation. But what counts as
 374 extraordinary in constitutional politics? Constitution-making is extraordinary by definition, since it means changing
 375 the “rules of the game”, when the usually invisible *pouvoir constituant* (constitution-making power), i.e. the political
 376 sovereign, comes to the fore to be activated (Ackerman, 1998). This exceptional power, however, is supposed to
 377 withdraw and give way to normal politics again, after it has done its work. Therefore, constitutional politics is also a
 378 form of extraordinary situations, like crisis, when the existing norms, institutions and rules are under threat, a high
 379 level of contingency is present, and therefore there is an urgency to re-establish stability according to the scheduled
 380 new order. However, the extraordinary qualities of constitution-making – threat, contingency and urgency – can be
 381 reduced to a minimum, if it is carried out by an inclusive political consensus of the major political actors, elite groups
 382 and other stakeholders.¹⁴ This way, constitution-making can be tamed: contingency is reduced and it is pushed back
 383 to the world of normal politics, i.e. to quadrant A in our typology. The constitutional policy of Orbán, however, was
 384 far from this “domesticated”, consensual version of policy-making. The unilateral constitutional changes and the
 385 accompanying legislation modified the balance of powers, curtailed the power of control institutions like the
 386 Constitutional Court and the ombudsman, weakened the independence of the judiciary and introduced a more
 387 majoritarian electoral system. It also changed the relation between state and society and weakened the separation
 388 of Church and State. All of these changes, which were carried out in a style of emergency legislation, threatened the
 389 social and political status quo of post-communist politics, and questioned the conventions and conventional
 390 authorities of the post-1990 Hungarian regime. This constitutional revolution was neither the consequence of an
 391 external shock, nor that of a deep internal constitutional crisis. It was endogenously generated by Orbán’s creative
 392 political leadership and framing of the situation. Through the policy of permanent constitutional amendments and
 393 legislative dumping Orbán kept the level of contingency high and widened his room for manoeuvre to such a great
 394 extent as was unprecedented in Hungary since the 1989–90 democratic transition.

395 **4. Conclusions**

396 This paper aimed to investigate the relation between contingency and political agency. Institutions, including norms,
 397 conventions and even the *Zeitgeist* are usually regarded as constraints of agency. In crisis, however, institutions
 398 become malleable and may be shaped by political agency. What is an institutional constraint for most political
 399 actors, is often formed and generated through operative contingency by political agency, as our examples for
 400 *endogenous* crisis-generation and the re-definition of the crisis confirmed. Contingency too can be both a problem
 401 to overcome or a means of political action. To increase contingency instead of defending stability contradicts our
 402 usual expectation of political leaders. Why, in fact, do creative leaders increase contingency? As we have seen, to
 403 increase contingency might have strategic purposes, such as: to widen their room for manoeuvre; to question the
 404 prevailing *policy-paradigm* or dominant *public philosophy* and to offer a new paradigm of interpretation of crisis; to

¹³ This unconstitutional strategy clearly separates the case from quadrant A. De Gaulle’s strategy clearly transgressed the normal state of affairs.

¹⁴ A consensual constitution-making can be a long-lasting process, where there is time for deliberation and/or bargaining of the parties, in order to reduce contingency and threat.

405 de-legitimize or blame conventional authorities; to offer / apply a new kind of crisis-management; to restructure
 406 power relations.

407
 408 The role of contingency depends on the abilities and goals of the political actor who faces the crisis situation (or
 409 creates one). Technocrats, like Monti, were trying to “erect defences and barriers” against *fortuna*, while the agency
 410 of de Gaulle, G. W. Bush or Orbán can rather be characterized as “boring the hard boards” of the institutional
 411 arrangement, economic conventions, and authorities. As we saw in their cases, political leaders can not only utilize
 412 the higher level of contingency to create a new arrangement (a new state of normalcy) shaped to their wants; they
 413 can also try to incorporate an elevated level of contingency into everyday politics, making the state of exception
 414 permanent.

415
 416 This paper aimed to contribute to the field at two levels. First, at the conceptual level we aimed to overcome, or at
 417 least to alleviate, the stark distinction between structure and agency through the concept of contingency.
 418 Contingency, as we have seen, can be a constraining element of the structure that forces the politician to take a
 419 certain course of action (background contingency). But at the same time it can become operative, if the political
 420 actor wants and is able to take risk (Weber), or continually makes order and recreates chaos (Schabert, 1989). The
 421 views of Schabert and Weber point toward a “monist” understanding of political action, where contingency
 422 permeates everything and where it is both the barrier to and an element of agency. This view can be contrasted with
 423 the “dualist view”, where structures and agency are starkly separated, and contingency is a feature of the structure,
 424 and the only task of political agency can be to abate it.

425
 426 Second, at empirical level we aimed to contribute to the ordering of empirical cases of leadership in crises or
 427 extraordinary situations. In table 3 we differentiated between three types of crises. The first one (quadrant B)
 428 contains crisis as an exogenous shock, where technocratic or conventional measures characterize the response.
 429 Crisis may be highly unexpected, but it does not “surpass and defy existing political–bureaucratic repertoires of crisis
 430 prevention and response” (Boin et al., 2008, p. 289). The second one (quadrant C) refers to crisis re-defined by
 431 political agency. The political actor is a “prince of chaosmos” (Schabert, 1989), although not entirely in the
 432 Schabertian sense. Here the chaotic does not apply to the structure of government, but to the circumstances
 433 threatening the political (or economic) order. One of the two common points is that agency (leadership) has to
 434 create some kind of order, e.g. a different kind of order through interpretation, as we saw in the case of Churchill, G.
 435 W. Bush and the unorthodox crisis management of Orbán. The other common point is that agency has to confuse
 436 that order and create chaos to be able to lead. The latter feature characterizes the third type of crisis (quadrant D),
 437 which is the “most Weberian” one. The endogenously generated crisis has been illustrated above by Hitler, Andrew
 438 Jackson, de Gaulle and Orbán, as founders of new constitutional regimes.

439

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444 **Conflict of Interests**

445 The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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