environment do not stem from different ideological attitudes but rather from the personal antipathy of the political party leaders. If political conflict is based not on the competition of ideas but instead primarily on individual leaders and their mutual antipathy, it is possible that dissatisfaction with the democratic system will increase and lead to dysfunction in the political system.

The Czech case shows that the privileges of the opposition to resist the majority's oppression, in extreme polarization, can result in a state of paralysis in the functioning of legislative bodies.

DATA AVAILABLITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the *PS: Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/L6YZV9.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ∎

NOTES

1. The five-party coalition consisted of the Civic Democratic Party, the Christian Democrats, the TOP 09, the Pirates, and the Mayors and Independents. However, the Pirates left the government in October 2024.
2. It is noteworthy that relations between governmental and oppositional MPs generally are more respectful within the context of parliamentary committees. In comparison to plenary sessions, committees are perceived to facilitate a more consensual, collegiate, and work-oriented environment.

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A WRENCH IN THE WORKS: FRANCE AND ITS INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED POWER DYNAMIC

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The French Fifth Republic is widely known for having a strong, directly elected President and a somewhat weak Parliament relative to the executive branch. The 1958 Constitution granted the government a wide range of legal tools to protect itself. Since 1962, the executive branch has mostly enjoyed a strong parliamentary majority in the National Assembly, which rendered these tools seldom necessary. Only once in this period has the government lacked an absolute majority, and only by a short margin: from 1988 to 1993, when the Socialist Party controlled 47% of the seats.

However, the 2022 legislative election produced the most divided legislature in the history of the Fifth Republic—a short-lived record, as it would be surpassed in the 2024 election. From 2022 to 2024, France has had a minority government, with a three-party coalition comprising 43% of the Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) —the smallest parliamentary support for the Cabinet in the lower chamber in more than 60 years. This unprecedented situation has generated much tension, with an increasing number of bills being passed or rejected against the government's wishes.

This situation is not the result of one specific election. Rather, it is the culmination of recent incremental evolutions in the executive–legislative power dynamics, which is rooted in constitutional reforms, the erosion of in-party cohesion, and a rapid party-system fragmentation. Moreover, it is not without consequences for the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches. We argue that if all of those changes allowed Parliament to regain some influence and centrality in the political game, then the political culture has failed to adapt at the same time and still tends to rely on coercion rather than negotiations, resulting in ever-escalating tensions that have yet to be resolved.

What are the factors that led to this situation? The system underwent a major change in dynamics when, in 2000–2001, a constitutional and electoral law reform shortened the presidential term from seven years to align with the five-year mandate of MNAs and placed legislative elections a few weeks after the presidential election, effectively synchronizing previously asynchronous elections. The shift was designed to ever-so-slightly presidentialize the system and to increase the likelihood that the President and the parliamentary majority would be from the same party. However, this also framed the President no longer as a reasonably independent head of state but instead as the political leader of the parliamentary majority. Suddenly much more at the forefront of public scrutiny, personally tied to any political decisions, the President was exposed to a faster decline of his political capital.

This greater exposure of the President appeared to go hand in hand with growing in-party difficulties. The voting cohesion of successive parliamentary majorities steadily declined from 2002 to 2017, as divisions within governing parties became apparent and the popularity rate of the successive presidents kept decreasing (Lecomte and Rozenberg 2021). During their last terms in power, both Conservatives (2007–2012) and Socialists (2012–2017) experienced the consolidation of internal factions at odds with the successive governments' methods and increasing difficulties in enforcing party discipline and overcoming ideological

disagreements. Notably, President François Hollande's term was marked by strong contestations within his own majority against his policies, which some of his own MNAs accused him of diverging radically from the party's platform and political goals.

These intraparty difficulties arguably led to a spectacular fragmentation of the French party system (Clift and McDaniel 2017). Indeed, for a long time, French political life was dominated by two poles: one on the left around the Socialist Party; the other on the right around the Gaullists and the centrists—most of whom merged into the same Conservative Party in 2002. This bipolarization was challenged in presidential elections by the rise of the far right, which reached a runoff for the first time in 2002, and the creation of the independent centrist party MoDem in 2007. Nevertheless, neither of these forces managed to carve out a significant space to occupy in the French Parliament in the 2000s and early 2010s.

The presidential election of 2017 was a turning point: both historical main parties collapsed in the first round over their own internal divisions. The independent centrist Emmanuel Macron was elected in the second round against the far-right candidate. Macron's party was a new creation, founded to support his presidential endeavor by bringing together personalities from the center right and the center left, and quickly encountered internal coherence issues, which led to an unprecedented number of floor crossing and party splits in the National Assembly in a couple of years. On the left, the decrease in the Socialist Party's electoral share led to a rebalancing of left-wing voters among La France Insoumise's radical left, the Green Party, the Communist Party, and the remnants of the Socialist Party. On the right, the conservative party became trapped between an increasingly powerful far right and the several center-right parties around Emmanuel Macron.

This rapid fragmentation of the party system culminated in the 2022 legislative election, in which none of the parties, even those considered as potential coalition "blocs" (left, center right, and far right), could hold a majority despite the majority voting system. Macron's three-party coalition won 43% of the seats, and the four parties of the left—united in the New Ecological and Social People's Union—won 26% of the seats. The far-right National Rally won about 15% and the conservative Republicans almost 11%;

give it newfound centrality in an institutional system that routinely has disregarded it for decades.

However, the French Fifth Republic is not a consensus democracy. It has no tradition of building majorities through deliberation and compromises. Quite the contrary: the high degree of personalization in political life—whether it is around the figure of the President or the majority system for electing members of Parliament—leads to strategies of differentiation and individualization that prevent compromises from being reached. Its usual functioning relies on numbers and force—and, in the absence of the first, the temptation is to lean strongly on the second. Macron's successive governments, therefore, have made extensive use of the constitutional prerogatives meant to bring Parliament to heel: using "bloc voting" that allows them to exclude amendments; using their agenda-setting powers to limit the time spent debating the most controversial bills; overruling the decisions of the chair of the Finance Committee on what is or is not valid parliamentary initiative; and so forth. The most infamous of those tools likely is Article 49, Paragraph 3, which allows the government to pass bills without a vote as long as MNAs do not adopt a motion of no confidence—which the opposition so far has not managed to achieve (Bloquet 2023). This Article 49.3 has been used for disputed bills and every finance-related bill. Despite this accumulation of advantages, the government's plans often were defeated—enough so that Emmanuel Macron eventually decided to dissolve the National Assembly in June 2024, triggering new elections. This resulted in an even more divided assembly and major problems with government formation.

The situation of minority government so far has added significant tension to the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches, as it clashes with both party culture and electoral incentives. If this does put Parliament back in the center of the political game, how those new stakes are handled mostly relies on overt power moves and conflicts between two differently equipped sides. Whether those eventually will resolve with the newly elected legislature and whether Parliament will end up strengthened or weakened from this new strife remains to be seen.

The situation of minority government so far has added significant tension to the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches because it clashes with both party culture and electoral incentives.

the remaining seats were won by an unusually high number of independent MNAs. The National Assembly then counted 10 parliamentary party groups—a record high—and the effective number of parliamentary parties (according to Laasko and Taagepera's 1979 formula) has increased from consistently less than three between 2002 and 2017 to more than six by 2022.

On paper, the situation should have been good for parliamentary deliberation. The National Assembly hosted a wide range of diverse parties, none of them strong enough to overpower the others, while the country was led by minority governments—by definition, these are governments that need to find support outside of their own parties to pass bills. Because there were so many oppositions, the oversight function likely was to be fulfilled more thoroughly. This was expected to strengthen Parliament and

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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THE HEAT IS ON IN THE GERMAN BUNDESTAG: COALITIONS, CONFLICTS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF "HOT POLITICS"

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The German Bundestag is one of the strongest and most influential parliaments. It exists in a political system with a uniform parliamentarization. Decision making builds on a policy-based division of labor among Members of Parliament (MPs), where political parties have an important organizing role. The polity is stable, but politics has changed significantly in recent years. The concept of the "temperature of politics" (Sartori 2005/1976) helps to explain these developments in Parliament.

Stability in the Polity: Key Characteristics of a Strong Parliament

The German Constitution provides for a strictly parliamentary system: all democratic power flows through Parliament in long and unbroken chains of legitimation. At the federal level, no referenda or ballot measures exist; the system is one of pure representative democracy. Recent experimentation with Mini Publics ("*Bürgerräte*") by the Bundestag—first set up in 2023—provides a careful opening. They bring together groups of citizens randomly drawn by lot who deliberate to develop concrete proposals that then are submitted to Parliament. Although they have a consultative role only (Decker 2021), there are positive effects for those who participate in the process and, potentially, on a broader public as well.

In Parliament, MPs have a clear focus in dedicated policy areas. It follows from their committee assignment that mirrors ministerial portfolios. Inside committees, MPs specialize further and distribute responsibility in smaller segments, leading to a system of "rapporteur governance" (Siefken 2022a, 125). Rapporteurs prepare and coordinate individual bills and exercise oversight over "their" agencies and departments. In this way, MPs can exercise substantial influence in the respective policy networks. However, MPs are not alone; through internal coordination, the Parliamentary Party Groups (PPGs) ensure that party discipline in Parliament is upheld and that the policy expertise of rapporteurs can be used.

Current Challenges and Concerns

The German polity has not been altered fundamentally in the past 75 years. The political system is set up as a coordination-and-compromise machine, bringing together parties from the majority and the opposition in a multilevel federal arena. Democracy, established after the catastrophic dictatorship of the Nazi Party, has broad public support—yet, governmental approval ratings have been at a historic low in 2024.

Indeed, there is public debate about whether German democracy is in danger in light of a strengthened right-wing populist party, the "Alternative für Deutschland" (AfD). In December 2024, it polled at 19% nationwide, having reached around 30% in some recent state elections. This discussion has the historical backdrop of the Weimar Republic, having failed in a context of political violence and economic depression when the Nazis used provisions of the democratic system to destroy it. The concern that this may happen again led millions of Germans to demonstrate against right-wing extremism in early 2024.

Satisfaction with Parliament has always been lower than with other state institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the police. This can be explained by German political culture that largely follows the consociational model (Lijphart 1984), which values compromise building and consensus rather than competition. Yet, parliamentary institutions clearly show conflict—and more so in recent years.

Turning up the Heat in German Politics

According to Sartori (2005/1976, 69, 199), systems with a high temperature are characterized by ideological conflict, whereas those with a low temperature are more pragmatic and oriented toward cooperation. The "heat" in German politics has increased for various reasons.

The presence of the AfD since 2017 has changed the political discourse and interactions in Parliament. From the outset, this populist party has used Parliament as a stage to create outside attention among supporters. Its mode has not been on constructive cooperation; instead, it employs instruments of obstruction and provocation. Some AfD MPs even admitted protesters into Parliament who harassed other politicians. In Parliament, the AfD is focused on plenary activities, not committee work. Its provocations have led to many "calls to order" by the parliamentary presidium. Moreover, other parties have adjusted their behavior: more plenary presence, stronger reactions to speeches, and a "*cordon sanitaire*" making clear that there will be no cooperation with the AfD. This feeds anti-establishment rhetoric, and a populist party may profit from being ostracized. The "temperature" has gone up in Parliament.

The heat went up during the COVID-19 crisis. At the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, cooperation and cross-party support for government action were prevalent. But after the first wave of infections was over, a debate about the proper measures being taken (e.g., social distancing and masking) began. In the following months and years of this long-lasting crisis, conflicts became more pronounced and negativity increased in parliamentary debates and in the streets (Siefken 2023, 678).

The September 2021 general elections had two further effects on the heat in Parliament. For the first time, three parties from different parts of the political spectrum jointly formed the government: the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Green Party, and the Liberal Party (FDP). Coalition negotiations were well organized and led to a detailed agreement (Siefken 2022b). However, this straightforward, "rationalized" government formation was not followed by governing in a similar manner. Instead, major conflicts erupted and played out openly, mostly